

WPA Alabama Writers Project
Short Stories/Sketches by:
Susie R. O'Brien, Perry Co

Susie R. O'Brien, writer

January 3, 1939

J. C. Stringer (carpenter)

Lula Stringer (white)

Uniontown, Alabama.

2600 words

-1-

The Stringers.

Although it was the day after Xmas there was no evidence of the gay holiday season in the section of town where the Stringer family lives. No holly wreathes brightened the dingy, curtainless windows, no laughing children played about the yards with their new Xmas toys and no sound or color broke the cold gray stillness of earth and sky. The only sign of life and warmth was a thin spiral of smoke here and there coming from the chimneys of the delapidated houses.

The Stringers live across the railroad in a section inhabited mostly by negroes. On this cold, gray morning when I started out to visit them I was not sure that I knew where they lived, but I had no trouble in locating the house for as I walked down the railroad track I met an old negro woman whom I asked to direct me to the home of the Stringers. Carefully balancing a bundle of pine wood on her head she placed one hand on her hip and with the other pointed down the railroad and said, "jus' keep straight ahead till you come to the wus lookin' house on the row, thats theirn". Following her directions I picked my way across a yard littered with rusty automobile bodies, axles and fenders and piles of rusty tin cans, and soon came to the door of the Stringers home.

-2-

Though there were signs of there having once been a porch and a shelter over the door, there was not a piece of it left and the steps that led up to the door were also gone. The broken window panes were covered with card board and dirty burlap sacks. Seeing no signs of life except two scrubby looking cows grazing about between the rusty automobile parts, I thought at first there could be no one at home but as I stood and looked about me I noticed a tiny spiral of smoke coming from one of the chimneys at the back of the house. After knocking repeatedly and getting no response I was about to turn away when I heard the patter of running feet and four pairs of grimy little hands appeared in the crack of the knobless door. After much straining and pulling, the door, with a loud noise swung back on its broken hinges and four small children, ranging in age from three to six, with dirty faces and tousled white heads, stared at me with wide inquiring blue eyes. Is your mother at home, I asked, "yes'm, said the oldest of the four, come on in here". But the problem now was how could I get in, the door was at least three feet from the ground with no steps. I looked about for something to step on but found nothing, but just as I was about to give up Lula Stringer hurried to the door. She was a tall, thin woman with a leather-like skin, her hair was screwed in a tight knot on top of her head, the loose strands hanging in a stringy fringe around her face and one eye looked as if she had lost the sight of it. She wore a soiled print dress and a dark coat buttoned closely about her

-3-

thin neck, she had a pleasant smile and seemed glad to see a visitor for she said, "good morning, come right on in we'll help you." So with the help of Lula on one side and the children on the other I was finally pulled into the front door. Coming out of the light into the darkened room I had to stand a few seconds until my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, then I saw that I was in a bedroom which contained only a bed, there was no other furniture. The bed had no mattress or pillows the springs being covered with a soiled quilt. "Come right in here" said Lula, leading the way to an adjoining room "we are a settin' in the kitchen". Following I found myself in a small room containing another bed, this one having a mattress. In one corner stood a small table piled high with cooking utensils and paper sacks, in another a stove in which a small blaze sputtered but gave forth no warmth. "Addie, Lula called, bring another chair in here" a young woman with unkept hair and wearing a soiled dress appeared bringing two chairs. I seated myself in one and Addie took the other, Lula making herself comfortable on the foot of the bed said "I reckon you'll find it right cold in here but this is the only place we got a fire, the other chimney wont draw it smokes somethin' awful. Joe, thats my husband, brought home twenty-five cents worth of coal day before yesterday and we are a burnin' the last of it now, this cold weather does eat up the coal. "It sho does, said Addie". Up until this time Addie had said nothing and Lula evidently had forgotten she was there but now she said apologetically, I plum forgot to tell you this is Addie, my son Grady's wife, they live here with us, and these are their

