

**AS THE HART
PANTETH**

**BY
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TO
A MEMORY.

AS THE HART PANTETH.

THE CHILD.



CHAPTER I.

HE sat just outside the lofty doorway, that opened between the bare hall and front verandah. The great white columns held a wild clematis vine, the leaves of which almost concealed the bricks where the plaster had fallen off. Presently a child came out with a violin in her hand. She went up to him, and laying her full cheek against his shrunken one, caressed him. Her blue eyes that went black in an instant, from the pupils' swift dilation, had the direct gaze of one knowing nothing of the world and never fearing to be misunderstood. She was slim yet strong; her waving hair that fell softly about her face was the color of sunburnt cornsilk, her skin ovaling from it, smooth and white, like a bursting magnolia bud.

“Grandpa, I can play ‘The Mocking Bird’ for you now.”

“Play it, God’s child; play it,” he said.

As she leaned against the column and began playing, his face, old and worn with many griefs, seemed, for a moment, rejuvenated by the spirit of his lost youth. His heart stirred strangely within him, and he was minded of another slim, little girl, who came down to the gate to meet him when the day was done in the long ago. She had the same glorious hair, and tender, fearless eyes and love for him. But that was more than forty years gone by and she was dead.

As the strains became fuller and sweeter, a bird began twittering, trilling among the leaves, imitating the sounds it heard.

“Listen. Do you hear that, Esther?” whispering, as he searched for a sight of the singer. “There it is. It’s a mocking bird,” he said, pointing to the young thing, as the fluting feathers on its throat stood out like the pipes of an organ. Its song, accompanying the tune, never ceased until the violin was tossed upon the bench and the child was in the old man’s arms.

“That was beautiful, beautiful!” His eyes were filled with tears of enthusiasm that fell upon her hair.

“Your mother used to play that, when she was young.” He spoke with the weight of profound emotion, that glowed in his eyes, and quivered on his lips.

“And did the bird sing with her?” a softer look coming upon the childish face.

“I don’t remember that it did, though she was always a friend to the birds that built their nests about us. She kept the boys from breaking them up or trapping them. Every spring they sang here in the trees. They seemed to know that she was looking after them. That must have been what she was born for. She was always watching over something or somebody.” He swallowed hard. “I can see her now, bending over her work, late at night, stitching away, with her fingers on those gray clothes for the boys in the army—your Uncle Billy and your father.”

“Was she little, then?” Esther inquired, while with one hand she clasped his wrist, and with the other stroked his brow.

“No. When the war broke out, she was just about to be married to your father, who had been appointed Captain under General Lee. She made a coat for him and quilted money in the collar. She had a way of doing things that nobody would have thought of. You remind me of her.” He folded his hands across his stick and was silent for a moment. “There is much about her life that I want you to know, and bear in mind, now that you are getting old enough to understand. She had great hopes for you, for your music. I’ve been thinking how proud she would be if she could know that you had got along well enough to be invited to play at the University—on commencement night at that. I ask nothing higher for you than that you make such a woman as your mother.”

They did not see the old negro, ragged to the skin, coming around the corner of the house, carrying his discolored straw hat in one hand and mopping his face on a faded cotton handkerchief.

CHAPTER II.

“G’MORNIN’, Marse Hardin.”

“Howdy, Sandy. Where did you come from? I thought you’d gone clear out of the country, for good.”

“Nor sir, nor sir. You jes’ let a nigger git a taste of dis here spring water, and he’s charmed, conjured, he kyant stay away if he do go. But I come back, dis time, to see my young marster—Marse Davy Pool.”

“How is he to-day?”

“He daid. Dat’s what I was sent to tell you. Dey guinter bury him up at de old place.”

“I am sorry to hear of his death, Sandy. He was the best one of the boys.”

“Dat’s so, sir; ’tain’t nobody guine to miss him like his mammy do. She’s told me to ax you for your hoss and buggy. She’s afeared of the boys’ hosses, dey keep such wild uns. Marse Davy sold his’n, dat was the onliest one she would ride behind. She said she wanted Marse Hardin Campbell’s. It was so trusty and gentlelike.”

