

# THE LITTLE CALL

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

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## "LONESOME."

(Synopsis)—Young Carlyle Wheaton Dale, of "Bill Dale," son of a wealthy coal operator, John K. Dale, arrives at the Halfway Switch, in eastern Tennessee, abandoning a life of ease and wealth. He meets "Babe" Littleford, typical mountain girl. Littleford, a character of the hills, takes him to John Moreland's home. Moreland is chief of the "clan," which has an old feud with the Littlefords. He tells Dale of the killing of his brother, David Moreland, years ago, owner of rich coal deposits by a man named Carlyle. Dale believes the man was his father. Dale makes his home with the Morelands. Talking with Babe, Dale is ordered by "Black Adam" Ball to leave "his girl" alone. Dale writes the bully. He arranges with John Moreland to develop the coal deposits. Ben Littleford sends a challenge to John Moreland to meet him with his followers in battle. Moreland agrees. The two clans line up for battle. A Littleford fired the first shot. Dale in an effort to stop the fighting, crosses to the Moreland side of the river and is accidentally killed by his father and seriously wounded. The fight stops and the Morelands are not seriously hurt. Dale meets an old friend, Bobby McLaughlin, who has married Patricia Clavery. Dale's father admits he killed David Moreland and offers him funds to develop the coal.

## CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"You needn't," broke in the embittered Bill Dale. "I can get the necessary funds without difficulty. I'll pay the debt myself. You've got a great many years in which to try to make amends, and you haven't done anything. You might have helped the Morelands without their even knowing that it was you—especially as they seem to have known you by another name—and that's the only way you could have helped them. Here you have one reason why I cannot accept assistance from you; don't you feel that?" The Morelands wouldn't have it, and I couldn't lie to them."

He motioned to McLaughlin, who had halted on the lower veranda step in order that he might not overhear, and turned and walked away. McLaughlin followed, and soon overtook him.

Bill Dale stopped suddenly and faced back to his father.

"Remember that Bobby gets his house and lot."

"Yes," replied John K. Dale, "Bobby gets his house and lot."

He went sadly toward the mansion that seemed to him now a good deal like a tomb. Young Dale touched his friend on the arm.

"Tell me, what did mother tell you? I know it's going to hurt, but—tell it."

"She was sitting beside an open window in the library," said McLaughlin. "I told her that you were at the gate, and asked if she would like to see you. At first I was afraid she hadn't heard me. Then she opened a book that she was reading, found her place and

marked it with a finger, and looked at me."

"Who did you say was at the gate, Mr. McLaughlin?" she asked.

"Your son Carlyle," I answered.

"Mr. McLaughlin, she said, 'How coldly, I want you never to forget this: To me there is no such person on earth as Carlyle Dale.'"

They went downtown in silence.

## CHAPTER VII.

Lonesome.

When John Moreland and Ben Littleford had finished their breakfast

there in the dining room of the Blaisdel, they drank the water from their fingerbowl, threatened with sudden death the waiter who snickered, and found the way to the lobby.

To Littleford the minutes dragged suddenly. Finally he told Moreland, in a sentence filled with double negatives, that he could bear the suspense no longer, and proposed that they set out at once. Doctor Braeuer's hospital. The hotel manager overheard some of the one-sided conversation; he phoned the surgeon and learned that the young woman was resting easily, which information he passed on to the mountain men.

Ben Littleford was quiet for five minutes, more or less. Then he again proposed to John Moreland that they go to the hospital to see Babe. More go and refused flatly, and accompanied his refusal with an unmistakable look of contempt.

"You're as restless as a dawg in a pen town," he told his old enemy, and then he walked away. A few minutes later Ben Littleford stole out unnoticed by his neighbor from the Big Pig Inn, and went at a brisk gallop to the street. Moreland found it out almost at once. He followed the Littleford chief hotfoot, and overtook him. Trust your hill dweller to note landmarks when he goes into unknown territory—Littleford was headed straight for the hospital.

"They walked for two blocks in silence. Moreland had assumed the attitude of one who has had the guardianship of an irresponsible person thrust upon him. But soon he softened somewhat."

"I show can't understand, Ben," he drawled. "How Bill Dale ever could bear it to live here."

"I wonder," Littleford said absently, as though he had not heard, "what Bill Dale is at? It's mighty durned lonesome without him, ain't it? That was good ham we had for breakfast, John."

"It wasn't ham. It was beef."

"It was ham."

"It was beef."

"It was ham."

"Don't you reckon," flared John Moreland, "that I know a durn cow's meat when I see it? It was beef!"

They had halted in the middle of a stream of pedestrians. A policeman crowded his way to them.