younguns, where are your manners" she said to the children "come and tell the lady your names. Now this is Naomi the baby, she's three and this here is Talmange, we call him Tal, he's four and this here is Thomasene the oldest, she's five." And who is the other little girl I asked, is she a little Stringer too. " Oh yes she's a Stringer alright but she dont belong to Grady and Addie. She's my daughter Sadie's child, Sadie and Grady was twins but she died about four years ago with TB when Artie Jean here was two years old. I raised her myself and she calls me Mama and dont know no difference. She's six years old now and goes to school. Come here Artie Jean and tell her what you got on the Xmas tree". All the children disappeared and each came back bringing a toy, a doll chair, a small automobile with Charley McCarthy in the drivers seat, a black board and a doll. " We belong to the Baptist church at Ellawhite, the mill village, we used to live out there and they always put somethin' on the tree for the children " Lula said, "the preacher's wife in town give this doll to Artie Jean, now thats what I call real nice of her."

After I had admired each toy and they had been put away again, Addie said, " now yawl set down and be quiet and listen to the lady talk". Lula, seated on the bed drew Artie Jean up beside her where she sat as quiet as a mouse. The other three children removed the eye from the kitchen stove and poked at the small blaze with a table knife.

" We didnt have much to spend on trash this Xmas," Lula said, " I generally pick up a little bit sellin' ladies hoses, but trade aint been so good of late. I taken a few

-5-

orders from some girls at the village and you know how hard girls is on hoses, well they didnt last, got runs in 'em and now they wont give me no more orders, just ruint my trade , thats what it did. Well I'm gettin' old, I'm sixty two now though I might not look it, and its hard on me doin' so much walkin'. My health aint what it used to be neither, I suffer with a misery in my side, the doctor says its TB but shucks I dont know whether he knows or not.

But my, I could work when I was young, my first husband, I been married twict, used to say I could keep up, with anybody. He was years and years older than I was and I used to laugh and tell my sister, her husband was a young man, that I'd rather be an old mans darlin' than a young mans slave. And I was really his darlin' too, " she said with a pleased little laugh. " He didnt live but five years and left me with two little boys. After I married Stringer I sent my boys, one twelve and one fourteen, to the Masonic Home in Montgomery, I wanted them to have a good home and be educated and we wasnt able to do much for them. But you know them little rascals ran away before they had been there no time." Dont you know where they are now, I asked. " oh my yes, they are both married and have families.

" We been livin' here about seven years, come here from Fulton Ala., the saw-mill there burned and there wasnt no work there for the men. It looks like its hard for us to get back on our feet, just one thing afterv another sets us back. Now Joe, my husband, is a good carpenter, not no fancy carpenter but a good one , he can work from blue prints. Hecant get no steady work though, just odd jobs like makin' coffin boxes for the undertakers and such like.

-6-

Fed, my oldest boy, most everybody calls him Fred, is a carpenter too and a good one, but not as good as his Pa, he picks up a days job now and then but what he wants is steady work. Fed lives here with us too, he had some trouble with his wife and she left him. Fed was a home body and Clara liked to go about to dances and things like that. They had two children, Clara wanted the first one but when the second one come along she didnt want it. Well she kept on naggin' Fed to let her go and have an operation so she wouldnt have no more children, finally he got tired of it and let her go to the hospital. The doctor told Fed at the time it was goin' to cause trouble, said he never had seen an operation like that that didnt cause a separation, and shure enough it did. It wasnt long after she come home that Clara said to me, I'm goin' to my sisters for a little while, I wont be gone long, will you keep the kids? I said yes and asked her to bring me a spoonful of lard when she come back, since I didnt have quite enough to make the bread. Well suh, I'm still a waitin' for that lard for Clara never did come back. She sent for the children and Fed didnt make no move to get her back, he figgered if she didnt want to stay it was better to let her go along." Here Lula rose and poked the dying embers in the kitchen stove wiping her hands on the front of her dress as she returned to her seat on the bed. "I declare its chilly, this old house is so open" she said pointing to the rag stuffed cracks in the wall and to the large holes in the roof where we could look through at the sky. " But it aint so bad if it dont rain and the wind dont blow. We are a goin' to move though, this house has been sold from under us.

