"Kiver"

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NO MORE feelin' out of them old legs than ef they belonged to some one else, 'cepting when he sat too long, and pin-pricks chased through the skin like pieces of sharp sand blown into him. He'd have to heave himself up and shake that stinging sand out of his flesh or the old posts wouldn't hold him a'tall.

Gettin' hard to get up, too. All sixty years layin' heavy on him like layers of soggy leaf-mould, weightin' down the red undersoil heavier every fall.

Knee j'int crackin'? No, musta been the splints squeakin' in the rocker seat. Glad to be shed of the weight o' him, was it?

Wild air gusted through the cracks in the cabin wall, and chased blue-bitter smoke out of the back log to make him cough. Savannah'd always chinked the gaps tight before leaf-fallin'—till this time. Now she was sleepin', down under the yellow
maple leaves—he'd wager she fancied the way the wind rustled and stirred them over her. Mayhap the sap tumblin' down with fright of the cold w'd tell her how empty he felt, startin' t' winter without her.

Reckon she'd grieve big if he sold the Kiver for medicine-money? Couldn't wait till green-up time for the maple buds to give him her say. 'Tw'd be too late come sap-risin'!

If he just had the bitter stuff in the brown bottles, it might keep his oldticker spurtin' blood through him till spring. Leastways, 'twould take the edge off the pains that came rantin' fury-hot through his chest and eased out again through the ribs under his shoulder blades after they'd got him weak and tremblin'; and his fore'e'd covered with dew beads from the hurt of it.

THE Kiver—he'd spread it out on the bed so he could see it all. Whig Rose, it was. He'd never forgit the look of it ef he never saw it again. He could even remember how it looked stretched in the loom years ago, with Savannah bent over it, hummin', and watchin' it grow as she worked. She'd just laughed about her fingernails bein' blue-rimmed all winter from the indigo vat where she'd dyed the wool. Trim, she was, and shy like the wood things—just a mite of a bride, and him proud as ever of her.—He'd lie down a while under the Kiver and think of Her.

Before the last medicine'd given out—that he'd bought with money from sellin' their old cherry table—he'd been able to sleep more, and he'd dreamed he and Savannah were lyin' snug and happy down there under the maple's heart, wrapped together close and warm with the Kiver. What would She think if he came down to rest beside her without it? 'Twould be tradin' part of Her for a little ease.

Better for him to let the medicine go. He could get some one to bring him in some spice bush twigs to chew. 'Twould take his mind off'n the pain, when it set him quiverin', to bite hard, and taste the cinnamoned juice flowing out on his tongue from the crushed bark.

He'd given her spice bush twigs to mash with her teeth that night long since when the wind had howled so, and the Least One was born. Her pain was too great, and she'd bit her
knuckles till the blood spurted out, sickening him, and at last, he'd thought of the spice twigs. When it was all over, he'd covered the two of them with the Kiver. Funny how the feel of it against his face took him back to those long-ago things.

SEEMED like the light was dim in the cabin. Funny! He'd thought it only past noon-time—the shadow of the window frame was dark, but it did lay just where the worn corner of the cherry table used to be. He'd get up and brew some sassafras bark d'rectly, but first he'd rest a bit. He was tired, so heavy-tired.

'Twas good to waller down in the corn-shuck mattress—the husks rattled like dry maple leaves—and feel the wool of the Kiver. Chill was in the room, and 'twas getting 'most as dusk-filled as the barn-shed loft.

And the indigo wheels—blue agin the lamb-white of the Kiver—why, they'd come to be nought but dark patches, tree-bark color, restin' on gray.

And them sheets of light in the fer corner, slidin' through where the logs gap after fallen chinking,—not golden with dust specks jiggin' in them like they was—just gray streaks in a room getting cave-dark.

'Twas gathering thick, and moss-soft, this noon-day blackness, like the deep night that filled the hollow, ridge-high. 'Twas good to let it close over him.

March, 1937