

Mary Noailles Murfree

Una Of The Hill Country



eBookTakeAway

UNA OF THE HILL COUNTRY

By Charles Egbert Craddock

1911

The old sawmill on Headlong Creek at the water-gap of Chilhowee Mountain was silent and still one day, its habit of industry suggested only in the ample expanse of sawdust spread thickly over a level open space in the woods hard by, to serve as footing for the "bran dance" that had been so long heralded and that was destined to end so strangely.

A barbecue had added its attractions, unrivalled in the estimation of the rustic epicure, but even while the shoats, with the delectable flavor imparted by underground roasting and browned to a turn, were under discussion by the elder men and the sun-bonneted matrons on a shady slope near the mill, where tablecloths had been spread beside a crystal spring, the dance went ceaselessly on, as if the flying figures were insensible of fatigue, impervious to hunger, immune from heat.

Indeed the youths and maidens of the contiguous coves and ridges had rarely so eligible an opportunity, for it is one of the accepted tenets of the rural religionist that dancing in itself is a deadly sin, and all the pulpits of the countryside had joined in fulminations against it. Nothing less than a political necessity had compassed this joyous occasion. It was said to have been devised by the "machine" to draw together the largest possible crowd, that certain candidates might present their views on burning questions of more than local importance, in order to secure vigorous and concerted action at the polls in the luke-warm rural districts when these measures should go before the people, in the person of their advocates, at the approaching primary elections. However, even the wisdom of a political boss is not infallible, and despite the succulent graces of the barbecue numbers of the ascetic and jeans-clad elder worthies, though fed to repletion, colloqued unhappily together among the ox-teams and canvas-hooded wagons on the slope, commenting sourly on the frivolity of the dance. These might be relied on to cast no ballots in the interest of its promoters, with whose views they were to be favored between the close of the feast and the final dance before sunset.

The trees waved full-foliated branches above the circle of sawdust and dappled the sunny expanse with flickering shade, and as they swayed apart in the wind they gave evanescent glimpses of tiers on tiers of the faint blue mountains of the Great Smoky Range in the distance, seeming ethereal, luminous, seen from between the dark, steep, wooded slopes of the narrow watergap hard by, through which Headlong Creek plunged and roared. The principal musician, perched with his fellows on a hastily erected stand, was burly, red-faced, and of a jovial aspect. He had a brace of fiddlers, one on each side, but with his own violin under his double-chin he alone "called the figures" of the old-fashioned contradances. Now and again, with a wide, melodious, sonorous voice, he burst into a snatch of song:

*"Shanghai chicken he grew so tall,
In a few days--few days,
Cannot hear him crow at all-----"*

Sometimes he would intersperse jocund personal remarks in his Terpsichorean commands: "Gents, forward to the centre--back--swing: the lady ye love the best." Then in alternation, "Ladies, forward to the centre--back----" and as the mountain damsels teetered in expectation of the usual supplement of this mandate he called out in apparent expostulation, "*Don't* swing him, Miss--he don't wuth a turn."

Suddenly the tune changed and with great gusto he chanted forth:

*"When fust I did a-courtin' go,
Says she 'Now, don't be foolish, Joe,'"*

the *tempo rubato* giving fresh impetus to the kaleidoscopic whirl of the dancers. The young men were of indomitable endurance and manifested a crude agility as they sprang about clumsily in time to the scraping of the fiddles, while their partners shuffled bouncingly or sidled mincingly according to their individual persuasion of the most apt expression of elegance. Considered from a critical point of view the dance was singularly devoid of grace--only one couple illustrating the exception to the rule. The youth it was who was obviously beautiful, of a type as old as the fabled Endymion.

His long brown hair hung in heavy curls to the collar of his butternut jeans coat; his eyes were blue and large and finely set; his face was fair and bespoke none of the midday toil at the plow-handles that had tanned the complexion of his compeers, for Brent Kayle had little affinity for labor of any sort. He danced with a light firm step, every muscle supple responsive to the strongly marked pulse of the music, and he had a lithe, erect carriage which imparted a certain picturesque effect to his presence, despite his much creased boots, drawn over his trousers to the knee, and his

big black hat which he wore on the back of his head. The face of his partner had a more subtle appeal, and so light and willowy was her figure as she danced that it suggested a degree of slenderness that bordered on attenuation. Her unbonneted hair of a rich blonde hue had a golden lustre in the sun; her complexion was of an exquisite whiteness and with a delicate flush; the chiseling of her features was peculiarly fine, in clear, sharp lines--she was called "hatchet-faced" by her indiscriminating friends. She wore a coarse, flimsy, pink muslin dress which showed a repetitious pattern of vague green leaves, and as she flitted, lissome and swaying, through the throng, with the wind a-flutter in her full draperies, she might have suggested to a spectator the semblance of a pink flower--of the humbler varieties, perhaps, but still a wild rose is a rose.