-7-

I declare when we do get in a close house I reckon I'll take down sick I'm so used to this old open one. We pay four dollars a month for this house but the one we are moving into is going to cost us six dollars, I kinda hate to move on account of that for as I was a tellin' you we have had a heap of expense.

About two years ago Grady got his leg hurt, it went into a risin' and the doctor couldnt get it cured up, he was in bed flat of his back for months. Well he went from bad to worse and finally had to go to the hospital and have his leg took off right below his hip, the doctor said the bone was plum gone. So he aint been well since, cant do no work except settin' down work and there aint no such thing these days, and him and Addie with all them younguns. Addie had a job at the cotton mill but some of them was laid off and Addie not livin' in the village was one of the first to be laid off. You know Grady has been off" she said, looking down and carefully smoothing the front of her dress, but he's back home now." She did not mention the fact that Grady had "been off" serving time for taking an automobile which did not belong to him, driving it to a nearby town and wrecking it in a ditch. You must have a pretty bad time when nobody in the family is working, I said. " Yes we do" she said , but Addie here gets ten dollars a month and a few groceries from the relief and that tides us over till some of the men find work. You see when I lost my daughter Sadie that set us back a lot, she was sick a long time and then she left Artie Jean to be took care of." Doesnt the childs father do anything for her, I asked. " Well, no he dont, Sadie was young and give her love to this boy and he

ruined her and then wouldn't marry her, got out of it by sayin' he was already married and, well you know how it is I just couldn't ask him for nothin' for ArtieJean after he acted so low." Lula seemed not to care to dwell on this subject so we talked of other things. "When the wind is in the east I always have rheumatism in my arm, do you ever have it" she asked not giving me time to answer she went on, "well if you do I have got a good remedy. You might laugh at it but there's nothing like these old time home remedies, I'll tell you about it. First you dig up some earth worms, you will find them in damp stalls or other damp places. Get some big ones, the bigger the better, but if you can't get no big ones the little ones will do. Put the worms in a bottle and stop them up tight. Then you make up some bread dough and roll it out thin, wrap the bottle up in the dough and bake it. When the bread is done the worms will be pure oil. Just dab a little of this on your joints, not too much it might make you too limber" she said, dangling her arms to show me what effect the oil would have should I use too much." Now you be sure and try it " she said, "and if it don't do you no good it won't do you no harm, I'd dig you up some earth worms but I aint even got a hoe". Thankful that Lula did not own a hoe I rose and told her I must be going, for it was getting late and uncomfortably cold at the Stringers. So with a promise to the children to send some fruit and chalk for the new black board I took my departure, though not a very dignified one for the family assisted me while I sat down on the high sill of the door and dropped to the ground.

Alabama
Susie R O'Brien.
Uniontown, Alabama

E.J. Alexander
Hamburg Road
Ten miles Southeast of
Marion, Alabama

THE ALEXANDERS.

Perry Co.

Ten miles Southeast of Marion, on a wind swept hill overgrown with sun-dried grass and weeds live E.J. and Ellen Alexander. Their dilapidated four-room farm house is reached by a dusty road leading from Hamburg, a village four miles away. The house rests on high log pillars which look as if they might crumble from under it at any moment. The porch has long since rotted and fallen away, leaving the front of the house bare and unsightly.

One climbs rather than steps into the front door on the ladder-like steps, many of which are missing, and those left being none too secure.

Not a shade tree protects the windows from the heat of the blazing summer sun; a rusty screen wire hangs in a crumpled mass from many of the windows. A few flowers peep up over the brown grass around the door step, but Ellen's efforts at making a flower garden have been fruitless.

Ellen was born in Texas, she, with her mother and father, who is a carpenter, and her four sisters moved about from place to place settling wherever the father could get work. Ellen does not remember ever living in one place more than a year.

The family finally settled in Birmingham where Ellen met E.J. Alexander and they were married. They rented a small farm in Perry County and here they have lived ever since, moving from farm to farm, hoping by each move to better their conditions.

