EARLY MEMORIES

by

WALTER CREASY
OVERCARSH

Early Memories

The two narratives which follow were written by Walter Creasy Overcarsh. The first, Summer Interlude - 1900 AD, was written in June 1961 upon the death of his Aunt Isabel, and recounts fond memories of a summer vacation spent with his Grandmother Edith Creasy in Mount Airy, North Carolina, and his Great Grandmother Sarah Creasy in Patrick County, Virginia. The second, titled simply 1903, is not dated and appears to be unfinished. It tells of his Aunt Isabel's marriage to Samuel Lee Smith, their life together in New Orleans, and the anguish she feels by marrying Lee against her mother's wishes.

Walter Creasy Overcarsh was born August 19, 1893, in Charlotte, North Carolina, the eldest child of Sarah Bethania Creasy and Bryan Jefferson Overcarsh. He was a member of the Signal Corps in World War I and served in France. Married to Haselline Dunn Love, he was connected with the Southern Bell Telephone Company in their Charlotte offices. He died on December 1, 1966.

The handwritten manuscripts were made available to me by his son, Walter Creasy Overcarsh, Jr. In preparing them for typing, I have diligently tried to make no changes in the manner they were originally written, with two small exceptions---full names have been added in parenthesis the first time a given name appears in each story, and English translations have been added in parenthesis for several French words in the second story.

March 1979
Albert Henderson Creasy
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Summer Interlude-1900 AD

Aunt Isabel died today. The last of her generation.

Minnie Isabel Creasy.

Born-February 12, 1883, Concord, North Carolina.

Married-November 11, 1903, Mount Airy, North Carolina, to Samuel Lee Smith.

Died-June 22, 1961, New Orleans, Louisiana.

The memories of summers spent with Grandmother Creasy (Edith Eliza Sparger Creasy) in the little town of Mount Airy, nestled in the Carolina foothills near the Virginia line, recalls most vividly this then teenage girl, the youngest of three brothers and four sisters.

Grandfather Creasy (Walter Scott Creasy), following the career of a Methodist minister, had, during his married life, filled many assignments in both large and small communities throughout the state of North Carolina. With his pastorial remuneration and gifts from the congregations, he had managed to provide the necessities of life, and education for an ever growing family.

At the height of his career, with a pending recommendation for a Bishopric, he died suddenly on August twenty-first 1899 from a heart attack. The family was at the time in the parsonage at Winston Salem, North Carolina, and while still mourning the loss of Mary, an invalid daughter of twenty-five, whom a lingering illness had carried away the month before, this second tragedy left Grandmother not only heartbroken but bewildered. Although her three sons now living in Wilmington, North Carolina (William Murlin Creasy, Albert Henderson Creasy,John Walter Creasy), and her daughter Betty (Sarah Bethania Creasy Overcarsh) in Charlotte offered her a home; with two unmarried daughters to care for, Elizabeth, twenty, (Edith Elizabeth Creasy) and Isabel, sixteen, Grandmother naturally felt it her duty to return to Mount Airy, where she would be near her older brother John (John Henry Sparger) and sister Margaret (Margaret Frances Sparger Patterson), who were still living at

the Sparger homestead, for the counsel and guidance she so desperately needed.

Therefore, arrangements were made for her to live in a neat little dwelling located on Main Street across town from her childhood home. With the help of her two daughters and some family heirlooms which her sister Margaret gave her, she turned the house into a quaint Victorian cottage; and it was to this place Mother (Sarah Bethania Creasy Overcarsh) would take the twins, Edith (Edith Deborah Overcarsh) and Matilda (Sarah Matilda Overcarsh), and me (Walter Creasy Overcarsh) during the first several summers after Grandfather's death, to spend the month of August.

Living in Charlotte some hundred and sixty miles away enhanced the spirit of adventure; and for weeks the most elaborate plans were discussed for the coming event. However, as the bright hot summer wore on with its humid backdrop of intermittent thunderstorms and disturbing night-singing grass crickets, whose discordant sounds came from nowhere and everywhere, and with no particular occupation to while away the lingering days, time weighed heavily on our hands until at last we found ourselves making ready for the trip.

The night before our journey was all excitement. When the supper things were done, we would all gather in the "Summer Room", rather large and so called for its northern exposure, where Aunt Kate, who lived with us, would bring the freshly washed underclothes, blouses, skirts, cotton dresses, pants and overalls, mending whatever torn or worn places she could find. Mother had her hands full with the ironing, while Papa (Bryan Jefferson Overcarsh) meticulously packed each piece in the family trunk. To keep us children occupied and out of mischief, we were permitted to carry the garments from one to the other, but long before this task was completed, we were sound asleep in bed.

Sunrise next morning found us up with lighthearted anticipation. After a hurried breakfast, Papa would line the two shoe boxes, that were to contain our lunch, with tissue. Then Aunt Kate did the packing; she would fill one box with the choice

pieces of three young fried chickens, while in the other she stored ham and jelley biscuits, filling all the crannies with ginger cookies. In the meantime, Mother saw to it that everything was in readiness.

As we lived a mile or more from the railroad station, it was necessary that a one horse dray be hired to carry the trunk, and a carriage used for Mother and we children. Once on the train, the usual controversy arose as to who would sit by the window. This question settled, we began inquiring about the lunch boxes-but they were tucked away on the baggage rack overhead where they would stay until we reached Greensboro.

Since there was no air conditioning, and the windows of the coach closed to keep the hot cinders and soot, from the coal burning locomotive, out of the car, the air was stale and dank, and so in spite of all the excitement we soon became drowsy; and, to the clickity-clack rhythm coming from the rails beneath, finally went to sleep. Sometime later, out of a dreamless world, came the porter's rasping drawl G-R-E-E-N-S-B-O-R-O-O-O-O bringing us back to reality. With his assistance, Mother managed somehow to get us, who were still half asleep, and the baggage, off the train and settled in the depot's waiting room.

We arrived around noon, and having had nothing to eat since early morning, the chicken and biscuits, which Aunt Kate had so carefully packed, were now torn from the boxes and quickly devoured. The long wait until four o'clock, when the train from Goldsboro would arrive to carry us to our destination, was all but unbearable. There was no where to go, nothing to do but wait-wait-wait.

From the big waiting room window, Elm Street, which it faced, appeared to be deserted, except for an occasional horse or mule lazily pulling its burden over the heat baked pavement; and now and then a woman, under a bright colored parasol, window shopping. Farther up the street a big sign hung over the sidewalk, that held my attention, not because it was in any way unusual, but since I was learning to read at school, the two strange words puzzled me and I kept spelling "GRESHAM

HOTEL" until Mother lost all patience and removed me from my window perch.

Inside the waiting room all was quiet, Edith and Matilda were asleep; and other than our little group, there were only two or three loiterers idling away the day where it was cooler than out under the summer sun. The Seth Thomas clock over the ticket window had, at some time in the past, stopped at two. The world stood still.

However, in spite of the obstinate old Seth Thomas, we finally heard the far away whistle of the long awaited train. Everyone around the place came to life, the ticket window went up with a bang, passengers began to rush into the room, baggage trucks rumbled by the door, Mother gathered up our things, and giving each of us a parcel, we impatiently headed for the tracks.

Travel on this branch line of the road justified only limited passenger accomodations, so the train was made up of every imaginable kind of railroad vehicle. There was a combination baggage and passenger car, two or three boxcars, a coal car, flat cars, and caboose. With freight destined for several towns along the way, we would be travelling throughout the afternoon, until at least seven-thirty.

The train gave a gentle lurch and we were off. Out of the smudgy glass windows, the station slipped away and the view widened to the open countryside; with now and then a farmhouse from which children, half dressed in overalls, waved as we passed by.

Our first stop was Guilford College, the next Friendship, and then Kernersville. Later, the penetrating pungent aroma of cigarette, chewing, and pipe tobacco signalled our approach to Winston Salem, with its large warehouses and factories. Once in the station, this aroma became intense, irritating and distressing, as we waited, while the train was jolted backward and forward with the switching and changing of cars. Upon reaching Rural Hall, the distant Blue Ridge range came into view. When we passed Pinnacle Junction, we could clearly see off to the left a tall mountain standing all alone, and jutting up into the sky with a large knob

on the very top. Mother explained to us that it was a famous landmark used in the old days-by the Indians and settlers as a guide when going west to Kentucky, and for that reason, was known to everyone as Pilot Mountain. Farther up the winding road we passed the little way station of Ararat, leaving nothing between us and the end of our journey but the rolling green hills and the endless track that continually came into view around every bend.

The sun had disappeared behind the smokey horizon and the first light breeze preceeding the advancing twilight had just brushed the trees when the rumbling train, with a slowing jerky motion finally screeched to a stop before the little station of Mount Airy.

There was Grandmother, in her perennial black dress and white lace collar, with eager eyes searching each car window for a first glimpse, and Aunt Isabel running up to the coach door to greet us. We were welcomed with open arms, for our coming was a prelude to the annual visit to the old Creasy homeplace in Virginia where my Great Grandmother, Sarah Slusher Creasy, now lived alone; William (William Owen Creasy), her husband having died several years before.

We were soon off the train and all crowded into a one horse carriage. With the trunk on some sort of appendage at the rear, we started on our trip to Grandmother's house which stood at the other end of Main Street. Passing the livery stable and one story buildings which housed the town's mercantile stores, we came upon the hotel, a three story white wooden structure of Colonial design, the tallest in the community-with its square columns extending to the roof which overhung the sidewalk, and served as the center of social, civic, and political affairs. Some of the guests were sitting in big wooden chairs on the wide, wide sidewalk in front of the entrance, presumably to enjoy the expected breeze that should come out of the cooling atmosphere (which would eventually chill the night) and in the meantime polish up the latest local gossip. However, since no one seemed to notice us, I concluded that this overloaded carriage, which seemed so strange to me, was an accepted part of the

everyday scene.

