

Seemed to me everything about her was fat an' chubby, thess like herself. Ricollec', one day, she dropped her satchel, an' out rolled the fattest little dictionary I ever see, an' when I see it, seem like she could n't nachelly be expected to tote no other kind. I used to take pleasure in getherin' a pink out o' mother's garden in the mornin's when I'd be startin' to school, an' slippin' it on to her desk when she would n't be lookin', an' she 'd always pin it on her frock when I'd have my head turned the other way. Then when she 'd ketch my eye, she 'd turn pinker 'n the pink. But she never mentioned one o' them pinks to me in her life, nor I to her.

Yas; I always think of her little picture with a bunch o' them old-fashioned garden pinks a settin' under it, an' there they 'll stay ez long ez my old mind is a fitten place for sech sweet-scented pictures to hang in.

They 've been a pleasure to me all my life, an' I 'm glad to see Sonny's a-startin' his little picture-gallery a'ready.

WEDDIN' PRESENTS

WHAT you, doctor? Hitch up, an' come right in.

You say Sonny called by an' ast you to drop in to see me?

But I ain't sick. I 'm thess settin' out here on the po'ch, upholstered with pillers this-a-way on account o' the spine o' my back feelin' sort o' porely.

I reckon likely ez not it 's a-fixin' to rain — the way I ache.

Ef I don't seem to him quite ez chirpy ez I ought to be, why Sonny he gets on-easy an' goes for you, an' when I complain to him about it — not thet I ain't always glad to see you, doctor — why, he th'ows up to me thet that 's the way we always done about him when he was in his first childhood. An' ef you ricollec' — why, it 's about true. He says he 's boss now, an' turn about is fair play.

My pulse ain't no ways discordant, is it? No, I thought not. Of co'se, ez you say, I s'pose it 's sort o' different to a younger person's, an' then I 've been so worked up lately thet my heart 's bound to be more or less frustrated, and Sonny says a person's heart reg'lates his pulse.

I reckon I ain't ez strong ez I ought to be, maybe, or I would n't cry so easy ez what I do. I been settin' here, pretty near boo-hoo-in' for the last half-hour, over the weddin' presents Sonny has thess been agivin' me.

Last week it was a daughter, little Mary Elizabeth — an' now it 's his book.

They was to 've come together. The book was printed and was to 've been received here on Sonny's weddin'-day, but it did n't git in on time. But I counted it in ez one o' my weddin' presents from Sonny, give to me on the occasion of his marriage, thess the same, though I did n't know about the inscription thet he 's inscribed inside it tell it arrived — an' I 'm glad I did n't.

Ef I 'd 've knew that day, when my heart

was already in my win'-pipe, thet he had give out to the world by sech a printed declaration ez that thet he had to say dedicated all his work in life, *in advance*, to my ol' soul, I could n't no mo' 've kep' up my behavior 'n nothin'.

I 'm glad you think I don't need no physic, doctor. I never was no hand to swaller medicine when I was young, and the obnoxion seems to grow on me ez I git older.

Not all that toddy? You 'll have me in a drunkard's grave yet,—you an' Sonny together,—ef I don't watch out.

That nutmeg gives it a mighty good flavor, doc'. Ef any thing ever does make me intemp'rate, why, it 'll be the nutmeg an' sugar thet you all smuggle the liquor to me in.

It does make me see clairer, I vow it does, either the nutmeg or the sperit, one.

There 's Sonny's step, now. I can tell it quick ez he sets it on the back steps. Sence I 'm sort o' laid up, Sonny gits into the saddle every day an' rides over the place an' gives orders for me.

Come out here, son, an' shake hands with the doctor.

Pretty warm, you say it is, son? An' th' ain't nothin' goin' astray on the place? Well, that 's good. An', doc', here, he says thet his bill for this visit is a unwarranted extravagance 'cause they ain't a thing I need but to start on the downward way thet leads to ruin. He 's got me all threatened with the tremens now, so thet I hardly know how to match my pronouns to suit their genders an' persons. He 's give me fully a tablespoonful o' the reverend stuff in one toddy. I tell him he must write out a prescription for the gold cure an' leave it with me, so 's in case he should drop off befo' I need it, I could git it, 'thout applyin' to a strange doctor an' disgracin' everybody in America by the name o' Jones.