This year they rented thirty acres on which they raised cotton and corn, but the boll weevil has destroyed most of the cotton and the drought has kept them from making a corn crop.

The family consists of five girls all of whom are married and have left home except two. The parents' education is limited but the girls attend school at Hamburg, a village about four miles from their home.

Ellen is a very busy woman. She rises with the sun, milks, tends the chickens and pigs, carries water from an overflowing well about a quarter of a mile from the house. Here too she does the family wash in the shade of the willows which grow near the well.

With the help of her husband and girls she works the vegetable garden and raises enough vegetables to feed the family during the summer, with a surplus for canning, she has already canned over two hundred quarts for winter use. Some of this she is offering for sale at fifteen cents a quart. "Money is awful scarce" she says "and we need a little cash sometimes. The girls like to go to town to the picture show and I let 'em go whenever I can, 'cause its mighty dull out here for young folks. It looks like somethin' turns up every year to keep us from makin' a crop. Now year before last the Goverment let us have some steers. Well it took us three months to break them things so they would pull a plow."

During the winter months E.J. helps along by making figures of dogs which he displays along the roadside. These figures are made of plaster of Paris which is poured into wooden moulds and left to harden. The moulds are in several pieces so that they can be removed easily.

The soft plaster is poured through a hole in the bottom of the mould, the mould being turned continuously so that each crevice will be filled. After the plaster is hard the mould is removed and the dogs are painted. The figures bring from twenty-five cents to a dollar according to size. There has not been much sale for the figures lately and they have stopped making them, E. J. is trying

to get work on the County Road Construction.

Ellen does not like farm life. She says " I didn't know anything about work till I married. My father was a good man and I didn't know anything about men drinkin' and gamblin'. I ain't old, just forty-two, but I fell pretty old. If I could have looked ahead I guess maybe I would have picked a different road."

Washington Copy

10/20/38

L.H.

Mark Clemp,
Nine miles south east
of Marion, on the
Hamburg road.

F 7 1

Mark Clemp.

Mark Clemp trudges wearily along the dusty road toward his home. He has been to Marion, a distance of about nine miles, to purchase his small stock of groceries which he carries in a dirty meal sack thrown across his shoulder.

At each passing car he looks up hopefully, his blue eyes peering from beneath his shaggy brows. He stops for a moment on the side of the road, thinking perhaps someone might give him a ride and thus save him a few miles of the eighteen mile walk to and from his home.

As the car passes on without stopping Mark bows his head dejectedly and pulling the dirty brim of his old felt hat over his eyes to shut out the cloud of dust he resumes his walking.

Mark wears a pair of faded overall pants, an army coat which once belonged to a much smaller man, the sleeves stopping halfway between his elbows and his large toil worn hands, his shirt shows signs of having once been white the collar of which in no spot touches his thin neck. The lower part of his face is covered with several days growth of reddish beard.

Mark's progress is slow, for he has to stop often to remove the gravel from the worn sole of his shoes, so he has not gone far when a car slows up and a cherry voice calls, "hey, old man if you are going my way hop in". With a

Susie R. O'Brien.

Mark Clemp.

2

broad grin Mark quickens his step and after seeing that his sack of groceries is first taken care of he climbs in and sits uncomfortably on the edge of the seat.

After a few miles he begins to feel more at home so he settles back comfortably and ventures to start a conversation. " Nice car you got here mister, they sho saves a feller a heap o' steps, I aint never owned nary one myself and I dont reckon I ever will.

You see we come here from Hale County 'bout six or seven year ago and we aint done so well. I rent a little place and farm on shares, I'm what we call a share-cropper, the landlord gits half and I gits half. But we aint made no crop this year and I dont git nothin'.

Me and Etta , thats my old lady, managed to make enough to feed us and thats about all. I planted nine acres of cotton and five acres of corn, well both them crops went bad on me. I dont know as I'll stay on this place next year, the house does very well but the water is turrible, its got sulphur in it , the clothes washed in it is yeller and look like they been starched.