Aunt Elizabeth, who shared the household duties with Grandmother, was standing by the front gate to welcome us as we drove up. She was, like her mother, rather tall-of a serious mind-and therefore somewhat reserved. Her dark brown hair pulled tight and done in a knot at the back of her head gave the impression of a girl much older than her years, and helped command the respect she needed for her responsibilities when facing three little rebels. With all the day's excitement, and the long tiring journey, we were cross, irritable, and dead tired, so after Aunt Elizabeth had given us a quick cold supper, Mother tucked us away for the night.

Life around Grandmother was always quiet with a religous overtone that began with family prayers immediately after breakfast, to be repeated at bedtime. A long siesta at noon, which was a part of the daily ritual, would find everyone in their room for rest and meditation, that is, except we children. Grandmother permitted us to make pallets in the hallway where at times there was a breeze, or so she said, but I suspect the arrangement was to relieve the grownups of our restlessness. I usually placed my pallet under the big chandelier hanging in the front hall. It was made of some kind of bright metal with a rose colored oblong fancy globe over the kerosene lamp, which to light or refill with oil, you could, by two dangling chains, pull it up and down in the frame fastened to the ceiling. This to me was intriguing and I would lie there with a burning desire to test my skill on this tempting mechanical wonder.

The afternoons frequently found us at the Banners, a family that lived in a big rambling house at the foot of the hill behind Grandmother's, where there were six children of all ages and therefore a super abundance of playmates including a teenage companion for Aunt Isabel, who was always sent along as a sort of protector or guardian. The wide stretches of the hilly pasture to the south of the house, with an oasis of shade trees here and there, and a winding stream, were the attraction. The sensation of cool green grass on our bare feet-The sound of water tumbling over

the little moss dams we made in the brook-The imagined Indians behind the hedge-rows and trees, and the make believe wild country just beyond the rise-all created a world far removed from our accustomed life. Once, I was separated from the group and found myself face to face with what appeared to be a strange animal from beyond the hill. Not knowing what to do, I turned and ran with this vicious beast, head down, close on my heels. Just as I had given up all hope of escape, for some unknown reason, my pursurer, apparently also exhausted, stopped, turned around, and slowly walked away. At this instant Aunt Isabel, who had been looking for me, came into view and walked me back to the house. Although she tried to console me with the fact that this terror was nothing more than a little harmless calf, years after-ward I was still dreaming of an unearthly demon chasing me up a green slippery hill.

Sunday was the Lord's day and who, but a Methodist minister's widow would, with reverence and humility, be the one to so remember from sun up 'til bed time. At the table, Grandmother always asked for the blessing, but on the Sabbath there was also Bible reading; when each of the grownups would, in turn, read a verse and then pass the book until a chapter had been completed; while we impatient children absorbed the aroma of the steaming food spread before us. Sunday breakfast was simple and soon over. After a bowl of hot buttered corn mush and two slabs of crisp fat back, which were to me, always too salty, we were dressed in our stuffy, starchy clothes, and sent to sit in the green straight back chairs on the front porch until church time. As the morning sun climbed the cloudless sky, my collar became sticky and tight. The black patent leather slippers I wore were as usual burning my cramped feet. And with little beads of perspiration popping out all over, the penance for a week of pleasure began.

The price of patent leather slippers was such that discarding them was out of the question. However, I remember Papa's many attempts to relieve my distress. He tried everything, from soaking the soles in water, covering the uppers with vase-line, to stretching them with improvised shoe trees, but to no avail; which left me

with a permanent dislike of everything patent leather.

Finally, Mother came out on the porch, and seeing that nothing was out of order in our appearance, we set out for the church.

Grandmother being the widow of the widely known minister, Dr. Walter Scott Creasy, as well as the daughter of a staunch pillar of the church, Murlin Sparger, now deceased, it was only natural that she sit among the elect. So she, together with whomever her companions might be, were always ushered to the front of the church. In the center of the second row from the chancel we young members of the family found ourselves separated, and placed between our elders, so there would be no temptation for pinching or other antics during the service.

Sitting there under the towering minister, who, with a commanding voice, shouted, over my head, the joys and sorrows of a rigid faith in the justice and mercy of Heaven; my short life would unfold before me, punctuated with the "Thou shalt nots" that had so often interrupted an otherwise happy adventure. It all added up to a sort of game in which the good was separated from the bad. But who knew how to tell the one from the other? To me, pleasant things seemed good-unpleasant things bad. But this didn't fit; for some of the pleasant things, I was informed, were evil, while some of the unpleasant things, I was told, were good. And then there was something about "Doing unto others" that further muddled the natural trend of my feelings and desires. With the reminder that God was always watching and saw every evil thing as well as the good, naturally developed in me an anxious feeling of guilt. But guilt for what? It was usually only after being admonished for some act of childish desire that the accusing finger was leveled at me, and another "Thou shalt not" was added to the already annoying heap.

Mother was the one who led me up the narrow path of morality. Her joyous privilege to praise. Her grievous duty to reprove; that would sometimes end with me on my knees asking forgiveness for a guilt I vaguely understood.

The prayer which I repeated after her, concluded, she would leave me in the darkened room, alone. And while consciously resenting her discipline of repentful prayer, something inside was reaching out for the sheltering arms to protect me from the wrath of the God I had displeased. After what seemed to me an eternity, the emotional conflict subsided. I was again face to face with reality, and although I had paid the penalty for my wrong doing, there was still the humiliation of facing Edith and Matilda, who were certainly hiding around some corner to ridicule and chide me when we met. While the four walls which surrounded me had shielded my punishment from any inquiring eyes or ears, they had become my prison, and the desire to flee overpowering. I would then leave the chair where I had been kneeling, quietly open the door, and peep out to see that no one was around; then tip-toe down the hall and out the back door to again breathe the fresh air of freedom.

"The problem of guilt is not easily untangled. Guilt feeling is a disturbing factor in personality, yet it is inherent in normal persons and societies, and is essential to ethical character. It is a painful blessing-dangerous to have and fatal to be without."

The deep tones from the organ suddenly bursting upon the air, brought the congregation to its feet for the Doxology-and then with the benediction, the devotions were over. Although the service had taxed our patience with (disciplined) inactivity, we soon found ourselves in the midst of family friends gathered outside the church, for the usual greetings, which further delayed any relaxation of our good behavior. Finally, however, we were off to the Spargers for Sunday dinner; which was Grandmother's only Sabbath diversion.

The suburban Sparger plantation lay just northwest of the town, with its orchards spreading over the valley beyond, supplying an abundance of York Imperial and Winesap apples to the northern markets; and in turn a comfortable way of life for the entire family, as well as a living wage for the colored tenants, whose little cottages were scattered along the wooded lanes in the valley.

On the edge of a large chestnut grove, the ten room Colonial home was always alive with children and grandchildren, for besides Grandmother's brother John and sister Margaret-Mrs. Wiley E. Patterson-both of whom lived here with their children, there were always other members of this closely knit clan coming and going. In addition to the cook house which stood some thirty feet away-so placed to lessen the fire hazard-there was a big corn crib, a silo, cavernous barn for the horses, cows, and farm implements, a coach shed, a large cider press for making vinegar, and the mysterious ice cellar which was built in the side of a shady mound behind the barn. In winter, the men of the family would cut ice from the frozen lake nearby and store it, in sawdust, in the cellar; then in summer it would be chopped into small pieces as needed, and used for cooling drinks and making frozen desserts. Our visits here were always an invitation for exploring expeditions which never failed to yield new and exciting discoveries.

William Owen Creasy, besides his farming responsibilities in Virginia, was interested in silver mining at Ore Hill, about three miles from Mount Airy. And while making trips to the vicinity, it was only natural that he became aquainted with Murlin Sparger, one of the largest landowners in the county. They were soon associated in various ventures, and among other things owned and operated a portable threshing machine, which was in demand throughout the community for threshing wheat, rye, oats, and other grains. One summer when William Creasy's son, Walter Scott Creasy, was working with the threshers during vacation and threshing grain on the Sparger farm, Edith and her sister Margaret went out to the field to watch the machine at work. Walter Scott immediately became interested in these two young girls, and painstakingly explained to them how four horses each hitched to the end of a lever, which was in turn attached to a center post, and by their walking around in a circle, turned the wheel overhead on which a leather belt ran to the machine, and operated the wooden blades of the thresher. This meeting was the beginning of a courtship that continued throughout his remaining school years. After finishing his schooling, which among other things prepared him to teach, he returned to Mount Airy to marry

Edith. However, her father's consent was given only after Walter had agreed to teach in the nearby Salem school, of which her father Murlin was one of the founders. They were married November fifth 1867 and lived happily at the Sparger home during which time he continued his preparation for the ministry, his cherished ambition.

Just two days after their first child-William Murlin, so named after his two grandfathers-was born, his license to preach arrived and, as usual with young preachers, he was assigned to a mission circuit which embraced Patrick County, Virginia. And so it was that he, with his little family left the Sparger plantation to live with his mother and father at the homeplace in Virginia. Although Grandmother willingly left the only home she had ever known, her childhood memories as well as a sentimental nostalgia for her first and only love frequently brought her back to relive in fantasy those early carefree days, and could have been a deciding factor in her moving back to Mount Airy after Walter Scott's death.

Monday morning-We awoke to find great grandmother's cousin Ben and his two horse covered mountain wagon at the front gate ready for the trip to "Summer Rest". He had come into town late the night before, after we had gone to bed, and quartered his team at the town's livery stable.