Do you notice how strong he favors *her* to-day, doctor?

I don't know whether it 's the toddy I 've took thet calls my attention to it or not.

She always seemed to see me in him —

but I never could. Far ez I can see, he never taken nothin' from me but his sect — an' yo' name, son, of co'se. 'Cep'in' for me, you could n't 'a' been no Jones — 't least not in our branch.

Put yo' hand on my forr'd, son, an' bresh it up'ards a few times, while I shet my eyes.

Do you know when he does that, doc', I could n't tell his hand from hers.

He taken his touch after her, exact — an' his hands, too, sech good firm fingers, not all plowed out o' shape, like mine. I never seemed to reelize it tell she 'd passed away.

That 'll do now, boy. I know you want to go in an' see where the little wife is, an' I 've no doubt you 'll find her with a wishful look in her eyes, wonderin' what keeps you out here so long.

Funny, doctor, how seein' him and little Mary Elizabeth together brings back my own youth to me — an' wife's.

From the first day we was married to the day we laid her away under the poplars, the first thing I done on enterin' the

house was to wonder where she was an' go an' find her. An' quick ez I 'd git her located, why, I 'd feel sort o' rested, an' know things was all right.

Heap of his ma's ways I seem to see in Sonny since she 's went.

An' what do you think, doc'? He 's took to kissin' me nights and mornin's since she 's passed away, an' I could n't tell you how it seems to comfort me.

Maybe that sounds strange to you in a grown-up man, but it don't come no ways strange to me—not from Sonny. Now he 's started it, seems like ez ef I 'd 've missed it if he had n't.

Ez I look back, they ain't no lovin' way that a boy could have thet ain't seemed to come nachel to him—not a one. An' his little wife, Mary Elizabeth, why, they never was a sweeter daughter on earth.

An' ef I do say it ez should n't, their weddin' was the purtiest that has ever took place in this county—in my ricollection, which goes back distine' for over sixty year.

Everybody loves little Mary Elizabeth,

an' th' aint a man, woman, or child in the place but doted on Sonny, even befo' he turned into a book-writer. But, of co'se, all the great honors they laid on him—the weddin' supper an' dance in the Simpkins's barn, the dec'rations o' the church that embraced so many things he 's lectured about an' all that—why they was all meant to show fo'th how everybody took pride in him, ez a author o' printed books.

You see he has give' twelve lectures in the academy each term for the last three years, after studyin' them three winters in New York, each year's lectures different, but all relatin' to our own forests an' their dumb population. That 's what he calls 'em. Th' ain't a boy thet has attended the academy, sence he 's took the nachel history to teach, but 'll tell you thess what kind o' inhabitants to look for on any particular tree. Nearly every boy in the county 's got a cabinet—an' most of 'em have carpentered 'em theirselves, though I taught 'em how to do that after the pattern Sonny got me to make his by—an' you 'll find all sorts o' specimens of what they designate

ez "summer an' winter resorts" in pieces of bark an' cobweb an' ol' twisted tree-leaves in every one of 'em.

The boys thet dec'rated the barn for the dance say thet they ain't a tree Sonny ever lectured about but was represented in the ornaments tacked up ag'inst the wall, an' they was n't a space big ez yo' hand, ez you know, doctor, thet was n't covered with some sort o' evergreen or berry-branch, or somethin'.

An' have you heerd what the ol' nigger Proph' says? Of co'se he 's all unhinged in the top story ez anybody would be thet lived in the woods an' e't sca'cely anything but herbs an' berries. But, anyhow, he 's got a sort o' gift o' prophecy an' insight, ez we all know.

Well, Proph', he sez that while the weddin' march was bein' played in the church the night o' Sonny's weddin' thet he could n't hear his own ears for the racket among all the live things in the woods. An' he says thet they was n't a frog, or a cricket, or katydid, or nothin', but up an' played on its little instrument, an' thet every note they

sounded fitted into the church music—even to the mockin'-bird an' the screech-owl.