Even the longest dance must have an end; even the stanchest mountain fiddler will reach at last his limit of endurance and must needs be refreshed and fed. There was a sudden significant flourish of frisky bowing, now up and again down, enlisting every resonant capacity of horsehair and catgut; the violins quavered to a final long-drawn scrape and silence descended. Dullness ensued; the flavor of the day seemed to pall; the dancers scattered and were presently following the crowd that began to slowly gather about the vacated stand of the musicians, from which elevation the speakers of the occasion were about to address their fellow-citizens. One of the disaffected old farmers, gruff and averse, could not refrain from administering a rebuke to Brent Kayle as crossing the expanse of saw-dust on his way to join the audience he encountered the youth in company with Valeria Clee, his recent partner.

"Ai-yi, Brent," the old man said, "the last time I seen you uns I remember well ez ye war a-settin' on the mourner's bench." For there had been a great religious revival the previous year and many had been pricked in conscience. "Ye ain't so tuk up now in contemplatin' the goodness o' God an' yer sins agin same," he pursued caustically.

Brent retorted with obvious acrimony. "I don't see no 'casion ter doubt the goodness o' God--I never war so ongrateful nohow as that comes to." He resented being thus publicly reproached, as if he were individually responsible for the iniquity of the bran dance--the scape-goat for the sins of all this merry company. Many of the whilom dancers had pressed forward, crowding up behind the old mountaineer and facing the flushed Brent and the flowerlike Valeria, the faint green leaves of her muslin dress fluttering about her as her skirts swayed in the wind.

"Ye ain't so powerful afeard of the devil *now* ez ye uster was on the mourner's bench," the old man argued.

"I never war so mighty afeard of the devil," the goaded Brent broke forth angrily, for the crowd was laughing in great relish of his predicament--they, who had shared all the enormity of "shaking a foot" on this festive day. Brent flinched from the obvious injustice of their ridicule. He felt an eager impulse for reprisal. "I know ez sech dancin' ez I hev done ain't no sin," he blustered. "I ain't afeared o' the devil fur sech ez that. I wouldn't be skeered a mite ef he war ter--ter--ter speak right out now agin it, an' I'll be bound ez all o' you uns would. I--I--look yander--*look!*"

He had thrown himself into a posture of amazed intentness and was pointing upward at the overhanging boughs of a tree above their heads. A squirrel was poised thereon, gazing down motionless. Then, suddenly--a frightful thing happened. The creature seemed to speak. A strange falsetto voice, such as might befit so eerie a chance, sounded on the air--loud, distinct, heard far up the slope, and electrifying the assemblage near at hand that was gathering about the stand and awaiting the political candidates.

"Quit yer foolin'--quit yer fooling" the strange voice iterated. "I'll lam ye ter be afeared o' the devil. Long legs now is special grace."

So wild a cry broke from the startled group below the tree that the squirrel, with a sudden, alert, about-face movement, turned and swiftly ran along the bough and up the bole. It paused once and looked back to cry out again in distinct iteration, "Quit yer foolin'! Quit yer foolin'!"

But none had stayed to listen. A general frantic rout ensued. The possibility of ventriloquism was unknown to their limited experience. All had heard the voice and those who had distinguished the words and their seeming source needed no argument. In either case the result was the same. Within ten minutes the grounds of the famous barbecue and bran dance were deserted. The cumbrous wagons, all too slow, were wending with such speed as their drivers could coerce the ox-teams to make along the woodland road homeward, while happier wights on horseback galloped past, leaving clouds of dust in the rear and a grewsome premonition of being hindmost in a flight that to the simple minds of the mountaineers had a pursuer of direful reality.

The state of a candidate is rarely enviable until the event is cast and the postulant is merged into the elect, but on the day signalized by the barbecue, the bran dance, and the rout the unfortunate aspirants for public favor felt that they had experienced the extremest spite of fate; for although they realized in their superior education and sophistication that the panic-stricken rural crowd had been tricked by some clever ventriloquist, the political orators were left with only the winds and waters and wilderness on which to waste their eloquence, and the wisdom of their exclusive method of saving the country.