All was made ready for the journey, lunch boxes prepared, clothes packed in cane hampers, the iron rimmed barrel, which was tied to a little platform on the side of the wagon, filled with fresh water for all the travellers, including the team. Staples such as salted meat, flour, lard, sugar, coffee beans, and salt had been purchased by cousin Ben and these together with a generous supply of apples from the Sparger orchard were placed in the wagon under and just behind the driver's seat. Four straight split bottom chairs (arranged two by two) for the grownups came next in the center of the wagon, and the floor at the rear covered with fresh hay for us children to sit on. The chairs were secured to the upright staves with leather thongs and the canvas cover tied up at the sides for air circulation.

By midmorning we were on our way. The road we travelled was known as the Pike- connecting the village of Stuart, Patrick County seat, which had been the home of the Confederate general J. E. B. Stuart, with the town of Mount Airy. The twelve miles before us would require some four or more hours since this rather primitive country road together with our mode of transportation permitted a travel of only about three miles an hour. Beyond the open hill country that encircled Mount Airy, the cultivated fields and meadows began to disappear with only now and then a little clearing with its farm house and barn. After travelling some six or seven miles we stopped near a small shady brook, where Mother and Aunt Elizabeth spread our picnic lunch, while the horses enjoyed a respite from their morning ordeal, and we relieved a growing impatience by splashing in the cool clear water. The afternoon found us in the quiet Virginia woodlands of fragrant balsam, spruce and chestnut, which from time to time spread a canopy of leaves over the road that shaded us from the hot August sun. No sign of life was now visible, other than the chirping birds and an occasional frightened deer that would suddenly disappear into dense forrest. The bumpy road, winding ever upward, and at times narrow and somewhat precipitous, kept us on needles and pins; and once while fording a stream, the water came up to the wagon wheels' axels to give us a terrifying scare.

As we neared Great Grandmother's, the road leveled out, and we were now jogging along on a wooded plateau with little grassy meadows, here and there among the trees, where the land had either been cultivated in the past or cleared for grazing. Turning off the high road on to the farm lane, the horses, with their heads now erect and ears alert, seemed to sense the end of their weary task, with the never failing reward of a full manger of corn and hay and a well earned rest. No hoof falls could now be heard, only the creaks of the wagon bed as we moved over the soft earth.

It was mid-afternoon when we reached the house. Great Grandmother and Mary Travis, the old negro woman who lived on the place and helped with the chores, were on the

porch to greet us, and with the generous help of all hands, the wagon's stores soon disappeared into the house. Being of an inquisitive mind, nothing would do but, that I go with cousin Ben to stable the team. The barn which stood a short distance from the house had been neglected and was in need of some repair for it was now only used when cousin Ben, who lived some three miles over the ridge and across the River Dan, made his regular weekly visits bringing supplies and transacting whatever business came to hand. When Great Grandfather, William Owen Creasy, was paralyzed several years before, he gave the live stock and farm equipment to Ben who in turn would look after the homestead as long as Great Grandmother lived. Cousin Ben was a tall dark haired (nut brown) man who moved about with a precision which was slow but thorough. He had very little to say, a habit developed in this mountain country where visitors are seldom seen, and the natives live much to themselves. Therefore, my many questions were either ignored or answered in a short, precise, but nevertheless polite manner. Cousin Ben usually came over on Tuesdays and since this was Monday he would stay the night, sleeping in the upstairs bedroom, and taking care of whatever was to be done before going home.

Returning to the house, I was attracted by the vegetable cellar door beside the chimney (where vegetables were stored for the winter) which opened on to several stone steps that led down under the house. The rough shingle covering over the steps supported a trumpet vine which was in full bloom and the attraction for three little humming birds. I could hardly believe my eyes as these little creatures, suspended in the air, gathered nectar from the long orange-red blossoms with their spindly bills. Crying out for Edith and Matilda to come see, of course frightened them away, and although I frequently returned to watch for the birds, they were never seen again. But just as the scent of new mown hay and ripe apples recall an old mountain wagon, so the sight of a trumpet blossom brings back visions of a vine covered cellar door and little fluttering birds.

Inside the house all was in a dither. The smokey smell of hickory wood came from the

large cook stove. Aunt Isabel and Elizabeth, Mother, and Grandmother were all trying to out do each other in helping Great Grandmother and Mary Travis prepare the evening meal, and while the cook room was unusually large, it was, as you can see, bursting at the seams with eager hearts and willing hands. Now Great Grandmother, although of a full, rich, generous nature, trustful and obliging-was also impulsive, earnest, and prompt to act when the occasion arose. So appraising the situation as hopeless, she immediately took command, and we all found ourselves sitting on the porch in the cool afternoon air.

A supply of mountain cured ham together with sweet potatoes baked in sourwood honey, stewed sugar corn, squash, snap field peas and juicy tomatoes, as well as plates of hot biscuits, made from stone ground flour, was topped off with cinnamon spiced apple pie. After bountiful helpings, the room was cleared and Mary Travis, with her homemade damp mop, went over the bare wood floor as a precaution against ants and flies that would certainly make their appearance if tempting crumbs were left around.

In the meantime, cousin Ben had laid wood on the black, hand hammered, andirons in the large rock fireplace, an oversize hard hickory log at the back with soft split apple wood, from the older orchard trees, in front; then using hot coals from the stove's firebox, we quickly had a nice warm blaze beating back the chilly night. The long dining table had been pushed back and chairs arranged in a semi-circle before the crackling fire-where news of Mount Airy and the Sparger family mingled with tales of current life in the hills. Sitting there on the floor beside Mother's chair, the glow from the fire and dancing shadows around the room soon subdued the day's excitement, leaving my eyelids wearily drooping. Mother's ever watchful eye caught me napping and with a pat on the head she rose, and hurried me, stumbling, off to bed.

The twins and I were staying in the room across the porch, built for Great Grandfather after his disabling stroke. Edith and Matilda were sound asleep in the large walnut bed while I occupied a wooden cot in front of an oversize, oblong window, so pro-

vided that Great Grandfather, during his last years, being confined to a wheel chair, had a wide view of the outside world in front of the house. The fresh chill in this unheated room had revived me, and after my prayers were said, and Mother had put out the oil lamp, opened the cotton window curtains and closed the door, I became keenly aware of the mountain solitude, an ominous stillness intensified by the pale moonlight which spread an eerie grey veil over the landscape. This hushed quality in the air seemed to accentuate the unfamiliar ghostly sounds of creaking timber in the old house, and the far away lonely cry of some forest creature which, in my imagination, came nearer and nearer. To sleep or not to sleep, that was the question. Whether I should lie there awake and face the phantom terrors of the night, or pull the quilt over my head and resign myself to the will of heaven-was finally resolved in the oblivion of peaceful slumber.

The rays of a friendly morning sun entering the room had chased away the frightful thoughts of the night before; and in the brisk clean air, I was up and away to the barn where cousin Ben would surely be feeding his hungry mares. To my surprise, Aunt Isabel, apparently being restless in this quiet mountain retreat, had already arrived, and was imploring him to take us to Fairy Stone Park. Legend in the hills would say that many, many years ago, before the settlers came, little fairy folk lived in this secluded shady glen, and spent their days making tiny crosses from the dark brown soft stone found there abouts  , placing on them a charm which would protect the wearer from the spells of the evil spirit who lived in the forest. But Fairy Stone Park was located in the northern part of Patrick County, some seventeen miles from Great Grandmother's, and cousin Ben just never got around to making the trip. He did, however, give me one of the little crosses still to be found in the glen-which I wore religiously until some time later, when it was carelessly misplaced.

The morning passed, and after the midday meal, Great Grandmother Sarah and Grand-

mother Edith Creasy walked down to the orchard to look over the apple crop. A lazy August sun, filtering through the yard trees, glistened in the mica loam scattered along the walk where Edith and Matilda were sifting it through their fingers to see it sparkle. The rest of us gathered on the porch for a quiet afternoon. But cousin Ben had his banjo with him, and with the first few chords, Isabel was up on her toes; tip, tap, tippity tap, tap; keeping time to one of his favorite mountain jigs, as she danced around in the center of the group. The rhythmic melody, accompanied by her laughter echoing down the porch and out through the rows of apple trees, reached her elders in the orchard; and brought them scurrying back to the house. Isabel was a beautiful blond haired girl, whose sparkling blue eyes were brimming with seventeen years of joy and happiness, seeking release from the rigid church discipline which eternally surrounded her. And now, as on many previous occasions, she awaited censure for her indiscretion.

When Sarah and Edith reached the porch, we were just sitting there in an irregular circle as if nothing had happened. The silence was stifling. Isabel's mother looked at her disapprovingly and hurt. However, there was a twinkle in the keen eyes of her Grandmother Sarah, as they passed through the group on their way to the kitchen. The door closed, and their voices came to us in muffled tones. Sarah was calm as she reproved her daughter-in-law: "Edith,since Walter passed away two years ago, you've spent your days in prayer and scripture reading. You seem to have forgotten the love of life we ordinary mortals carry in our hearts. Isabel is a normal child, yet you expect her to become some sort of saint because her father was a Methodist minister. I know you'll say the other children were quiet and duly respectful of their father's wishes; and since Walter is no longer here, think it your bounden duty to guide her in his footsteps. But you are forgetting that Walter spoiled his favorite child, and now, although seventeen, she cannot understand your exacting discipline."

There was silence, then Edith was heard to say: "Mother Sally,living here in these

lonely mountains, it never occurs to you that there are those who read their Bible every day; hold family prayers, and go to church twice on Sunday trying to follow the Christian way of life."