Of co'se, I don't say it 's so, but the ol' nigger swears to it, an' ef you dispute it with him an' ask him how it come thet nobody else did n't hear it, why he says that 's because them thet live in houses an' eat flesh ain't got the love o' God in their hearts, an' can't expect to hear the songs of the songless an' speech of the speechless.

That 's a toler'ble high-falutin figgur o' speech for a nigger, but it 's thess the way he expresses it.

You know he 's been seen holdin' conversation with dumb brutes, more'n once-t—in broad daylight.

Of co'se, we can't be shore thet they was rejoicin' expressed in the underbrush an' the forests, ez he says, but I do say, ez I said before, thet Sonny an' the little girl has had the purtiest an' joyfulest weddin' I ever see in this county, an' a good time was had by everybody present. An' it has made me mighty happy—it an' its results.

They say a son is a son till he gets him

a wife, but 't ain't so in this case, shore. I 've gained thess ez sweet a daughter ez I could 'a' picked out ef I 'd 'a' had the whole world to select from.

Little Mary Elizabeth has been mighty dear to our hearts for a long time, an' when wife passed away, although the weddin' had n't took place yet, she bestowed a mother's partin' blessin' on her, an' give Sonny a lot o' private advice about her disposition, an' how he ought to reg'late hisself to deal with it.

You see, Mary Elizabeth stayed along with us so much durin' the seasons he was away in New York, that we got to know all her crotchets an' quavers, an' she ain't got a mean one, neither.

But *they're there*. An' they have to be dealt with, lovin'. Fact is, th' ain't no other proper way to deal with nothin', in my opinion.

We was ruther glad to find out some little twists in her disposition, wife an' me was, 'cause ef we had n't discovered none, why we 'd 'a' felt shore she had some in'ard deceit or somethin'. No person can't be

perfec', an' when I see people always outwardly serene, I mistrust their insides.

But little Mary Elizabeth, why, she ain't none too angelic to git a good healthy spell o' the pouts once-t in a while, but ef she 's handled kind an' tender, why, she 'll come thoo without havin' to humble herself with apologies.

It depends largely upon how a pout is took, whether it 'll contrac' itself into a hard knot an' give trouble or thess loosen up into a good-natured smile, an' the oftener they are let out that-a-way, the seldomer they 'll come.

Little Mary Elizabeth, why, she looks so purty when she pouts, now, that I 've been tempted sometimes to pervoke her to it, thess to witness the new set o' dimples she 'll turn out on short notice; but I ain't never done it. I know a dimple thet 's called into bein' too often in youth is li'ble to lay the foundation of a wrinkle in old age.

But takin' her right along stiddy, day in an' day out, she 's got a good sunny disposition an' is mighty lovin' and kind.

An' as to character and dependableness, why, she 's thess ez sound ez a bell.

In a heap o' ways she nears up to us, sech, f' instance, ez when she taken wife's cook-receipt book to go by in experimentin' with Sonny's likes an' dislikes. 'T ain't every new-married wife thet 's willin' to sample her husband's tastes by his ma's cook-books.

They seem to think they 're too dictatorial.

But, of co'se, wife's receipts was better 'n most, an' Mary Elizabeth, she knows that.

She ain't been married but a week, but she 's served up sev'al self-made dishes a'-ready — all constructed accordin' to wife's schedule.

Of co'se I could see the diff'ence in the mixin' — but it only amused me. An' Sonny seemed to think thet, ef anything, they was better 'n they ever had been — which is only right and proper.

Three days after she was married, the po' little thing whipped up a b'iled custard for dinner an', some way or other, she put salt in it 'stid o' sugar, and poor Sonny—

Well, I never have knew him to lie outright, befo', but he smacked his lips over it an' said it was the most delicious custard he had ever e't in his life, an' then, when he had done finished his first saucer an' said, "No, thank you, I won't choose any more," to a second helpin', why, she tasted it an' thess bust out a-cryin'.