“I was going to use it after dinner.” Mr. Campbell hesitated.

“Send it on, grandpa. Send it on.” Esther saw the inquiring look her grandfather turned upon her. “Something will turn up.”

“Suppose it shouldn’t; would you be disappointed?” he asked.

“I never count on being disappointed,” she responded, quickly.

“Ain’t she some kin to Miss Mary Campbell?” The negro’s face lighted as he asked the question.

“That’s her daughter, Miss Esther Powel.”

“It ’peared to me like I seed de favor in her face. Ev’ybody loved your mammy, honey. ’Twarn’ nobody that didn’t,” he said, turning to look again at Esther.

“The horse is in the pasture.” Mr. Campbell turned to the child. “Can’t you run and show him where the bridle is?” Bareheaded, she bounded down the steps, and motioned to the old negro to follow. She took the bridle and swung it over his arm. “Mind the foot log. Uncle Sandy, the hand rail has been washed away. The

pasture is over the creek. There is Selam now, under the sweet gum tree.” She pointed. “You will find the harness in the carriage house here.”

She watched him go over the slope to the creek, then stood gazing about her in childish contemplation. It was nearly noon. The shadow straightening in the doorway indicated it.

Mr. Campbell looked and saw her. His heart warmed toward her comeliness; moreover she was sweet of nature and had a ready smile even for those who had not been kind to her. Suddenly she disappeared in the direction of the carriage house. She feared that her pony could not pull the heavy vehicle that alone was left to take her to the University. It taxed her strength to draw the heavy bar from across the carriage house door. She sprang backward, as she dropped it upon the ground; then went in to examine the carriage that had not been used since she was a baby, almost fifteen years before. The clumsy conveyance had small iron steps that let down—steps that her mother’s child feet had pressed in climbing to the seat. The wheels were so heavy and cumbersome that she shook her head doubtfully. The green satin lining was in shreds; the worn leather seats covered with tufts of hair, while here and there a dead leaf or twig was tangled in its coarse mesh. It had required a pair to draw it in those old days. She had forgotten that. The tongue was held up in its position above by a girder in the loft. Esther gave it a strong, hard pull; the tongue fell forward, and as she skipped out of its path the lumbering old carriage went rolling down the incline, and clouds of dust, as though indignant at being disturbed, sullenly rose and fell about her.

Old and dilapidated harness that hung down from the walls swayed slowly in the general commotion. Esther wiped the dust from her

eyes and drew a long breath, looking defiantly at the result. She looked down. There, at her feet, lay a bird, fluttering beside its fallen nest. Her face lost its look of defiance.

“You poor, little thing,” bending down and cuddling it to the softness of her cheek. “Don’t die, please, don’t die!” she said, in dismay. “It will break my heart if I have killed you.” With tears streaming down her face she ran swiftly to the house.

“Grandpa, do something for it,” laying it in his hand. “Can you save it? It’s a mocking bird, too. I shook it out of the carriage.”

“They have nested there for years,” he said as he drew the wings gently through his fingers. “They are not broken,” he assured her.

“Are you sure it will live?” She was looking at him with frightened eyes.

“Live? Yes; and have a nest and young ones of its own next year. It is only stunned. Leave it in the parlor where it will be safe from the cats and it will be all right soon.”

A faint rumbling noise broke in upon their voices. They looked up to listen. It was like the sound of a wagon rolling. “Put it away, quick, and run to the creek to show them how to cross the ford.” They had kept close watch over the passers since the winter hauling had cut deep holes in the bed of the stream. It was a treacherous crossing. Closing the door upon her charge, Esther ran through the garden, the nearest way. She sped with the lithe agility of a young fawn, and before the newcomer was fairly into the stream she was there giving directions. The mountain stream ran fleet between its low banks, winding in haste through the valley.