"Now Edith, you know I always go to the mission whenever the minister comes through. I have read Walter's books and the Bible too, but all the prophets and saints seem so far away, having lived ages ago. I can't somehow make them a part of my life. Nothing I've ever read lifts my soul as the fresh morning breeze blowing in from the hills. The wild flowers of the field feeding the butterflies and bees, and the friendly little birds which come up to the door for their crumbs each day with a blind faith that needs no reminding, have taught me more about God than I would otherwise ever know. While walking down to the spring or through the quietness of the woods, with his creatures all around me, I have a feeling that he is close by and I am secure."

"But Sarah, there are those living in city and town who are blind to your world. They have no opportunity to understand as you do. There are no fields for bees, and butterflies, no quiet woodland to wander through; temptations crowd in upon them and moral consciousness is forgotten. They need something to remind and guide them-the testimony of great men."

Then Sarah's voice was heard in slow measured tones, "I guess you're right, Edith-they wouldn't understand", and then she said, "Isabel does-she has the joy of living in her heart while those others have it only in their heads. They just think they're happy; she lives her happiness or tries to. When we have God alone and live the love and joy he has placed all around us, we can be as care free and merry as the meadow lark. Edith, you're a good woman-too good perhaps-but virtue sometimes can beget vice. Sometimes I think you're afraid to be happy; that is a mortal sin, yet you search for it every day in the Bible."

Edith interrupted her: "But Sarah, you forget that when Walter died, the door to my

world of joyous living closed. When I read the Bible, I am not searching. The book holds the things that were dear to him, and reading it gives me an understanding peace. When I go to the texts of his sermons, I can see him standing there before his listeners, trying to open their hearts to the glory of Christian fellowship, trying and trying and trying until the tears would roll down his face; and finally, with his head raised and arms outstretched, and with a supplication to God for his help and blessing. This book is my life, just as the fields and mountains and sky are yours. People search for God in many different ways."

All was then quiet-finally Sarah said, "I am sure Isabel will find her happiness."

There we sat staring awkwardly at each other. To Isabel, the conversation coming from the kitchen had been humilating; but now, with everyone staring at her, the silence which followed was unbearable. She immediately rose and taking me by the hand, hurried off the porch. In the yard, Edith and Matilda left their play to join us. Off we went down the path to Mary Travis' cabin, the final refuge of the younger generation.

When Mary's one room log cabin, set in a small clearing came into view, we quickened our footsteps; found her sitting on the rock stoop in front of the open door, snapping pole beans which would most likely appear on tomorrow's dinner table. Mary Travis was a small frail-looking woman. Her dingy grey hair contrasted with a charcoal face on which the skin had dried in innumerable little hair like wrinkles. But then she was very old, just how old no one seemed to know. And yet she could still carry the two wooden water pails up the hill from the spring; chop the weeds in the vegetable garden, do the washing, and whatever came to hand with the fortitude of a saint. Joy and sorrow-and humility too-had entered her life which the passing years had mellowed through faithful service far beyond the call of duty.

Looking up from her frayed bean basket, she greeted us with: "Whut yo chillun adoing way out here?" With that question. we were caught off guard and looked at each other

embarassed and confused. "Ah knowed hit. Ah knowed hit", she said. "Trouble's abrewing up at de place. Now yo'all jes set right down on de grown and have yo' say. When I hered de brush cracklin' under yo' feet in de woods, Ah knowed hit."

Isabel attempted to explain-by confessing to her dancing and cousin Ben's banjo playing-and how it had displeased her mother, while her Grandmother defended her. "I 'grees wid Missis Sally lak always (das whut I does), but gal, ain't nobody done tole yuh? Yuh must mind yo' ma-'tain't no argu ment dere. Yo' ma-yeah, she's de one-right or wrong. I al'ays minded my ma 'til de good Lawd tuk her. Dat was way back long 'fo' de big war. Missis Sally was 'bout yo' age, an' ole Mary 'bout ten I s'pose. All us niggers belong to Marse Sol-Missis Sally's Pa (Solomon Slusher). And when my ma done gone-an' me no good fo' de field wuk-Marse Sol he give me tuh Missis Sally fo' waitin' maid. Lawsy chillun-dat was de time, me up at de big house, wid all de white folks."

"Den Missis Sally, she ups and gits hitched an' off we go over de ridge wid Mistah Will tuh his gran'pa Claiborne's place (Claiborne Creasy)-cause Mistah Will's pa (Wyatt Creasy) done dead by dat time. Dem biggity niggers round Marse Claiborne's place in Bedford dey say I'se foreign-nevuh lak me a'tall. But Mistah Will he pay dem no mine. 'Bout den, Missis Sally's baby come-Mistah Walt. An' den I'se mighty proud. Yass suh, more 'portant dan all de hands on de place. Ah'd prance right down de cabin road toten' Mistah Walt, singing: Chicken in de breadtray, peckin' at de dough, Granny will yo' dawgs bite, no, chile, no. And dey jes look to one t'other sheepish lak. Ever spring Missis Sally come down wid de homesickness, den off we'd go back over de ridge to her pa's fer a spell. Dem was mos' de gayest times Ah eveh knowed. But Mistah Walt, he growed-Den de big war come; course dere warn't no war 'roun dis place. Mistah Will he tuk Mistah Walt, an' off dey go in de big wagon. Dey nevuh say, but white folks up de pike say de's hauling victuals an' war stuff out'n de hills fo' de rebels."

"Den gloom dun set right down on dis place. Ever'day I listen to de grown for Mistah Will's horse acoming home. Den one day Ah see'd 'em, fo' Ah here'd 'um. Dere dey was, aridin' up de road, a whole passel uf blue legs-an me astandin' dere stiff as a hant. Dey look 'round. see de hosses an' wagon gone, an' Mistah Will, too-Den dey spitin' mad-Dey burn down de barn, den de nigger cabins. By dat time dem biggity niggers scatter lak chickens wid de hawk on dere tail; an' de blue legs, 'hinst 'em, ridin' dere nags fast as dey kin go. Nobody nevuh see'd 'em 'til dis day. Come de dark uf de moon Mistah Will and Mistah Walt dey slunk back home. Den when dey here'd what de blue legs done-he say dis no place fo' women folks, so'es he pack me an' Missis Sally wid de things in de wagon he brought-an' here we'se been ever since."

"I'se 'bout the onlyest nigger in dese hills. Way back in de war dem niggers all leff. Dey follow de big dipper-looking fo' Mistah Lincum's freedom. Not me-no suh-Ah stay wid Missis Sally. I'se got dis house. I'se got de black grown. I'se got Missis Sally-dat's better'n freedom. I'se born black lak de night-lak de grown in de cawn patch. I'se belongs to wuk de grown an' when Ah die, dey'll put me in dat grown an' Ah still belong to Missis Sally-'till jedgment day come. De good Lawd make it so us niggers wuk 'till we'se mos' tuckered out, den he takes de sun away, den de night come so'es yuh doan' haff to wurk. Dat's de way it be in ole black heaven, jes lak de night. No lickin sun, no pesterin' bugs, no wurk-de's cool an' quiet lak. Gal, if'en yuh 'spec tuh git tuh heaven, yuh sho better minds yo' ma. Now yuh chillun git along home fo' dark ketches yuh."

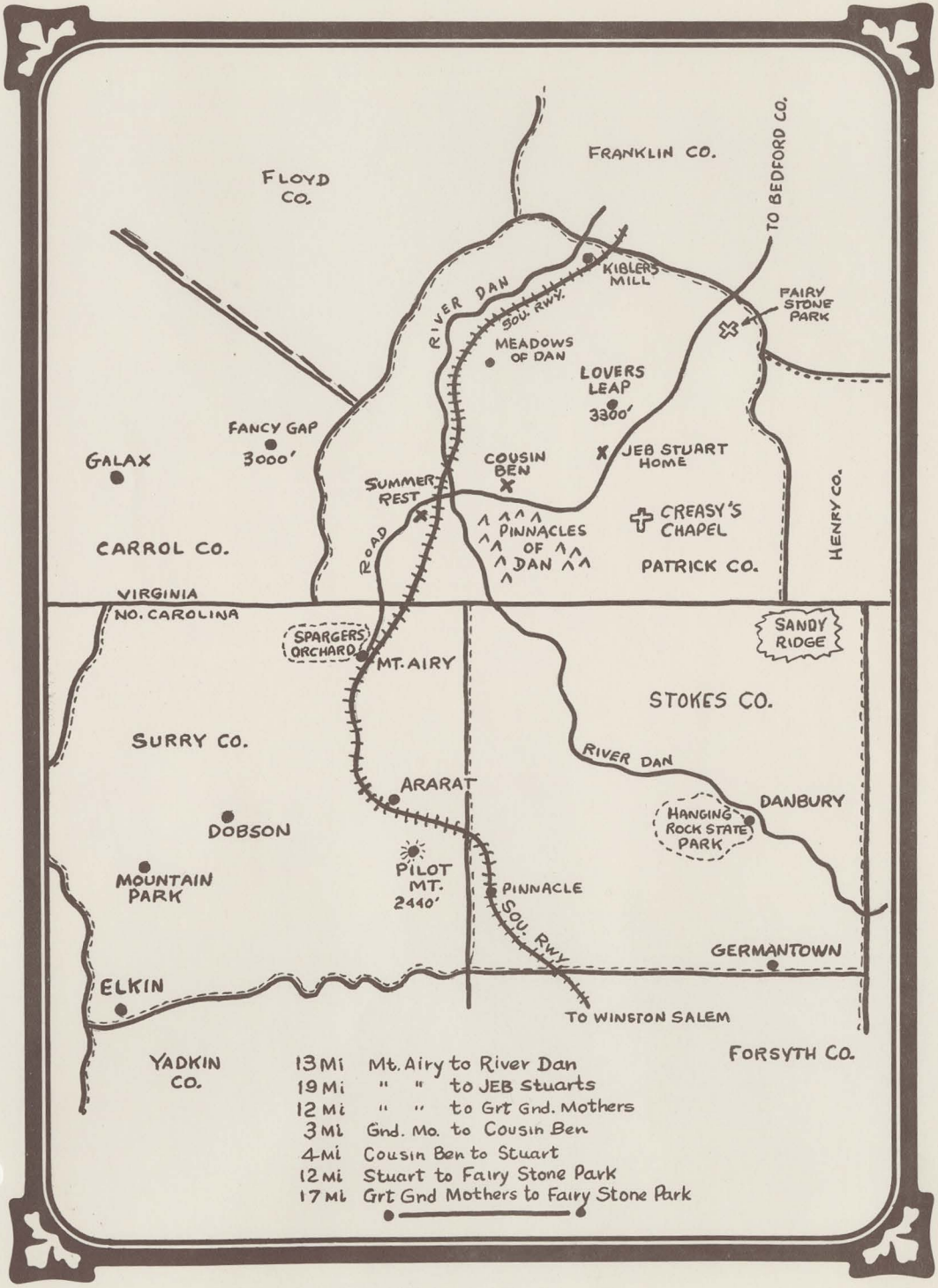
We retraced our steps through the woods-Isabel stopping at every opportunity to pick the little wild flowers growing here and there along the path, hesitant to reach the house and face her mother; not that any physical harm would come to her, for her mother had never raised a hand against her children; but far worse-the silence-the anguish she would show. And then the Bible laying open, on the turned down quilt with the passages marked for her bed time prayer. Even old Mary had failed her, and