Etta and me has got three children, all growed up now, the girl is married and gone and one of the boys is, God knows where, he just walked off and we aint never heard from him sinct. If it hadnt a been for my boy Alex in the C C C camp I dont know what we woulda done

Mark Clemp.

3

what he sent sho heped us out mightily.

But Alex aint in the camp now so they give me a job on the road, that will keep me from runnin' into debt. I work seventeen miles from whar I live so I have to git out early, sometimes I ketch a ride and sometimes I dont.

Etta gits up at three o'clock to cook, she aint able to do it but she hates for me to have to take cold stuff, she aint sick or nothin, just gittin' old, she is fifty two now."

Mark is quiet for a while now and seems to be studying with interest the signboards, finally with a wistful look he says " I wish I could read them signs, they got such purdy pictures on 'em, I sho have missed a heap cause I aint got nary bit of schoolin', not nary bit. I'm sixty six year old and I aint never been to school three months in my whole life, I dont know why, reckon my old man had work for me to do. I'd give most anything if I could read a little. My old lady can read printin' a little and I wish I could too. I heared about the schools where grown folks can go and learn to read and write but I aint never seen whar I had the time to go.

" But I sent the children to school", he says proudly, I didnt want them to be like me and Etta, one stopped in the ninth one in the seventh and one in the sixth grade, couse I coulda whipped 'em and made 'em go longer but I figgered it wouldnt do much good if they wanted to quit. But it sho would be nice if I could read them signs."

Susie R. O'Brien.

Mark Clemp.

4

Once more Mark busied himself with counting the small packages in the dirty meal sack, making sure that each and every one of his purchases ~~are~~ still there.

The car stops at the cross road and he climbs out, shoulders his sack and makes his way across the field of dried cotton stalks to his humble home.

Kenny and Jener Lolly (White)
Cotton Mill Workers
Uniontown, Alabama

Susie E. O'Brien
Perry County,

GRANDPA LOLLY'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

On a bright morning early in October I accepted an invitation to ride out with the teachers of the Ellawhite mill village and visit their school. At seven-thirty the sun was already high in the sky and the little frame schoolhouse seemed to spread itself on the grassy knoll on which it stood as if basking in the sunshine. The children too seemed to be enjoying the bright, unusually warm day for here and there they were gathered in groups in front of the building awaiting the arrival of the teachers. As we came to a stop in front of the schoolhouse the children swarmed about the car to greet their teachers, the girls wearing stiffly starched print dresses and the boys in overalls, each one eager to assist in carrying her books or her lunch basket.

"There seems to be quite a bit of excitement here this morning, what is it all about" asked one of the teachers.

"Grandpa Lolly had a birthday party last night" several voices chorused. "And he got a watch that cost two whole dollars" chimed in another.

I had noticed the children looking at me curiously but thought perhaps it was because I was a stranger. Soon, I saw a little girl pluck at the sleeve of her teacher and as she bent down the child whispered quite loud enough for me to hear, "Is she goin' to teach us?"

"No indeed" laughed the teacher, "she is just visiting us today."

"At this moment the school bell rang and the children trooped noisily into the building were they continued to discuss "Grandpa Lolly's" birthday party until roll call began. I sat awhile and listened to classes, then I decided since "Grandpa Lolly's" party was

of so much interest I would visit the Lollys and hear about it. The teacher volunteered to let me have one of the little girls to show me the way. Many hands were raised begging the privilege. One little girl on the back row, after many contortions in the air with her arms and hands, failing to attract the attention of the teacher rushed up to her and said, "Please, please let me go, I ought to go because he's my grandpa."

"All right Margy May you say show her where your grandfather lives" the teacher told her. Then turning to me she said, "This is Margy May Bush. She will go with you."