Tall sycamores, sentinels in silver armor, stood beside it on either hand.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CAMPBELL stood watching. Very soon the front gate opened and a boy came in, driving two white mules, with red tassels on their bridle bits. Amazement filled his eyes when he saw that it was a wagon load of coffins, and on the topmost one Esther sat smiling. As they drove up near the door, he went out to help her down.

“Didn’t I tell you something would turn up, grandpa; this wagon is going right by the University this evening.” She threw her arms about his neck; her laugh rang out in pure triumph. “Hitch your team, young man; a boy will come to take it out and feed it.” When they saw Esther again she was ready for her jaunt. Her violin was in its case; her fresh white organdie folded with as much care as she gave to anything—duty and care were unknown to her. Her visit to the University by such a conveyance would be the extreme limit of indulgence, yet she had no thought of being denied.

“I am ready,” she announced at table. Mr. Campbell burst into a laugh, half of annoyance, yet touched with the ring of true amusement.

“I really believe you would go.”

“I’d go on foot if necessary to keep my promise,” she answered quickly.

“How could the college folks know that Mr. David Pool had to be buried to-day when they printed my name on the programme?”

Watching her eyes, he caught their softness, their innocence, and knew that her eagerness was sincere.

“Let her go, Mr. Campbell, I’ll take good care of her.” The boy was a Rudd. Although he held a lowly position, he was not counted of the common people. Mr. Campbell had the old Virginia pride of race in him.

“I know you would.”

Esther looked steadily into his gray eyes and saw a relenting twinkle.

“Am I going?” Turning to her with a quiet smile: “Yes, you may go.” He could not see her disappointed when her heart was so determined. With a little cry of joy she brought her hands together. “I wish you could come along, grandpa. It will be such fun, and I wanted you to hear me to-night.” When the wagon came around Esther was helped up with her case and bundle. Her violin she held tenderly across her arm. Mr. Campbell went with them to close the gate.

“Good-bye; you will be in for me to-morrow.” Leaning down, she embraced his head. “Be sweet, God’s child,” he said, as they drove off. Esther kissed her hand to him, as he stood by the roadside looking after them. The cook, at the kitchen door, waved her dish rag for a frantic moment. The whirl of dust from the wheels soon clouded the view. The old man turned, and went slowly back to the house with a misty smile over his features.

A quaint, pathetic figure that, of Hardin Campbell, with his age, his poverty and the care of this child. Here had once been planter life in its carelessness and lavishness. It had been the home of friend and neighbor and the hospitable shelter of the transient guest. All the grand folk that came that way made this place headquarters in the days when Mr. Campbell was reckoned rich. But what he had lost in wealth he had more than gained in pride, and the child was brimming over with it. Generous, impetuous, enthusiastic, as she was, this wild young creature of nature, unhindered, venturesome and full of whims, would, he hoped, find pride her safeguard. He did not believe in curbing her. He guided, but did not limit her and tried to keep from her all warping influences. This was the way her mother had begun with her and he was only continuing her way for a while—it could not be very long before he would have to resign his charge. To whom—he did not know and could not bear to dwell upon the thought.

About the whole place there was evidence of departed glory. In the great white buildings which rose from the labyrinth of shrubbery like grim ghosts of the past; in the rows of cabins, formerly the dwellings of a horde of happy-hearted negroes, everywhere was evidence of the bygone prodigal days. The house, of colonial style, with its series of tall columns standing about the broad colonnade, was partially screened by the live oaks and was set some distance back from the big road. These encircling columns were built of brick, with a coating of plaster, once as white as the teeth of Uncle Simon, the plantation white-washer, who in former days would put an immaculate dress on them regularly once a month by means of an elevated step-ladder, but now Uncle Simon's labors were done. The neglected columns were crumbling with age and sadly splotched with the red of exposed masonry. At one side of the

verandah there spread the delicate green of the star-jessamine, with its miniature constellations flecking the background. Through the vista, leading to the house, from the big gate in front, flashed the crimson of a flowering-pear in full blossom. The blinds of the house that had once been green, were now hanging from their hinges, weather-stained, giving full view of a number of broken window panes, in one of which, on the second story, was perched a wren, whose energetic chattering over her nest hardby was the most decided indication of active life.