she somehow felt alone and oppressed. In a happy mood, she acted on pure impulse in the lure of innocent pleasure and could see no wrong in what she had done. Yet, again she had become entangled in the conflict of obediance and desire in which no freedom of choice could be found. So as we reached the house she became reconciled to the inevitable.

The days that followed brought little jaunts through the countryside, along the winding lane to the general store, where the pike crossed the narrow gauge pigmy railroad which carried lumber from Kibler's mill, at the headwaters of the River Dan, to the town of Mount Airy. In the little unpainted one room store with the smell of new leather from the harness hanging on wooden pegs, Isabel was charmed by the brightly colored bolts of cotten dress cloth, while the twins glued their eyes on the peppermint stick candy jar; as for me, the glass case of bone handle pocket knives held my attention. While feasting our eyes on these forbidden treasures, we were suddenly interrupted by the shrill whistle coming from the little rotund engine of the train, puffing and chugging its way along the irregular track, with billows of smoke, full of hot wood cinders, blowing in every direction. So, together with Mister Reeves, the store owner, we scampered down the track to have a close up view of this mysterious intruder of the mountain stillness. Then again-down a rather steep incline path toward Grandmother's log spring house where in the cool damp shade, the sweet smell of the soft moist earth, spiced with the scent of galax, spread over the fairyland display of huge mountain ferns growing among the moss covered rocks through which a little brook found its way. Just the place where you would expect a leprechaun or wood nymph to appear.

And then the picnic, on a shady grass covered knoll rising behind the barn; a picnic with ham, biscuits, cold sweet potatoes, sweet cider, and old Mary's rhubarb pie. Thus it was that we spent our summer vacation.

THE END


FLOYD CO.
FRANKLIN CO.
TO BEDFORD CO.
KIBLER'S MILL
RIVER DAN
SOU. RWY.
FAIRY STONE PARK
MEADOWS OF DAN
LOVERS LEAP
3300'
FANCY GAP
3000'
GALAX
COUSIN BEN
JEB STUART HOME
SUMMER REST
ROAD
PINNACLES OF DAN
CREASY'S CHAPEL
CARROL CO.
PATRICK CO.
HENRY CO.
VIRGINIA
NO. CAROLINA
SPARGERS ORCHARD
MT. AIRY
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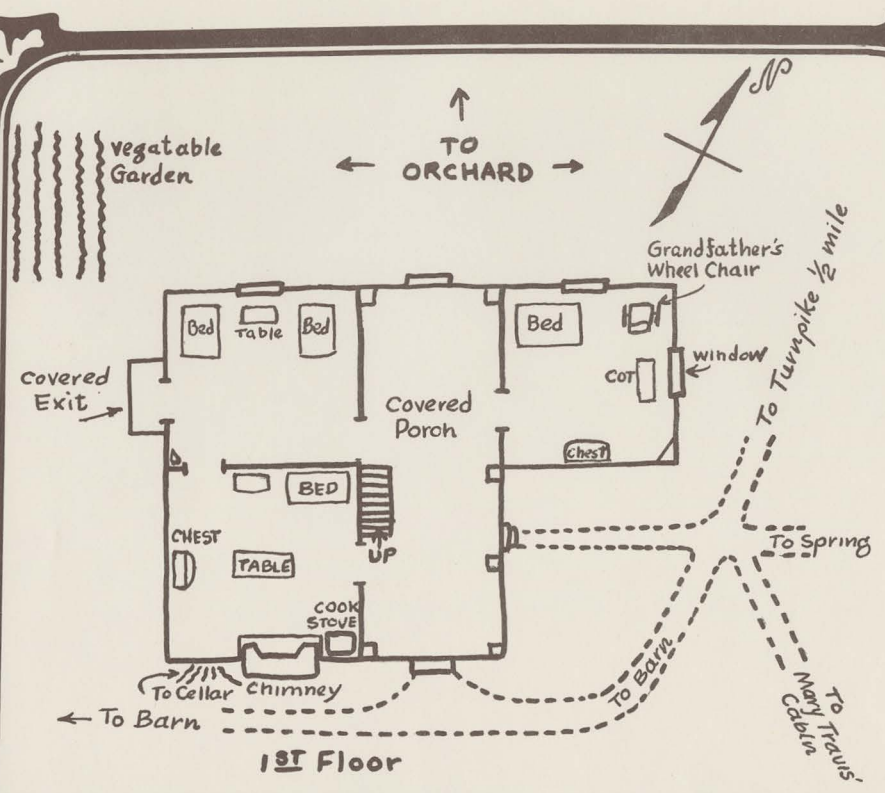
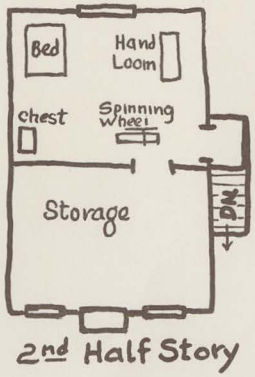
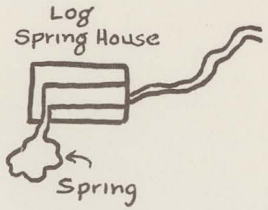
STOKES CO.
SURRY CO.
RIVER DAN
ARARAT
DANBURY
HANGING ROCK STATE PARK
DOBSON
PILOT MT. 2440'
MOUNTAIN PARK
PINNACLE
SOU. RWY.
GERMANTOWN
ELKIN
TO WINSTON SALEM
FORSYTH CO.
YADKIN CO.
13 Mi Mt. Airy to River Dan
19 Mi " " to JEB Stuarts
12 Mi " " to Grt Gnd. Mothers
3 Mi Gnd. Mo. to Cousin Ben
4 Mi Cousin Ben to Stuart
12 Mi Stuart to Fairy Stone Park
17 Mi Grt Gnd Mothers to Fairy Stone Park





Rock Foundation
Rock Chimney
Log House covered with Clapboard



SUMMER REST

HOME OF WILLIAM OWEN AND SARA SLUSHER CREASY

1864 - 1911

1903

How little we realize the effect our actions and demands have on those around us, given in all sincerity, may become claims to shackle the natural desires and talents of those dearest to us. Isabel (Minnie Isabel Creasy), caught up in a web of prohibitions, from which there seemed to be no escape, had interested herself more and more in the activities of the Church, even to the point of orienting the minds of young children in the Methodist doctrine, and was, although reluctantly, on the threshhold of completely suppressing into the unconscious innocent dreams that were the heritage of childhood fantasies, and which could have made for social diversions she so desperately desired, when Lee (Samuel Lee Smith) came, literally, dancing into her life.

Now Isabel's mother (Edith Eliza Sparger Creasy) was at "Summer's Rest" for a few days, where she was tending to the needs of her mother-in-law Sarah (Sarah Slusher Creasy), who had suddenly become ill with some sort of bronchial trouble. Although Sarah had disapproved, cousin Ben insisted that she needed someone other than old Mary (Mary Travis-former slave) to see her through; and as was customary in all such emergencies, Elizabeth (Edith Elizabeth Creasy) and Isabel were staying with their Uncle John (John Henry Sparger) and his family at the Sparger homeplace in Mount Airy, North Carolina.

A business meeting at the local bank, something about the town's bonded indebtedness, had brought Samuel Lee Smith, representative of a northern brokerage firm, and John Sparger together. And following the small town's custom, where there were no public places of entertainment or refreshment, John extended the hospitality of the Sparger home to this visitor. Such guests were no novelty to the Sparger family. John, prominent in civic affairs, brought home such visitors from time to time for an evening meal and relaxation, and therefore Mr. Smith created no unusual interest or problem, receiving the required courtesies and attention appropriate to the occasion.