With an air of importance and a beaming smile Margy May joined me and we started out. Walking beside me in her stiffly starched print dress she chatted away telling about many of the families who lived in the houses we passed. "They've got a new baby in this house," she said. "Goodness, but he's little and not so pretty either, but I reckon his mama thinks he is. The little boy that lives in the next house can't come to school 'cause he's got a bad burn on his arm. ~~His~~ mama was sick and he had to cook breakfast and he turned over the red hot meat grease on hisself."

Two women talked over a garden fence as they gathered vegetables, but as we drew near the conversation ceased abruptly, the women nodded and as we passed I was conscious of two pairs of eyes looking me over critically. For a strange woman at Ellawhite usually means that the county physician is there with his nurse to visit the school or that the welfare worker is visiting the village. "I bet they were talkin' 'bout grandpa's birthday party," said Margy May "and they are wonderin' who you are too. I bet they ask me when I go back."

We were now nearing the building where the primary grades are taught. "I used to go to school there " said Margy May, "but I'm in the fifth grade

now and I belong to the 4H club too. I had a nice teacher when I was in second grade but she got married and went way off to South America or somewhere. I hope she will bring me a bunch of bananas, or a monkey, when she comes back." On the playground near the primary school a group of children played a game in which two of the little girls held hands high over their heads making an arch while the others formed a line and marched through. To the tune of "London Bridge is Falling Down" they were singing in high, shrill, childish voices, "Hair in the buttermilk ten feet long, ten feet long, ten feet long. Margy May looked up at me smiling and said "They are playing hair in the buttermilk."

When we reached the store Margy May asked me to wait while she ran in to buy some cakes, explaining that her mother didn't have time to prepare her lunch before she went to work at the mill in the morning. On a bench in front several men sat in the sunshine and they too were discussing "Grandpa Lolly's" birthday party.

"You know that old boy got a heap of presents last night," said one; "And he couldn't a had a better time if he had been sixteen years old" said another.

Here Margy May joined me again, clutching her sack of cakes tightly in her small fist. "It's not far now," she said. "You see that green house up yonder? Well that's where we live. Mama is at the mill but grandma is at home. I thanked Margy May and assured her I could find my way alone so she hurried back to school.

I found Jener Lolly in the yard seated on a bench in the cool shade of a choke-berry tree. At first I thought she was dozing in the warm October sunshine, she sat so still, her figure relaxed and her hands folded idly in her lap. As I came up the narrow little brick walk toward her she smiled and nodded a greeting as if it required too much energy to speak.

"Are you Grandpa Lolly's wife," I asked.

"Yes, I'm Jener Lolly," she answered; then lots of folks tell me I look too young to be Kenny's wife." Here she roused herself and made room for me on the bench beside her.

"I have been hearing so much about the party you had at your house last night I thought perhaps you would tell me about it" I said.

"Well we did have a party. Now ain't that a pretty come-off for a man as old as Kenny, to be havin' a birthday party?" she laughed. He is seventy-three year old but he's as spry as a cricket. He has been talkin' a long time about havin' a party. He had saved up three dollars and a half and he wanted to have hisself a party. I tried to talk him out of it. I didn't think it was right to spend it that a-way when he could use it here at home to help out. But he had his heart set on it so we let him go on and have it. He invited everybody in the village, the house wasn't big enough to hold 'em all. Everybody brought presents and Kenny was just like a boy he was so tickled over them. They brought some nice things too. He got eight pocket handkers, some nice pants and nineteen pairs of socks and not nary pair cost less than fifteen cents.

"What tickled him most though was the watch the foreman at the mill give him. I bet that man has looked at that watch fifty times today. I told him he would wear it out puttin' it in and takin' it out of his pocket. After all the presents was give out we had refreshments, sandwiches, and coca colas. I thought when I saw that crowd of folks comin' in we wouldn't have enough to go around, but it went round all right. Then we played games and everybody seemed to enjoy theirselves. The party didn't break up 'till 'bout ten o'clock. I reckon Kenny got paid for the three dollars and a half he spent on the party, and I'm right glad I let him have it.