But I reckon that was partly because she was sort o' on edge yet from the excitement of new housekeepin' and the head o' the table.

Well, I felt mighty sorry to see her in tears, an' what does Sonny do but insist on eatin' the whole dish o' custard, an' soon ez I could git a chance, I took him aside an' give him a little dose-t o' pain-killer, an' I took a few drops myself.

I had felt obligated to swallow a few spoonfuls o' the salted custard when she 'd be lookin' my way, an' I felt like ez ef I was pizened, an' so I thess took the pain-killer ez a sort o' anecdote.

Another way Mary Elizabeth shows sense is the way she accepts discipline from the ol' nigger, Dicey.

She 's mighty old an' strenuous now, Dicey is, an' she thinks because she was present at Sonny's birth an' before it, thet she 's privileged to correct him for anything he does, and we 've always indulged her in it, an' thess ez soon as she knowed what was brewin' 'twix' him an' Mary Elizabeth, why, she took her into the same custody, an' it 's too cute for anything the way the little girl takes a scoldin' from her — thess winkin' at Sonny an' me while she receives it.

An' the ol' nigger 'd lay down her life for her most ez quick ez she would for Sonny.

She was the first to open our eyes to the state of affairs 'twixt the two child'en, that ol' nigger was. It was the first year Sonny went North. He had writ home to his ma from New York State, and said thet Mr. Burroughs had looked over his little writings an' said they was good enough to be printed an' bound up in a book.

Wife, she read the letter out loud, ez she always done, an' we noticed thet when we come to that, Mary Elizabeth slipped out o' the room; but we did n't think nothin'

of it tell direc'ly ol' Dicey, she come in tickled all but to death to tell us thet the little girl was out on the po'ch with her face hid in the honeysuckle vines, cryin' thess ez hard as we was. So then, of co'se, we knowed that ef the co'se of true love could be allowed to run smooth for once-t, she was fo'-ordained to be our little bles-sin' — an' his — that is, so far as she was concerned.

Of co'se we was even a little tenderer todes her, after that, than we had been befo'.

That was over five year ago, an' th' ain't been a day sca'cely sence then but we 've seen her, an' in my jedgment they won't be nothin' lackin' in her thet 's needful in a little wife — not a thing.

Ef they 's anything in long acquaintance, they 've certainly knowed one another all the time they 've had.

Of co'se Mary Elizabeth, she ain't to say got Sonny's thoughts, exae'ly, where it comes to sech a thing ez book-writin', but he says she 's a heap better educated 'n what he is.

She 's got all her tuition repo'ts du'in' the whole time she attended school, an' mostly all her precentage was up close onto the hund'eds.

Sonny never was no hand on earth to git good reports at school.

They was always so low down in figgurs thet he calls 'em his "misconduc' slips."

But they ain't a one he 's ever got, takin' 'em from the beginnin' clean up to the day o' his graduatin', thet ain't got some lovin' remark inscribed acrost it from his teacher — not a one.

Even them that wrastled with him most severe has writ him down friendly an' kind.

An' little Mary Elizabeth — why, she 's took every last one of 'em an' she 's feather-stitched 'em aroun' the edges an' sewed 'em up into a sort o' little book, an' tied a ribbin' bow acrost it. I don't know whether she done it on account o' the teacher's remarks or not — but she cert'n'y does prize that pamphlet.

She thinks so much of it thet I been advisin' her to take out a fire insu'ance on it.

In a heap o' ways she thess perzaedly suits Sonny. Lookin' at it from one p'int o' view, she 's a sort o' dictionary to him.

Whenever Sonny finds hisself short of a date, f' instance, or some unreasonable spellin' 'll bother 'im, why, he 'll call out to her for it an' she 'll hand it out to him, intact'. I ain't never knew her to fail.

You see, while Sonny's thoughts is purty far-reachin' in some ways, he 's received his education so sort o' hit an' miss thet the things he knows ain't to say catalogued in his mind, an' while he 'll know one fac', maybe he won't be able to recall another thet seems to belong hand in hand with it. An' that 's one reason why I say thet little Mary Elizabeth is thess the wife for him.