In the rear of the buildings stretched the cabins. To the right of them were the stables and the carriage house, with its weather vane of a flying steed on the top, but for years the most vigorous gales had failed to spur this steed to action and its tail, at one time proudly aflaut to the breeze, had yielded to time and rust, and, like that of Tam o'Shanter's mare, knew naught of direction. There was the dreary stillness of desolation over all things. But still a hospitable glow was in the summer sunshine and shone as well in the eyes of the old master.

Esther took off her hat when she got into the depths of the woods and drew out her violin. "I will amuse the boy," she thought, "if I play to him," for she had tired of talking against the rumbling of the wagon and its load. In his way, he appreciated her motive, for now and again he called back to her, awkwardly commending her, and urging her to continue. Near the spring they saw the negro washerwomen, with sleeves rolled to their shining shoulders, bending over their tubs; faded, limp skirts, bloused through apron belts, and dangled about their bare legs. A big wash kettle heaped with white linen stood to one side. Around it a fire was burning low for want of fuel.

“O—o—h! Yo’ Tagger, Tag-g-e-r; you’d better come on here, ef you know what’s good for you,” called one of the women with a long, resounding echo that drowned the answer of the small voice that said he was on his way. A troop of little niggers came to the roadside pulling a wagon load of brush and bark gathered through the woods. They looked back and spied Esther on the coffins. With a wild yell the children, load and all, tumbled over the embankment, rolling over each other in the dust, screaming, “Mammy! mammy!” at the top of their voices, scrambling to their feet and running with might and main down the road. As Esther drew up to the wash-place, the little fellows were clinging frantically to the knees of their mothers.

“It’s a little ha’nt blowin’ Gabel’s trumpet. Don’t let it ketch me! don’t let it ketch me!”

“In de name ob de Lawd!” said one of the women, seeing what had caused the fright; “ain’t you all got de sense you was born wid? Don’t you know Miss Esther Powel, Marse Hardin’s granddaughter?” The eyes of the pickaninnies were blinded by the wads of wet aprons they had covered them with, and the sound of the wheels filled them with terror. “Dry up!” The big dripping hand pounded on their heads. “Scuse ’em, Miss Esther, you’d think dese youngun’s been fotch up wid wild injun’s.”

“Tagger,” Esther called the boy, whose name, Montague, she had been responsible for. “Don’t you know me? I played for you to dance a jig for the young men who used to visit Will Curtis before he died. You haven’t forgotten that, have you?” Hearing her familiar voice, he slowly peeped out with scared eyes.

“You little monkey. Dip me some water out of the spring.” She saw a long, yellow gourd hanging from a striped bough above their heads. “I want a drink.” He sprang up and snatched the gourd, and before she could say more, he was holding it up to her, standing on his tiptoes, grinning, as the tears ran down and stained his dusty face.

“I am going to play at the University to-night,” she said, hanging back the gourd.

“You don’ say? One of dem ’Varsity gemmen’s coming out to see Marse Will’s folks next week.” Tagger’s mother lived with the Curtises, whose home was just beyond the spring. “I’ll be bound, you beat ’em all dar if you does play to-night,” she said when she saw they were leaving.

Bareheaded, Esther rode on, as long as the shade was over them, tying on her hat only when they got to the sunny way of the road. A man plowing in a cornfield, looked up as he stopped at the turn of the row. He gazed intently, rapping the line mechanically about his wrist.

“What is her grandpa thinking of?” seeing it was Esther, whom he knew. “But she’d a gone in spite of hell and high water.” With this aloud to himself, he drew his shirt sleeve across the sweat on his brow and trudged back down the row, relieved.

After two hours or more, through the heat, Esther was glad when at last she could see the end of her journey. The sunlight lay radiant upon the stretch of country famed for this honored institution of learning. Just before her, upon an eminence, spread the University buildings, the tall spires marking their profile on the sky. The sun’s rays shot up behind them its last warm flashes. Its heat had already

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