"Everybody out here calls Kenny 'Grandpa Lolly', I reckon its 'cause we been here so long. We come to Ellawhite when the mill was first built;

come here from Bibb County, and that's been over thirty year. All our younguns, we had sight, have growed up and married here. Most of 'em live here in the village. Kenny made seventy-five cents a day when the mill first opened up, but we had steady work and we got along all right on them wages. You see things was cheaper then. I worked some too in the mill then but I don't work none now, I'm gettin' too old. Kenny gets a odd job sometin' but he's gettin' too old too and they won't trust him with the machines, though he could run 'em as good as some of them young bucks.

"My son, Val, and my daughter, Lelia, lives here with us. Both of them work in the mill and I keep care of their children whilst they are at work. Lelia, she married the Rush boy and he walked off and left her before Margy May was borned. She had a right hard row to travel along about that time. She couldn't work at the mill and she didn't have no way to take care of herself so she moved over here with me and her pa. Well suh, when Margy May was six months old he come back and said he was sorry, and wanted Lelia to take him back; but that girl had backbone and she told him he wasn't on hand when she needed him and she didn't want him now. So that was the end of it. Lelia works and takes care of Margy May. This child goes to school and belongs to the 'R club and if I do say it myself she's as smart as a whip."

Here the conversation ceased abruptly and Jener seemed to have forgotten I was there. Presently she reached into the front of her dress and drew out a small tin snuff box. Extending her lower lip she raised the box and tapped it gently on the bottom. When her lip was filled to her satisfaction she varefully replaced the top of the box and put it away again in the front of her dress. Then wiping the overflow from the corners of her mouth, she said, "Now I'll feel better! I declare I was up so late last night I can't hardly stay awake."

But Jenor likes to talk and she didn't want to miss this opportunity, especially when she had a good listener, so she yawned and stretched herself making a special effort to stay awake. "Now my boy Val," she said - "his real name is Valentine - you might think that's a funny name, but I'll tell you how come us to name him that. When he was borned we couldn't decide on no name for him; reckon we had so many we had run out of names. Well one day when he was 'bout three weeks old I was takin' him over to see my mother and as we passed the mill the manager of the mill came out and says to me, 'good morning Mrs. Lolly; let's see what you got there;' so I pulled the blanket back and showed him.

"'Fine boy, fine boy,' he says; 'what's his name?'

"'Well' I says kinder shame like, 'he ain't go no name yet;' so right off he says 'why don't you name him for me?'

"He was always the kind to have his joke so when he walked off he says, 'I hope to God he will be a better lookin' man than I am though I can't say as he shows much promise now.' Well, after that we called the baby Val for Mr. Valentine.

"As I said, him and his two children, Rose and Jack is livin' here with us. He married a widow with two children and they didn't hit it off so well. One mornin' she went down to the store and called up her folks and they come and got her and her two children by her first husband. That's the last we ever heard of her. I don't know why Val married her and I don't think he knows either. She left Val's two children, Rose and Jack and I keep care of them for him. They go to school and are in the fourth grade.

"Here comes Kenny now" she said. "I see him gettin' out of a truck. He walks to town every mornin' and goes to the postoffice; not that he's lookin' for any mail. He just goes to have some place to be goin'.

Then sometimes he picks up a job in town, like last Christmas when he got a job playin' Santa Claus out in front of one of the stores. It wasn't much of a job but he picked up a little money for Christmas. We don't have much to spend with all of us to be took care of and just two in the family workin'. Now there's a donkey show in town tonight, I wish we could go" she said wistfully, "but we just can't spare the money.

By this time Grandpa Lolly had reached the house stepping airily along with the aid of a cane. He was a small man inclined to stoutness, with twinkling eyes and a handle-bar moustache that seemed much too large for his face. "Well Jener" he said "I caught a ride back home today." Then seeing that his wife had a visitor he touched his hat and nodded a greeting. As he walked toward the house he suddenly stopped. Drawing out his watch he looked at it proudly and said, "Well she's still a kickin' and ain't lost a minute."

"Now ain't he a sight?" said Jener chuckling. "Men don't never grow up.

2/3/39

S.J.