Brent Kayle's talent for eluding the common doom of man to eat his bread in the sweat of his face was peculiarly marked. He was the eldest of seven sons, ranging in age from eleven to twenty years, including one pair of twins. The parents had been greatly pitied for the exorbitant exactions of rearing this large family during its immaturity, but now,

the labor of farm, barnyard and woodpile, distributed among so many stalwart fellows of the same home and interest was light and the result ample. Perhaps none of them realized how little of this abundance was compassed by Brent's exertions--how many days he spent dawdling on the river bank idly experimenting with the echoes--how often, even when he affected to work, he left the plow in the furrow while he followed till sunset the flight of successive birds through the adjacent pastures, imitating as he went the fresh mid-air cry, whistling in so vibrant a bird-voice, so signally clear and dulcet, yet so keen despite its sweetness, that his brothers at the plow-handles sought in vain to distinguish between the calls of the earth-ling and the winged voyager of the empyreal air. None of them had ever heard of ventriloquism, so limited had been their education and experience, so sequestered was their home amidst the wilderness of the mountains. Only very gradually to Brent himself came the consciousness of his unique gift, as from imitation he progressed to causing a silent bird to seem to sing. The strangeness of the experience frightened him at first, but with each experiment he had grown more confident, more skilled, until at length he found that he could throw a singularly articulate voice into the jaws of the old plow-horse, while his brothers, accustomed to his queer vocal tricks, were convulsed with laughter at the bizarre quadrupedal views of life thus elicited. This development of proficiency, however, was recent, and until the incident at the bran dance it had not been exercised beyond the limits of their secluded home. It had revealed new possibilities to the young ventriloquist and he looked at once agitated, excited, and triumphant when late that afternoon he appeared suddenly at the rail fence about the door-yard of Valeria Clee's home on one of the spurs of Chilhowee Mountain. It was no such home as his--lacking all the evidence of rude comfort and coarse plenty that reigned there--and in its tumbledown disrepair it had an aspect of dispirited helplessness. Here Valeria, an orphan from her infancy, dwelt with her father's parents, who always of small means had become yearly a more precarious support. The ancient grandmother was sunken in many infirmities, and the household tasks had all fallen to the lot of Valeria. Latterly a stroke of paralysis had given old man Clee an awful annotation on the chapter of age and poverty upon which he was entering, and his little farm was fast growing up in brambles.

"But 't ain't no differ, gran Mad," Valeria often sought to reassure him. "I'll work some way out."

And when he would irritably flout the possibility that she could do aught to materially avert disaster she was wont to protest: "You jes' watch *me*. I'll find out some way. I be ez knowin' ez any old *owel*."

Despite her slender physique and her recurrent heavy tasks the drear doom of poverty with its multiform menace had cast no shadow on her ethereal face, and her pensive dark gray eyes were full of serene light as she met the visitor at the bars. A glimmer of mirth began to scintillate beneath her long brown lashes, and she spoke first. "The folks in the mountings air mighty nigh skeered out'n thar boots by yer foolishness, Brent"--she sought to conserve a mien of reproof. "They 'low ez it war a manifestation of the Evil One."

Brent laughed delightedly. "Warn't it prime?" he said. "But I never expected ter work sech a scatteration of the crowd. Thar skeer plumb terrified *me*. I jes' set out with the nimblest, an' run from the devil myself."

"Won't them candidates fur office be mighty mad if they find out what it war sure enough?" she queried anxiously. "They gin the crowd a barbecue an' bran dance, an' arter all, the folks got quit of hevin' ter hear them speak an' jaw about thar old politics an' sech."

"Them candidates air hoppin' mad fur true," he admitted. "I been down yander at Gilfillan's store in the Cove an' I hearn the loafers thar talkin' powerful 'bout the strange happening. An' them candidates war thar gittin' ready ter start out fur town in thar buggy. An' that thar gay one--though now he seems ez sober ez that sour one--he said 't warn't no devil. 'Twar jes' a ventriloquisk from somewhar--that's jes' what that town man called it. But *I* never said nuthin'. I kep' powerful quiet."

Brent Kayle was as vain a man as ever stood in shoe leather--even in the midst of his absorption in his disclosure he could not refrain from a pause to reflect on the signal success of his prank and laugh and plume himself.