"Where's he?" he growled.

Bill Dale was at that moment entering the lobby of the Blaisdel with Robert McLaughlin at his side. Dale had just told McLaughlin he must go to Cincinnati to borrow money from his wealthy friend Harris. Then McLaughlin told Dale something that saved him the journey to Cincinnati.

"You said he said something about daddy, didn't you?"

"Bill? I'm sorry, because he would have accommodated you. He went back a few days ago in the cotton smash. He was here yesterday, and left last night for Quincy."

Dale did not try to conceal his surprise and disappointment. Harris, for all his youth, had been a business idiot.

"I'll have to try somebody here, I guess. But I won't take it from him—there mother wouldn't permit it, anyway, if she knew—and there are several other reasons. Queer how a fellow's mother would turn him down like this! Usually, you know, it's a fellow's mother that sticks by him the longest."

"I wonder where I could find old Newton Wheatley, of the Luther Wheatley Iron company? I know him, all right. He always liked me. Bobby."

"You'll find him at home," McLaughlin answered. "He's out of business, and here all the time now. He might like a shot at coal. Why not 'phone him from here?"

"I'll do that," Dale decided. "Look up my two friends for me, Bobby, will you?"

He was soon speaking to Newton Wheatley. He was brief in stating his wishes. To the question as to why he did not go to his father for funds—well, he had his reasons, and it was rather a private matter. Wheatley, of course, remembered the old feud.

"The old iron man was silent for what seemed to Dale a very long time. Then his voice came over the wire with an almost ominous calm:

"Who besides you has seen this yeln, Carlyle? Anybody that knows coal?"

"Yes, my father," Dale answered quickly. "He went over it years ago. Ask him about the coal in David Moreland's mountain. Phone him, and then phone me. I'm waiting at the Blaisdel."

Dale was jubilant. Here was a rare stroke of good fortune. He went to McLaughlin—who had not yet found John Moreland and Ben Littleford—and told him about it. McLaughlin was almost as happy as Dale over it. A belloy appeared like a jack-in-the-box in the center of the floor. "Mistoh Carlyle Dale! Mistoh Carlyle Dale!" Dale wheeled. "Well?"

"Wanted familiarity at Doctor Braeuer's hospital, sir?"

Dale shook hands with McLaughlin and hurried toward the street.

A few minutes later Doctor Braeuer met him in the red pine room.

"What's wrong, doctor?"

The surgeon beckoned. "Come with me."

He turned and led the way through a long corridor and to a sunny window room where Babe Littleford lay with a bandage about her temples. Ben Littleford was on his knees at his daughter's bedside; he was slowly wringing his big, rough hands and begging pitifully to be forgiven.

Babe stared at him a trifle oddly. She had not yet seen the two men who



"I was a-tryin' to skeer him out o' fightin' any more," she interrupted.

stood in the doorway. Then she interrupted her father:

"You hush, pap, and go away. I've told a hundred times about fightin' a-bully murder, and specially to you wimmenfolks, and you never would pay any 'tention to me. You hush, pap, and go away. If I die, I'll just hit to die. And if I die, I shore do want to die in peace. Go away, pap."

"But ye must live, Babe, honey!" Ben Littleford moaned. "Ef you was to die, what'd I do?"

"I don't know what ye'd do, pap," Babe said weakly. "You ought to thought o' that afore, pap. It may be too late now. I want ye to go on off and fe' me alone. Ef I die, I want to die in peace. The Lord knows I never got to live in peace!"

There was a worried look in her wonderful brown eyes, and the doctor saw it. He strode forward decisively and helped Littleford to his feet. The hillman wiped away a tear with his faded blue bandana, and hung his head. He had been made a broken man in one day.

"Go out to your friend Moreland," smiled the doctor, and wait there for a little while."

Babe's father walked unsteadily out of the room. Dr. Dale went to Doctor Braeuer and whispered, "Isn't she going to make it?"

"Certainly she's going to make it," Braeuer assured him. "Go on, she wants to see you."

Dale drew a chair up close to the white bed and sat down. Babe's eyes lighted at once, and she put a hand uncertainly up toward him. Dale took the hand in his. He saw that it was a little pale under its delicate sunburn.

"Who besides you has seen this yeln, Carlyle? Anybody that knows coal?"

"Yes, my father," Dale answered quickly. "He went over it years ago. Ask him about the coal in David Moreland's mountain. Phone him, and then phone me. I'm waiting at the Blaisdel."

Wheatley agreed a little reluctantly. Dale waited patiently for fifteen minutes. Then the clock called him to the phone. He took up the receiver with boyish eagerness.