Such an evening always began with John driving his guest over the acres of apple trees, which at this time of year were full of bloom- transforming the valley into a pinkish white cloud of lovliness- and secretly feeding his ego with further pride of his inheritance. John had never made up his mind as to whether the delicious "apple

float", a dessert which his wife Mary (Mary Matilda Smith), made in the fall and winter by whipping freshly crushed apples into sweetened dairy cream, and, secretly a kind of joke with the family, by John's insistence that it be served whenever company came in, was more to be desired than the spring display of blossoms. But then, since one begat the other, he would always have them both to gratify his asthetic, as well as palatable, hunger for the better things in life.

After dinner, the older members of the family, together with their guests, gathered in the somewhat overstuffed Victorian parlor and continued their discussion of the unstable stock market, a result of the treaty with Columbia for canal rights in Panama, which had been signed in January, and just recently rejected by the Columbian government. During a lull in the conversation, Lee spied the square rosewood piano, with its rich coloured silk tasseled cover, in a far corner of the room, and with a nod from John, sat down at the keyboard and began to play and sing a lively, and currently popular song. Isabel, with her cousins Margaret (?) and Valera (Emma Valeria Sparger?) were sitting in their porch swing just outside the parlor window, and before he was well into his song, their voices came floating into the room in perfect rhythm with the melody. Nothing would do but that they join him around the piano. After three or four songs, during which Lee was particularly complimentary of Isabel's natural musical talent, he sang several of his own lyrics and then, to Valera's accompaniment, did a soft shoe dance climaxing the evening's entertainment. Although the entire family expressed sincere pleasure in his performance, on leaving, Lee offered apologies for the indelicate behaviour of a man in his position, explaining that, having followed the career of a professional entertainer before taking up his present occupation, he could never forego the opportunity of recalling nostalgic memories of those days when the music he still loved so much filled his whole life.

Isabel spent a wakeful night. The music of early evening kept drifting back and forth through the silence, and the misty image of a tall sandy-haired stranger, mingling with the hazy instrument he seemed to be playing, were continually swimming before her eyes. It was not until the little birds, in a chestnut tree just beyond her window, chirped their morning carol, did she drift off to sleep. A tranquility she had never known before enveloped her, and in suspended animation, she prayed the night would never end.

During the months that followed, Lee, on every opportunity, made his way back to Mount Airy. For just as he had dispelled the shadows hovering over Isabel's life,

so she, with her vibrant personality, had chimed a lost chord which now vibrated his whole being.

Sulphur Springs camp meetings and Church ice cream suppers were pleasant diversions that frequently occupied their time. Spring slipped into summer- summer into fall- and Isabel had become moody and preoccupied with a growing unrest. This worried her mother no end, for, knowing that Isabel was aware of her feeling towards Lee's past life, such voluntary aloofness could mean but one thing.

Now she had, at Lee's insistance, always accompanied them to the summer camp meetings where he enjoyed singing the old Church hymns. Picnics at Sulphur Springs, some five miles from Mount Airy, when he would appear to be more interested in her welfare than Isabel's company; the frequent Church socials had also been occasions where he had proved himself a gentleman; even a conversation with her brother John as to his life in the business world had only confirmed his good character.

Yet, in accepting all these things, a lingering shadow of his past life was still before her, and she could never bring herself to face the issue that was rapidly reaching a climax. So when Lee came to her for his answer, she was in no way prepared to meet the challenge- for although her consent to this marriage was out of the question- it was not in her to deny Isabel the happiness she so earnestly desired. Now it was after the first wave of emotion, a painful smile crossed her face and she could only bow her head in silent resignation.

The mid-day service had been brief. Isabel and Lee had humbly said their vows and looked altogether happy as they hurried from the church, amid the good wishes of the family's many friends, to drive through the country to Winston-Salem. From there they would begin the long trip, by rail, to New Orleans, their future home. For her mother, it seemed the day would never end. The sun had lost its glow, and the chilled grey of this November afternoon deepened the sadness in her heart. Her baby was gone. Elizabeth, now beside her, was all she had left to call her very own. Little did she know, that within two years, she too would marry and leave her alone.

What was a mother to do? When Walter (Walter Scott Creasy) died and the influence of his inspired personality was no longer present to meet and sustain the spiritual needs of the family, she had undertaken this arduous task. From a time even before her wedding day, she had come under the spell of his consecrated life and, through

love and devotion, had fervently followed his teachings. It was with this fortress of strength that she faced the dual responsibility of parenthood.

But what had gone wrong? Was it the fact that Isabel had always looked to her father for guidance? Was it that Walter had, as Sarah said, "spoiled his favorite child"? Or was it that she had been over zealous in an effort to guide her in the ways of Christian living? Whatever the reason, she had, in her opinion, failed her, and in doing so failed her father as well. She had always felt a sense of pride in pointing to her children as examples for the whole Sparger clan and now she must face humiliation through the marriage of her baby to a man of the world.

Not that Lee was a bad man, but his career as a vaudeville performer, before taking up his present occupation, was something outside the concepts of Christendom-dancing, shady parodies on popular songs, burlesque, and pleasurable dissipation, which were frowned upon by all who sincerely followed the orthodox faith, had certainly been a part of his life, and these things she had been taught to shun. They would surely stain the escutcheon she had worked so hard to keep clean and bright.

With a contrite heart, for whatever her failure might have been, she faced the conflict now raging in her conscience. There could be no turning back, but with faith and hope in the ultimate victory of good over evil, she would turn to prayer with confidence that God would take care of his own.

Isabel had left the nest, but her wings, no doubt, were strong to combat the buffeting winds ahead; for surely by her growing years under the shadow of the church had clothed her with a fortitude no weakness could wholly overcome. Not even the appeal of Mardi Gras glamour and gaiety in Creole New Orleans.

New Orleans, "The City care forgot", was a blend of magnolia blossoms, orange and banana trees, live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, and white columned villas with broad verandas fringed in oleanders, camelias and azeleas. Winter carnival with its piquant quadroon girls in bright striped tignons (chignons), intoxicated the revelers with their pungent rhythms. Flower fiestas of spring bubbling with unquenchable gaiety. And at night in the Vieux Carre (literally the old square or French Quarter)- dreamy patios filled with moonlight and roses, lacy balconies, hovering over shady narrow streets, beckoning to pleasure seeking wanderers, shuttered windows shielding the night's wanton secrets, stringed melodies with their

Creole lyrics of sweet sin, drifting up from the levees where the tall funnels of riverboats nightly pierced the sky with flames of fire. And then just before the dawn old evil eye "The Great Zombi" cast a spell of silence over the wild Voodoo dancers in the bayous, leaving only the mocking birds in the magnolias to mimic the sounds that had fled the night-until the cathedral bells of old San Luis summoned the fallen angels to their morning prayers.

All this was intoxicating and at once bewildering to a modest girl from the quaint Carolina hills. The cloistered convents, churches, and many missions, scattered here and there, stood as strangers in a foreign land. And Isabel, being alone except for Lee, somehow felt a kindred relationship to them, for the innocent pleasures of which she had dreamed were alien to the turbulent way of life with all its temptations of evil. The little red testament her mother had slipped into her trunk when she left, whose passages had once seemed so rigid and harsh, now carried a soothing balm to her troubled heart.

Lee considered it fortunate that he had found a comfortable apartment in one of the converted colonial antebellum mansions in the Anglo Saxon garden district, located across Canal Street from the French Quarter. There Isabel was entrenched in the midst of this so called American community whose roots had been firmly implanted when, during the 1830's, the rich plantation owners had built their sumptuous town house in spacious gardens of sweet shrubs and fragrant flowers; continually vying with the older French chateaux standing somewhat grim and a little arrogant in the Vieux Carre.

"Old Man River" had been good to his "Chillun"- lavishing precious black gold upon the land- thereby enriching the delta, and in turn the plantation owners, who spent the post-harvest season in their townhouses in luxurious living. And then in the midst of this time of milk and honey "The Old Man", like an irate father, had borne the Yankee hoards up the channel to destroy this wealth, free the slaves, and all but obliterate their way of life. In the face of this misfortune, many of the country gentlemen were forced to convert their mansions in town to apartments for needed profits, and retreat to their plantations upstream to live.

Even though the war had destroyed much of the glamour and joy of this Creole paradise, the years that had since intervened gradually softened hearts and overlaid the scars of conflict with some semblance of the nostalgic past. The formal revival of the Mardi Gras season with its elegant and exclusive masked balls provided the

spark to set aflame the fiery French and Spanish natives of the Vieux Carre with a resurgence of utter abandon that threatened to engulf the entire city. A pagan morality overlay the semi-tropical atmosphere where the pleasure loving inhabitants lived only to eat, drink, and ply their clandestine trades. With the night before Mardi Gras climaxing this revelry; drug addicts, prostitutes, beggars, and workingmen staggered in and out of dimly lighted doorways amid the blare of cheap music and the smell of stale beer and wine, whiskey, cheap perfume and sweat. This rabble seldom invaded the exclusive aristocratic balls, but in their masquerades they overran the boulevards to the dismay of the more respectable citizens. Fruits of free love and careless living had taxed the community to the breaking point.

The more sober Anglo Saxons who still remained in the garden district, had not so much resisted the influx of iniquity, as they had completely ignored this unwelcomed intrusion into their restrained way of life. Quietly they had restored their gardens, which again displayed a fairyland charm, with cape jasmine, honeysuckle, magnolia, and sweet olive perfuming the air. And yet in this profusion of beauty, which Isabel had now learned to love, there was an illusive sadness emanating from the gigantic aging antebellum homes. They had a haunted look and seemed to belong to the past, particularly during the festive season did they appear unreal and ghostly.