"But old Gilfillan he loves ter believe ez the devil air hotfoot arter other folks with a pitchfork, an' he axed how then did sech a man happen ter be in the mountings 'thout none knowin' of it. An' that candidate, the gay one, he say he reckon the feller kem from that circus what is goin' fer show in Shaftesville termorrer--mebbe he hearn 'bout the bran dance an' wanted ter hev some fun out'n the country folks. That candidate say he hed hearn dozens o' ventriloquisks in shows in the big towns--though this war about the bes' one he could remember. He said he hed no doubt this feller is paid good money in the show, fur jes' sech fool tricks with his voice--*good money!*"

Valeria had listened in motionless amazement. But he had now paused, almost choking with his rush of emotion, his excitement, his sense of triumph, and straight ensued a certain reluctance, a dull negation, a prophetic recoil from responsibility that clogged his resolve. His eyes roved uncertainly about the familiar domestic scene, darkening now, duskily purple beneath the luminous pearly and roseate tints of the twilight sky. The old woman was a-drowse on the porch of the rickety little log-cabin beneath the gourd vines, the paralytic grandfather came hirpling unsteadily through the doorway on his supporting crutch, his pipe shaking in his shaking hand, while he muttered and mumbled to himself--who knows what?--whether of terror of the future, or regret for the past, or doubt and despair of to-day. The place was obviously so meagre, so poverty-bitten, so eloquent of the hard struggle for mere existence. If it had been necessary for Brent Kayle to put his hand to the plow in its behalf the words would never have been spoken--but

"good money" for this idle trade, these facile pranks!

"Vállie," he said impulsively, "I'm going ter try it--ef ye'll go with me. Ef ye war along I'd feel heartened ter stand up an' face the crowd in a strange place. I always loved ye better than any of the other gals--shucks!--whenst ye war about I never knowed ez they war alive."

Perhaps it was the after-glow of the sunset in the sky, but a crimson flush sprang into her delicate cheek; her eyes were evasive, quickly glancing here and there with an affectation of indifference, and she had no mind to talk of love, she declared.

But she should think of her gran'dad and gran'mam, he persisted. How had she the heart to deprive them of his willing aid? He declared he had intended to ask her to marry him anyhow, for she had always seemed to like him--she could not deny this--but now was the auspicious time--to-morrow--while the circus was in Shaftesville, and "good money" was to be had to provide for the wants of her old grandparents.

Though Váleria had flouted the talk of love she seemed his partisan when she confided the matter to the two old people and their consent was accorded rather for her sake than their own. They felt a revivifying impetus in the thought that after their death Váleria would have a good husband to care for her, for to them the chief grief of their loosening hold on life was her inheritance of their helplessness and poverty.

The courthouse in Shaftesville seemed a very imposing edifice to people unaccustomed to the giddy heights of a second story.

When the two staring young rustics left the desk of the county court clerk and repaired to the dwelling of the minister of the Methodist Church near by, with the marriage license just procured safely stowed away in Brent's capacious hat, their anxieties were roused for a moment lest some delay ensue, as they discovered that the minister was on the point of sitting down to his dinner. He courteously deferred the meal, however, and as the bride apologetically remarked after the ceremony that they might have awaited his convenience were it not for the circus, he imagined that the youthful couple had designed to utilize a round of the menagerie as a wedding tour. The same thought was in the minds of the metropolitan managers of the organization when presently the two young wildings from the mountain fastness were ushered into their presence, having secured an audience by dint of extreme persistence, aided by a mien of mysterious importance.

They found two men standing just within the great empty tent, for the crowd had not as yet begun to gather. The most authoritative, who was tall and portly, had the manner of swiftly disposing of the incident by asking in a peremptory voice what he could do for them. The other, lean and languid, looked up from a newspaper, in which he had been scanning a flaming circus advertisement, as he stood smoking a cigar. He said nothing, but concentrated an intent speculative gaze on the face of Váleria, who had pulled off her faint green sunbonnet and in a flush of eager hopefulness fanned with the slats.

"Ventriloquist!" the portly man repeated with a note of surprise, as Brent made known his gifts and his desire for an engagement. "Oh, well--ventriloquism is a chestnut."

Then with a qualm of pity, perhaps, for the blank despair that settled down on the two young faces he explained: "Nothing goes in the circus business but novelty. The public is tired out with ventriloquism. No mystery about it now--kind of thing, too, that a clever amateur can compass."

Brent, hurled from the giddy heights of imminent achievement to the depths of nullity, could not at once relinquish the glowing prospects that had allured him. He offered to give a sample of his powers. He would like to bark a few, he said; you couldn't tell him from a sure enough dog; he could imitate the different breeds--hound-dog, bull-pup, terrier--but the manager was definitely shaking his head.