"Wheatley began cordially. 'Your father tells me it is a good proposition, Carlyle, to let you see all the money you'll need. And if you want a good mining man, I know where you can lay your hands on one; also I can furnish you, at half the original cost, all the necessary machinery and accessories. You didn't know the old Luther Wheatley company dickered in coal as well as iron, eh? Well, it did. Let me see you at three o'clock this afternoon.'

"The universe," she repeated indignantly. "What's the universe, Bill Dale? Something to eat?"

"The world, the sun, the moon, and the stars," she said.

"The world, the sun, the moon, and the stars," she said. "No," she said, "the ain't nothin' I want, and ain't nothin' ye can do fo' me, I reckon."

"But I thought, as they sent for me—"

Babe Littleford's fingers held tightly to his. "It was me that sent for you."

"She turned her face away, and said, 'I was so lonesome, Bill Dale.'"

Robert McLaughlin's wife, Patricia, visited Babe twice daily, and a friendship that was none the less warm for being unique sprang up quickly between them. Patricia declared to her husband that she was going to keep Babe—who she was already calling 'by her proper name, the same being Elizabeth—under her wing. There was room in the bungalow, Patricia said; and she really needed company, because Bobby was away so much.

Babe accepted little Mrs. McLaughlin's offer as soon as Bill Dale convinced her that she wouldn't be merely an object of charity. The hill pride's first law is that one must pay for what he gets—and she is probably the first law God laid down for old Adam in Eden. Ben Littleford seemed bewildered and blue when they told him of the arrangement, but he voiced no objection. Dale pressed upon him a loan of a hundred dollars, and ordered him to give it to his daughter, which he did. Elizabeth Littleford, of course, would need new clothing.

"I ain't even got any dresses at home," she whispered to Patricia, "but two."

Bill Dale was sure now that he loved Babe, and she was almost sure that she cared for him. But he was quite properly in no haste to come to an understanding. He had known all along that Babe would have to be educated, and at a distance, he reasoned, might keep with education. And he wanted her to have the opportunity of an education other men of his class. If she couldn't love him with a lasting love, he didn't want her to love him at all.

Oddly or not, he never thought of Jimmy Payne.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Major Bradley and Henderson Goff. When Bill Dale, the expert mining man Hayes and the two mountaineers stepped from a short passenger train at the Halfway switch, they were approached by the major, Bradley, and a man whom Dale had never seen before.

He was tall, and his bearing was erect and soldierlike, though he was every day of sixty years old. His eyes were blue and twinkling with everlasting good humor; his gray mustaches and imperial were exceedingly well cared for; his teeth were his own, and as white as a school-girl's, and they bore out his general air of confidence. He was, plainly, a Southerner of the old type.

"Who's that?" whispered Dale to John Moreland.

But Moreland didn't hear. He ran forward with his right hand outstretched, and to old Ben Littleford. Moreland could not have greeted a brother with more gladness. Dale thought.

"Hi, there, Major Bradley," the hillman cried. "And how d'ye come on today?"

"I am very well, gentlemen, thank you," said the major, smiling.

He shook their hands heartily. "The trainmen gave us your message yesterday," he went on, still smiling, "and we were delighted to learn that the young woman was out of danger. I trust you are all in good health, gentlemen."

They assured him that they were. Moreland turned to introduce Bill Dale and the mining man. From the moment that Major Bradley glimpsed Dale's hand they were friends.

"Mighty glad to know you, sir!" exclaimed the old lawyer. "I've been hearing a great deal about you, sir, over in the valley of the Doe. They seem to think there's nobody just like Bill Dale! It was Bill Dale this, and Bill Dale that. It was 'Here' where Bill Dale whipped 'Black Adam,' or 'Here's where Bill Dale was standing when such-and-such happened, or 'Here's where Bill Dale crossed the fence.'"

"Hah-hah-hah!" laughingly laughed by Heck, who stood leaning on the muzzle of his rifle. "Bill Dale is all right, major; he's shore got my word fo' that."

The others laughed. Then John Moreland said they'd better be moving, or they'd be late for dinner.

When they had put a hundred yards of David Moreland's mountain behind them, the old Southerner turned slyly at Dale's steady and whispered:

"Let us fall behind a little, if you please. I want to speak with you privately."

They began to go, and soon there was a distance of several rods between them and the others.

"I heard through Addie Moreland," began Bradley, his friendly hand on the younger man's arm, "about you and what you're planning to do for the Morelands. I tell you, sir, I'm thankful because of your coming, and you may count on me to help in any way I can. The Morelands are quite friendly to me now, though up to the middle of last summer they didn't like me any too well because I made Ben

Littleford's cabin my home when but here.