With Lee's frequent trips out of town, Isabel became restless and lonely, desiring something more than the enclosed garden and drab high ceilinged abode could offer. It is true that Lee had given her a piano which was a joy to both of them, filling their weekends with song, but the days in between called for some further diversion to brighten her otherwise colourless days. With the spirit of youthful adventure still alive, midmorning often found her boldly walking up the Rue Chartres to Jackson Park in the midst of the French Quarter. There she would go to sit and enjoy the salty breeze blowing in from the waterfront, and watch the ever changing scene of frock-coated town officials on their way to the Cabildo to accuse, defend, and judge the unfortunate victims of the previous night's brawls; faded old women pushing their two wheeled wooden carts ladened with overripe fruit and aging seafood, looking for purchasers who seldom appeared; dark skinned natives in brightly coloured dresses with their slovenly clad escorts, wandering aimlessly here and there, whose haunted expression created an atmosphere of crime and intrigue. And then, in the midst of this atmosphere of perplexing uncertainties, she would turn to the carefree birds playing in the fountain waters, or scavenging along the gravel walks for castaway crumbs, and finally perching atop the twin church towers,

in what seemed to be a gesture to Saint Christopher, before vanishing in the distant blue.

On one such occasion Isabel had barely settled herself in a cool shady spot, when out of the Gulf, storm clouds, riding a violent swirling wind, suddenly darkened the sky and sent everyone fleeing for shelter. Isabel, being near the cathedral entrance, hurried inside just as the storm descended and deluged the park. The subdued light filtering through the frosted glass windows revealed the dingy high vaulted nave; and the unkempt stone flooring which supported a number of disarranged prayer chairs facing the once elegant, but now neglected sanctuary whose only sign of reverence was the immaculate chalk white altar cloths, prepared and meticulously kept in place by the Nuns of (original left blank).

There could be boasting neither of beauty nor riches here- the war some forty years past had taken care of that, and it would be another thirty before the good Monsieur Irby would come forth to renew its beauty. But without the glitter and gold, saintliness of feeling was easy and Isabel had felt it when she faced the outstretched arms of the Virgin standing in the transept to the left of the chancel. This statue was of natural wood and its mellowed age lent a greying softness to the gesture, surrounded as it were with a halo of light from the large rear window. The old Cajuns here about tell you that the brigand Jean Lafitte- dealer in "black ivory"- smuggled it out of Cuba and presented it to the church father for absolution of his unspeakable sins.

How strange it seemed, for she had never been inside a Catholic church before, yet in the shadowy half-light there was a strong sense of belonging, a feeling of welcome, security, and peace. Immediately she thought of her Mother, something about the face, the eyes, and the welling up inside of a repressed desire eager to be free. Why should she think of it? But Saul's experience on the way to Damascus, which her father had related on many occasions, filled her mind. Like a flash she could see it all now, as through a field glass, the blurred picture comes into focus. With her mother's many household duties, as well as the expected obligations of a minister's wife- and above all the constant care of her older sister Mary (Mary Ella Creasy), a helpless invalid- there was little time for a growing healthy girl. And then how she had impatiently turned to her father who, being occupied with the unending duties of a pastor, perhaps humored her beyond discretion. How an evergrowing affinity over the years drew them closer and closer together, so that when he and her sister Mary, so suddenly passed away, she was left with a

comfortless yearning, a sickness of heart, a clinging to the past; nursing a living memory she could never completely efface. And how then her mother- seemingly cast adrift- with the whole of her life a shambles, courageously picked up the pieces to build a future for Elizabeth and her. The zeal and energy of a dedicated church life now centered on them, and Isabel felt the tightening of a net around her, restricting the social and religous freedom she had once enjoyed. How she again turned away with a childish resentment at a time of greatest need when her mother had done what she did under the weight of a cross much greater than her own. How foolish- inconsiderate- really selfish, and she felt ashamed.

In this far away world marketplace where she had so swiftly grown to maturity, Isabel had found release; for Lee's devotion and thoughtfulness had in some measure dimmed her grievous loss. During these months, however, she invaribly evaded as far as possible all thoughts of her mother and the estrangement that had saddened their lives. But here in the solitude of this holy place, she was caught up in a conflict beyond her ability to resolve; for although she was at once truly repentant of her many little indiscretions which had so grieved her mother, she faced a yawning chasm. Her marriage to Lee was a pledge for life, consummated in their mutual love; and yet the strict discipline under which her mother lived would never permit acceptance. In this dilemma she dropped down into one of the prayer chairs and closed her eyes. Silently she longed for understanding---And then suddenly her intuition prompted her, no Christian mother turns away in adversity. Wasn't that what the Virgin trying to tell her? With the pleading hands wasn't she saying that even though her mother could never bless this marriage, she would never forsake her? Yes, that was it, and when she looked up, the feeling of estrangement which she had repressed for so long, through the year of facing it, slowly dissolved in understanding- the burden lifted.

Just as the last cloud shadowing her life had vanished, so also the storm which had so suddenly engulfed the city moved up the river valley. Outside the cathedral, the leaves heavy with rain, glistened in the afternoon sun, and the cool fresh air brought to her the fragrance of the sweet moistened earth. Everything seemed so rich, so beautiful, and with a song in her heart she hurried through the park and down the Rue Chartres. She must write her mother this very day. There was so much to say, so much she had failed to tell her about the many faces of this restless city.

But her happiness was to be short lived, for as month followed month, she came to know that this marriage would never be blessed with children- she was barren. The hopeful plans with which she and Lee had gilded their future were now tucked away with other unrealized dreams, and in their place was a growing fear of insecurity which each would-be mother feels when facing her husband empty handed. Lee's absence much of the time only added to her despair and a developing melancholia threatened her health. In truth, Lee was alarmed and sought the advice of a physician. The first thing to be done would be to secure the services of a companion who could not only take care of her physical needs if and when necessary; but if possible, supply the required mental stimulant to dispel the illusion created by her growing anxiety. But where could one turn to find such a person? There was of course the landlord, Mr. G. Rowley Woodbourne, whose plantation across the river was relatively close by- and he, living here all of his life, should know such things- having, over the years, employed numerous persons in varied capacities.

Upon inquiring of Mr. Woodbourne, Lee learned of a woman he had employed on two occasions when there was sickness in his home, a woman by the name of Lucien (Lucy Ann) now in her middle forties, whose once striking appearance had retreated behind her greying hair and now sallow skin. She could be recommended for her practical nursing in which she had become proficient during the yellow fever epidemics- as well as for her dressmaking, from which she earned a meager living- and for her natural musical talent which her mother had persistently encouraged. She had a modest education, most of which was received at her mother's knee and centered around conversational English and French as well as the social etiquette her mother had been taught in Europe; but was of a quality acceptable in a servant to both the cultered Creoles and so called Americans. Mr. Woodbourne, however, cautioned Lee: "She is a quadroon and there are still some Creole, as well as Anglo Saxon women who abhor the name. But whatever her inherited past might have been she has earned the right to be accepted in her humble place in the community, and I recommend her to you." When Lee left, it was with the intention of immediately employing this woman. Yet, in remembering the warning of Mr. Woodbourne and his own meager knowledge of these outcasts, a further inquiry would seem desirable.

The librarian, when approached, was more than accomodating and gave Lee the following history of the unfortunates. From French Senegal and Dahomey, Negro slaves had been brought into the West Indies. The more select females who were well built and possessed straight long hair and delicate features were chosen as the "filles de joie" (prostitute) favorites of their aristocratic French masters. Each

succeeding generation, particularly in Santo Domingo, by careful breeding, produced a type more exotically lovely- with straight lithe figures, small hands and feet, exquisitely chiseled features, and who in time, acquired the name of "Les Sirenes". When the rich French planters migrated to New Orleans, they naturally included in their retinue "Les Sirenes". However, the moral atmosphere being what it was among the Arcadians and other settlers there, it was no longer possible for them to maintain their former way of life. Propriety demanded that these freed slaves live to themselves. Consequently, their aristocratic supporters provided the necessary segregation; and as time went on they became a recognized, and (for the male inhabitants) an enticing way of life. These courtesans reached the height of popularity in the 1840's. Nowhere in the world was there ever a group of women so beautiful, so notorious, and so intensely despised as the quadroons of New Orleans. Even today, white women hate their memory.

With eyes the colour of Haitian bluebells, velvet textured skin the shade of gardenias contrasting with their flowing blue-black hair, and the carriage and grace of a Parisian lady, they were never referred to as Negroes, but as "femmes de couleur" (coloured women); and considered by the gentlemen of New Orleans from an entirely subjective point of view. Supported by these Creole aristocrats, they lived in their secluded houses on the Rue de Rampart, isolated behind garden walls in more or less tainted luxury; suspended as it were between the wealthy self-righteous blue bloods and the beggarly destitute vagabonds. The concern of these "chere amies" (dear friends) was their offspring, and since these unwanted children were barred from the fashionable boarding schools, they were frequently sent abroad to be educated, thus leaving their parents free to pursue their clandestine way of life. Returning home from Paris, with pretty continental manners and trunks of beautiful clothes, they completely eclipsed the convent-bred Creole belles whose modest innocence was, by comparison, on the dull side.

When the social season began in October, the quadroons held their dance festival in seclusion, continuing nearly every week, until Ash Wednesday; and this defiance of the exclusive aristocratic balls of the first families where the courtly sires of these sumptuous affairs spared no expense to advance the cause of their modest and demure daughters. But, these proud fathers would likely as not face the embarrassment by their son's absence- a repetition of their own philandering around the "Garden of Eden". The mothers of these sporting young men knew about the "beautiful colored girls", but pure proud flowers of Southern womanhood were not supposed to mention such things.