She may not bother about the whys an' wherefores, but she 's got the statistics.

It 's always well, in a married couple, to have either one or the other statistical, so thet any needed fac' can be had on demand.

Wife, she was a heap more gifted that-a-way 'n what I was, but of co'se hers was n't so much book statistics.

She could give the name an' age of every

cow an' calf on the farm, an' relate any circumstance that has took place within her recollection or mine without the loss of a single date or any gain through imagination, either.

I don't know but I think that 's a greater gif' than the other, to be able to reproduce a event after a long time without sort o' thess techin' it up with a little exaggeration.

Th' ain't no finer trait, in my opinion, *in man or woman*, than dependableness, an' that 's another reason I take sech special delight in the little daughter, Mary Elizabeth.

If she tells you a thing 's black, why you may know it don't lean todes brown or gray. It 's thess a dismal black.

She may hate to say it, an' show her hatred in a dozen lovin', regretful ways, but out it 'll come.

An' I think thet any man thet can count on a devoted wife for *exactitude* is blessed beyond common.

So many exac' women is col'-breasted an' severe. An' ef I had to take one or the

other, why, I 'd let my wife prevaricate a little, ef need be, befo' I 'd relinquish warm-heartedness, an' the power to command peacefulness an' rest, an' make things comfortable an' homely, day in an' day out.

Maybe I 'm unprincipled in that, but life is so short, an' ef we did n't have lovin' ways to lengthen out our days, why I don't think I 'd keer to bother with it, less'n, of co'se, I might be needful to somebody else.

Yas, doc', I 'm mighty happy in the little daughter—an' the book—an' the blessed boy hisself. Maybe I 'm too talkative on the subject, but the way I feel about him, I might discuss him forever, an' then they 'd be thess a little sweetness left over thet I could n't put into words about him.

Not thet he 's faultless. I don't suppose they ever was a boy on earth thet had mo' faults 'n Sonny, but they ain't one he 's got thet I don't seem to cherish because I know it 's rooted in honest soil.

You may strike a weed now an' ag'in, but he don't grow no pizen vines in his little wilderness o' short-comin's. Th' ain't

no nettles in his garden o' faults. That ain't a bad figgur o' speech for a ol' man like me, is it, doctor?

But nex' time he stops an' tells you I'm sick, you thess tell him to go about his business.

I 'm failin' in stren'th ez the days go — an' I know it — an' it 's all right.

I don't ask no mo' 'n thess to pass on whenever the good Lord wills.

But of co'se I ain't in no hurry, an' they 's one joy I 'd like to feel befo' that time comes.

I 'd love to hol' Sonny's baby in my ol' arms — his an' hers — an' to see thet the good ol' name o' Jones has had safe transportation into one mo' generation of hon-est folks.

Sonny an' Mary Elizabeth are too sweet-hearted an' true not to be reproduced in detail, an' passed along.

This here ol' oak tree thet gran'pa planted when I was a kid, why, it 'd be a fine shady place for healthy girls an' boys to play under.

When I set here by myself on this po'ch

so much these days an' think,—an' remember,—why I thess wonder over the passage o' time.

I ricollec' thess ez well when gran'pa planted that oak saplin'. My pa he helt it stiddy an' I handed gran'pa the spade, an' we took off our hats whilst he repeated a Bible tex'.

Yes, that ol' oak was religiously planted, an' we 've tried not to offend its first principles in no ways du'in' the years we 've nurtured it.

An' when I set here an' look at it, an' consider its propensities,—it 's got five limbs that seem thess constructed to hold swings,—maybe it 's 'cause I was raised Presbyterian an' sort o' can't git shet o' the doctrine o' predestination, but I can't help seemin' to fo'-see them friendly family limbs all fulfillin' their promises.

An' when I imagine myself a-settin' there with one little one a-climbin' over me while the rest swings away, why, seem like a person don't no mo' 'n realize he 's a descendant befo' he 's a' ancestor.