"It was a simple thing that brought us together. John Moreland's little nephew was lost in the woods and his mother was frantic. There are panthers, you know, and wildcats, rattlers, and copperheads. I was fortunate enough to find the boy, and carried him home. That was all. They're a fine people, my boy, and so are the Littlefords. Good old English blood, that somehow wandered off. There's no purer, cleaner blood in America, sir."

"And now—how are you getting along with your plans for the operation of the coal mine?"

"Excellently," answered Dale. "We have the necessary finance; a geared locomotive and cars and light rails have been bargained for."

"Good!" Bradley gave Dale a hearty slap on the shoulder.

"There's something else I wanted to say, Mr. Dale," he continued, his color grayed. "The nearly certain to have a barrel of trouble with a shyster coal man named Henderson Goff. He's a villain, sir, if ever there was one! And he's quite the smoothest article I ever seen. He can make you believe black is white, if only you'll listen to him long enough."

"Is he—has he been here recently?" Dale wanted to know.

"He's here now," answered the major. "He's been here for three days and he's been working devilment fast. He was up here last summer, trying to buy the Moreland coal for a shog; he knows all the people, you see. As soon as he landed here on this present trip, he went out about your intentions. Then, at night, he asked Adam Ball from his tobacco barn prison, and went home with him."

"Well, by Heck followed them and did some eavesdropping—poor by has a strong point. The major hen on."

"Goff learned that Adam Ball's father knew about the coal vein long before David Moreland discovered it and got lawful possession of the mountain. Then Goff made the Balls believe that they were due a big share of the proceeds of the Moreland coal. It wasn't very hard to do, I guess. The Balls, this set, at least, were originally lowlanders; they took to the mountain. I understand to keep from being forced to fight during the Civil war."

"Goff's idea," muttered Dale, "is to get the Balls to scare me into selling instead of developing it."

"Exactly," nodded old Bradley. "Then he would settle with the Balls by giving them a dollar or two a day for digging coal; perhaps he would put them off until the mine was worked out for half of that, and then say, 'Anyway, Goff would come out at the big end.'"

"I see," said Dale.

"If there's anything that I can do, at any time, you won't hesitate to let me know?" said the major.

"You may consider yourself attorney and legal adviser for the Moreland Coal company, of which I have the honor to be general manager," smiled Dale. "If you will."

Major Bradley's voice came happily. "My dear boy, I am glad to accept! And there shall be no charge for any service that I may render."

They were not long in reaching the great valley, which lay very beautiful and very peaceful in the warm light of the early July sun. The soft murmuring of the crystal river and the low, slow tinkling of the cowbells made music that was sweet and pleasing.

Suddenly John Moreland stopped, uttered a swearword under his breath, turned and went back to Dale.

"He's a man a-wattin' on us shore thar, Bill," he drawled, "al ye abear want to watch like a hawk to keep him from a stealin' the eye-teeth out o' yore head. His name is Henderson Goff, and he wants coal."

They went on. Soon they met a man who, in clothing and manner, made Dale think of stories he had heard and read of Mississippi river steamboat gamblers of the long ago. His eyes were black; and as keen as a pair of spear-points; his mustaches were black; and they had sharp upturned ends like those of a Mohit. The major had said that he was a smooth article; he certainly looked it.

He met John Moreland with an old smile and thrust out his hand. But Moreland wouldn't see the hand.

"Anything he's got to say about coal," he growled, "ye can say to Bill Dale thar," pointing with a calloused thumb. "Bill he's the high light of the whole business; and when he opens his mouth, ye can see your head to one side and listen fo' gawls bel!"

Goff was delighted to meet Mr. Dale, of whom he had already heard. Dale had nothing whatever to say. They walked on toward the cabin of the Moreland chieftain, with Goff keeping up a running fire of talk concerning the scenery, the climate—anything but coal.

At John Moreland's gate, Goff nudged Dale with an elbow and whispered:

"Meet me at one o'clock down there where the big sycamores lies across the river. I've got something to tell you that will interest you."

"I want you Littlefords to be on good terms with your neighbors, the Morelands."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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Melted. "So you have made up with Ghiping?"

"Yes," said Mr. Twobible. "I couldn't resist the spirit in which his apology was offered. When a man comes to me and says he's sorry and unwraps a package done up to look like a pair of shoes and says, 'What we need now is a corkscrew,' I'm not adamant, sir, and in such circumstances I hope I never will be."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

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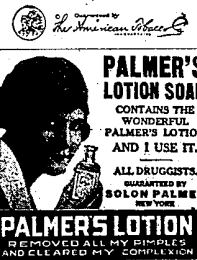
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