The hostesses in this so called "Happy Hunting Ground" were always free women of colour who were now or had been mistresses of white men, and the girls they brought out were always the illigitimate daughters of their benefactors. Since marriages between white and coloured persons were prohibited by law, the purpose was to display the youth and beauty of these girls in order to find rich protectors for them. It was a grand and elegant sex mart where Creole bluebloods chose their mistresses with taste and decorum. These free girls of colour, with their European culture, were as discreet as nuns and under strict surveillance until a desirable protector was found for them, and often as not they had more liberty in choosing a lover than the white Creole belles had in choosing a husband. Agreements, which included financial arrangements and a house on the Rue de Rampart with a promise that separation would call for a cash settlement, were considered respectable in colored circles and accepatable to the male world of the elite.

The war, however, took its toll; the balls lost their former character. The reconstruction era worked such devastating havoc upon the fortunes of Southern aristocracy that these once splendid gentlemen could no longer maintain luxurious institutions in antebellum style, and by the 1880's, this way of life no longer displayed its old time flavor and charm. The institution which had so carefully protected these unfortunates gradually crumbled and left the survivors to the mercy of their revengful adversaries. Those who remain today earn their living by dressmaking, hairdressing, nursing, and some, still in their dilapidated homes on Rampart Street, offer a night's lodging to any passerby whom they can entice inside.

Such was the picture Lee received of these outcasts. Whereas before, he was on the verge of employing this woman, he was now in a quandary. What would his garden district neighbors say? It so happened that Lucien had served a family who had, in the not too distant past, lived in the neighborhood. So when Lee approached Madam Gallier, a middle aged widow living on the floor above them, he was surprised to find her readily agreeable to the arrangement. As a matter of fact, he had difficulty in getting away from her praise of this "mercenary" as madam called her. After considering the fact that she had once before worked in the neighborhood, and since help who would stay on the place overnight was difficult to find, Lee felt he could at least give her a trial and in that way determine not only her qualifications, but the reaction of Isabel and the neighbors as well.

What should he tell Isabel? How much should he tell her? Sooner or later she would surely learn all the truth either from the neighbors or from Lucien herself.

Anyway, the information he had received at the library was of a general nature; and the little he knew of Lucien, as a person, was in the form of a reliable recommendation of her services; so there really was very little to be said. Isabel, although aware of the complacent badness of the times, actually knew nothing of the quadroons; and in her present state of mind was in no mood for further revelations, which involved someone who would be staying in her home. Madam, at the first opportunity, would certainly give her a glowing report, and this should offset anything she might hear from the outside; and then too, in this way, if information should reach her from other sources, it would give him the opportunity to explain any reports that might be disturbing, instead of finding himself defending whatever statements he might have voluntarily made. So Lee would trust to providence that no would-be tale-bearer, who had refused to forgive and forget could, at least for the present, be so unkind as to approach Isabel with such gossip.

Arrangements were made through the landlord for Lucien to report on Monday. So after Sunday dinner, when Isabel seemed composed and resting, Lee quite casually mentioned that Mr. Woodbourne had offered them the services of a woman named Lucien, whom he no longer needed on the plantation--that she would come in Monday mornings and remain until Friday, the usual time he returned for the weekend--that he thought this would give her company and incidentally some help with the house chores--and furthermore, please their landlord who had favored them on several occasions. Lee received no response to his carefully worded declaration, just an acquiescing nod of the head. Awkwardly, he got up and went to the piano, thinking a song might brighten her mood, but when he finished and turned around, she had left the room.

Althought the Ronstroms up the street, Madam Gallier, and her niece Miss Laure Raney, who visits now and then, as well as the Woodbournes across the river were all pleasant acquaintances, they were in no way what you might call close friends; for since her arrival, Isabel had been completely absorbed in the household duties and the many unexpected responsibilities of an inexperienced newly-wed. Lee's happiness and welfare were always her first consideration, and she had seriously thought of little else. Therefore, there was no one she felt free to turn to for comfort and advice.

A sense of her sacred marital duty had prepared her for the fulfillment of a destiny in which fate had now cruelly betrayed her. The welding link in the golden chain was missing, and the realization of her helplessness before the forces of nature had overshadowed her love with an anxiety of possible consequences she dared not

accept. She was isolated in self consciousness- a sadness almost too deep for tears. She prayed each day for understanding, for some guiding light, and while painfully aware of her estranged attitude toward Lee, this burden must be hers alone until she could find herself. A faint smile crossed her face while thinking of how Lee, through his kindness, made every effort to please, even to the point of employing a companion for her; but the answer lay far above and beyond anything else he could do.

"Mawnin' Missy 'Bel" greeted Isabel when answering the front door. And then with a slight quick curtsy, "Mam'zelle Lucien, iv you pliz. 'Ow I kin serve you?" Isabel was somewhat amazed. This was not what she had expected. Here before her was a trim middle aged woman in a starched white dress with a bright red tignon tightly drawn over her head. A natural grace and confidence in her movements belied her somewhat roughened red hands and faded complexion; and Isabel realized that whoever this woman was, or was not, she had certainly inherited a personality of unique charm and manner, pleasing her without saying why.

Lucien, installed in the servants quarters beyond the kitchen, was now busying herself with a generous mixture of elbow grease, mops, pans, and melodies in a daily round of chores which kept her occupied a good part of the time. And contrary to the customary lack-a-daisical manner usually found in local domestics, she appeared to be exerting every effort to earn her board and keep. To Isabel with a far more personal problem- left on her own- just having someone in the house dispelled the feeling of aloneless, and lightened her burden.

Lucien had one noticable weakness though---she just couldn't pass the piano, by the parlor window, without drumming the keys; and frequently, when no one was around, would sit down to play and sing a little plaintive song of sorrow:

Ah, ma piti sans papa
Lucien avez tristesse dans couer.
(Ah, my little fatherless one
Lucien has sadness in her heart.)

the slowing syllables trailing softly into nothingness.

Isabel knew little French, but, from the melody, she understood this song to be something of a melancholy nature; and striking a responsive chord in her heart, created a feeling of compassion for this woman. Now and again she would find

herself altogether absorbed in a desire for understanding, completely forgetting, at the moment her own secret quest. It would, however, be months, many months, before she was to know Lucien's secret. In the meantime things had settled down to something as near normal as could be expected under the circumstances.

It was again vacation time, but Isabel had no desire to travel. They usually went away for a few days. Excursions on the Gulf, trips to Florida- once they made it to the West Indies, and then the two week's trip back home to see her mother, stopping by Charlotte, North Carolina, for a visit with her sister Betty (Sarah Bethania Creasy Overcarsh). This year she suggested they stay home. Lee was pleased, for there were several chores to be done around the house. For one thing, the gutters needed cleaning--leaves, grass, straw, and twigs brought in by the birds, had been cluttering the drains for two winters now. And this should be taken care of immediately. He found a rickity ladder among the discarded things in the old carriage house which, with a little going over, should be satisfactory for the job. Starting with the porte cochere (carriage entrance), he would leave the high gutters until later; but he was never to finish the job, for he had been working only a few minutes when tha ladder gave way and he found himself sprawled on the gravel drive. He could move neither leg. He felt sick and very weak--everything turning green, and then blue, quickly fading into unconscious darkness. In the hospital, Lee had regained consciousness; but the doctors gave little encouragement to Isabel, for the spinal cord was so involved in the back fracture that a relieving operation was out of the question. At best, his prospects were that of a crippled invalid.

Although the doctors, after a few weeks, permitted Lee to go home, he was to have constant care. Lucien, who had become a permant fixture, was therefore staying the full week now, doing what cooking was necessary and the other required chores, while Isabel spent her time with Lee, seldom leaving his bedside. This misfortune had completely overshadowed the problem in which she had been absorbed for so long. All her energy was now directed toward his welfare. But here again, the effort was almost unbearable, for was it not she, herself, who had brought on this tragedy by suggesting that they spend their vacation at home?

Time passed and Lee didn't seem to improve. On the other hand he was losing weight and becoming more discouraged day by day. Inactivity had aggravated the arthritic condition developing in his right side. And he had trouble getting in and out of the rolling chair which the doctor permitted him to use for a few hours each day.

Months lengthened into years and although Isabel had noticed Lee wasting away, she never wavered in her faith and loyalty, beginning each day afresh with a chapter from her Bible and a personal prayer for his swift recovery. And then on one Autumn morning in 1930 while offering her daily prayer, Lucien hurried breathlessly in to the room with a telegram from Mount Airy:

> Your mother fell yesterday at back door
> breaking her hip. Your brother William
> (William Murlin Creasy) moving her to
> Bulluck Hospital, Wilmington, N.C. for
> treatment.
>
> Signed: Aunt Margaret (?)

This left Isabel stunned. She was still on her knees beside the bed, and when she had regained some semblance of composure, she got to her feet and read Lee the telegram.

(Editor's note: With the arrival of the telegram, the manuscript ends with only a few rough notes remaining. They are listed below for the reader to use his own imagination to complete the story.)

> Mother so far away.
> Unable to go to her.
> Regrets for the past.
> Tinge of conscience.
> Lee's death-Isabel's heartbreak-no husband, no child.
> Lucien's confession and demise.
> Isabel's activity at the mission.
> Learns to live with adversity.
> She came to know the sisters and the priest.
> Difficulty in finding someone to stay at night.

THE END

Editor's note: The following verse was found among Walter Creasy Overcarsh's writings and is included as a matter of interest:

Minnie Isabel Creasy Smith died in her sleep
June 22, 1961, age 78, New Orleans, Louisiana.

A bright June morn,
And Isabel is far from home.
While quietly sleeping- wafted away
On a wistful breeze that stirred the trees
At the break of day-
The winds that blow- ask them,
Which leaf of the tree will be the next to go,
And deepen the lonliness.

W. C. O. 1961

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