Suddenly his partner spoke. "The girl might take a turn!"

"In the show?" the portly man said in surprise.

"The Company's Una weighs two hundred pounds and has a face as broad as a barn-door. She shows she is afraid of the lion when she stands beside him in the street parade, and--curse him--he is so clever that he knows it, no matter how he is doped. It incites him to growl at her all through the pageant, and that simply queers the sweet peace of the idea."

"And you think this untrained girl could take her place!"

"Why not? She couldn't do worse--and she *could* look the part. See," he continued, in as business-like way as if Váleria were merely a bale of goods or deaf, "ethereal figure, poetic type of beauty, fine expression of candor and serene courage. She has a look of open-eyed innocence--I don't mean *ignorance*." He made a subtle distinction in the untutored aspect of the two countenances before him.

"Would you be afraid of the lion, child?" the stout man asked Váleria. "He is chained--and drugged, too--in the pageant."

It was difficult for the astonished Váleria to find her voice. "A lion?" she murmured. "I never seen a lion."

"No? Honest?" they both cried in amazement that such a thing could be. The portly man's rollicking laughter rang out through the thin walls of canvas to such effect that some savage caged beast within reach of the elastic buoyant sound was roused to anger and supplemented it with a rancorous snarl.

Valeria listened apprehensively, with dilated eyes. She thought of the lion, the ferocious creature that she had never seen. She thought of the massive strong woman who knew and feared him. Then she remembered the desolate old grandparents and their hopeless, helpless poverty. "I'll resk the lion," she said with a tremulous bated voice.

"That's a brave girl," cried the manager.

"I hev read 'bout Daniel's lions an' him in the den," she explained. "An' Daniel hed consid'ble trust an' warn't afeard--an' mebbe I won't be afeard nuther."

"Daniel's Lions? Daniel's Lions?" the portly manager repeated attentively. "I don't know the show--perhaps in some combination now." For if he had ever heard of that signal leonine incident recorded in Scripture he had forgotten it. "Yes, yes," as Valeria eagerly appealed to him in behalf of Brent, "we must try to give Hubby some little stunt to do in the performance--but *you* are the ticket--a sure winner."

Of course the public knew, if it chose to reflect, that though apparently free the lion was muzzled with a strong steel ring, and every ponderous paw was chained down securely to the exhibition car; it may even have suspected that the savage proclivities of the great beast were dulled by drags. But there is always the imminent chance of some failure of precaution, and the multitude must needs thrill to the spectacle of intrepidity and danger. Naught could exceed the enthusiasm that greeted this slim, graceful Una a few days later in the streets of a distant city, as clad in long draperies of fleecy white she reclined against a splendid leonine specimen, her shining golden hair hanging on her shoulders, or mingling with his tawny mane as now and again she let her soft cheek rest on his head, her luminous dark gray eyes smiling down at the cheering crowds. This speedily became the favorite feature of the pageant, and the billboards flamed with her portrait, leaning against the lion, hundreds of miles in advance of her triumphal progress.

All this unexpected success presently awoke Brent's emulation--so far he had not even "barked a few." A liberal advance on his wife's salary had quieted him for a time, but when the wonders of this new life began to grow stale--the steam-cars, the great cities, the vast country the Company traversed--he became importunate for the opportunity of display. He "barked a few" so cleverly at a concert after the performance one evening that the manager gave him a chance to throw the very considerable volume of sound he could command into the jaws of one of the lions. "Let Emperor speak to the people," he said. Forthwith he wrote a bit of rodomontade which he bade Brent memorize and had the satisfaction soon to hear from the lion-trainer, to whom was intrusted all that pertained to the exhibition of these kings of beasts, that the rehearsal was altogether satisfactory.

An immense audience was assembled in the great tent. The soaring dome of white canvas reflected the electric light with a moony lustre. The display of the three rings was in full swing. That magic atmosphere of the circus, the sense of simple festivity, the crises of thrilling expectancy, the revelation of successive wonders, the diffusive delight of a multitude not difficult to entertain--all were in evidence. Suddenly a ponderous cage was rolled in; the band was playing liltily; the largest of the lions within the bars, a tawny monster, roused up and with head depressed and switching tail paced back and forth within the restricted limits of the cage, while the others looked out with motionless curiosity at the tiers of people. Presently with a long supple stride the gigantic, blond Norwegian trainer came lightly across the arena--a Hercules, with broad bare chest and arms, arrayed in spangled blue satin and white tights that forbade all suspicion of protective armor. At a single bound he sprang into the cage, while Brent, garbed in carnation and white, stood unheralded and unremarked close by outside among the armed attendants. There seemed no need of precaution, however, so lightly the trainer frolicked with the savage creatures. He performed wonderful acrobatic feats with them in which one hardly knew which most to admire, the agility and intrepidity of the man or the supple strength and curious intelligence of the beasts. He wrestled with them; he leaped and rolled among them; he put his head into their terrible full-fanged jaws--but before springing forth he fired his pistols loaded with blank cartridges full in their faces; for the instant the coercion of his eye was pretermitted every one treacherously bounded toward him, seeking to seize him before he could reach the door. Then Emperor, as was his wont, flung himself in baffled fury against the bars and stood erect and shook them in his wrath.

All at once, to the astonishment of the people, he spoke, voicing a plaintive panegyric on liberty and protesting his willingness to barter all the luxury of his captivity for one free hour on the desert sands.

Surprise, absolute, unqualified, reigned for one moment. But a circus-going crowd is uncannily quick. The audience perceived a certain involuntary element of the entertainment. A storm of cat-calls ensued, hisses, roars of laughter. For the place was the city of Glaston, the Company being once more in East Tennessee, and the lion spoke the old familiar mountain dialect so easily recognizable in this locality. Even a *lapsus linguae*, "you uns," was unmistakable amidst the high-flown periods. Although the ventriloquism was appreciated, the incongruity of this countrified jargon, held in great contempt by the townfolks, discounted Emperor's majesty and he was in ludicrous eclipse.

Behind the screening canvas the portly manager raged; "How dare you make that fine lion talk like a 'hill-Billy' such as yourself--as if he were fresh caught in the Great Smoky Mountains!" he stormed at the indignant ventriloquist. The

other partners in the management interfered in Brent's behalf; they feared that the proud mountaineer, resenting the contemptuous designation "hill-Billy" might withdraw from the Company, taking his wife with him, and the loss of Valeria from the pageant would be well nigh irreparable, for her ethereal and fragile beauty as Una with her lion had a perennial charm for the public. The management therefore assumed the responsibility for the linguistic disaster, having confided the rehearsal to a foreigner, for the Norwegian lion-trainer naively explained that to him it seemed that all Americans talked alike.

A course in elocution was recommended to Brent by the managers, and he fell in with this plan delightedly, but after two or three elementary bouts with the vowel sounds, long and short, consonants, sonant and surd, he concluded that mere articulation could be made as laborious as sawing wood, and he discovered that it was incompatible with his dignity to be a pupil in an art in which he had professed proficiency. Thereafter his accomplishment rusted--to the relief of the management--although he required that Valeria should be described in the advertisements as the wife of "the celebrated ventriloquist, Mr. Brent Kayle," thus seeking by faked notoriety to secure the sweets of fame, without the labor of achievement.

Valeria had welcomed the pacific settlement of the difficulty, because her "good money" earned in the show so brightened and beautified the evening of life for the venerable grandparents at home. For their sake she had conquered her dread of the lion in the pageant. Indeed she had found other lions in her path that she feared more--the glitter and gauds of her tinsel world, the enervating love of ease, the influence of sordid surroundings and ignoble ideals. But not one could withstand the simple goodness of the unsophisticated girl. They retreated before the power of her fireside traditions of right thinking and true living which she had learned in her humble mountain home.

It had come to be a dwelling of comfortable aspect, cared for in the absence of the young couple by a thrifty hired housekeeper, a widowed cousin, and here they spent the off-seasons when the circus company went into winter quarters. Repairs had been instituted, several rooms were added, and a wide veranda replaced the rickety little porch and gave upon a noble prospect of mountain and valley and river. Here on sunshiny noons in the good Saint Martin's summer the old gran'dad loved to sit, blithe and hearty, chirping away the soft unseasonable December days. Sometimes in the plenitude of content he would give Valeria a meaning glance and mutter "Oh, leetle *Owel!* Oh, leetle *Owel!*" and then break into laughter that must needs pause to let him wipe his eyes.

"Yes, Vállie 'pears ter hev right good sense an' makes out toler'ble well, considerin'," her husband would affably remark, "though of course it war *me* ez interduced her ter the managers, an' she gits her main chance in the show through my bein' a celebrated ventriloquisk."