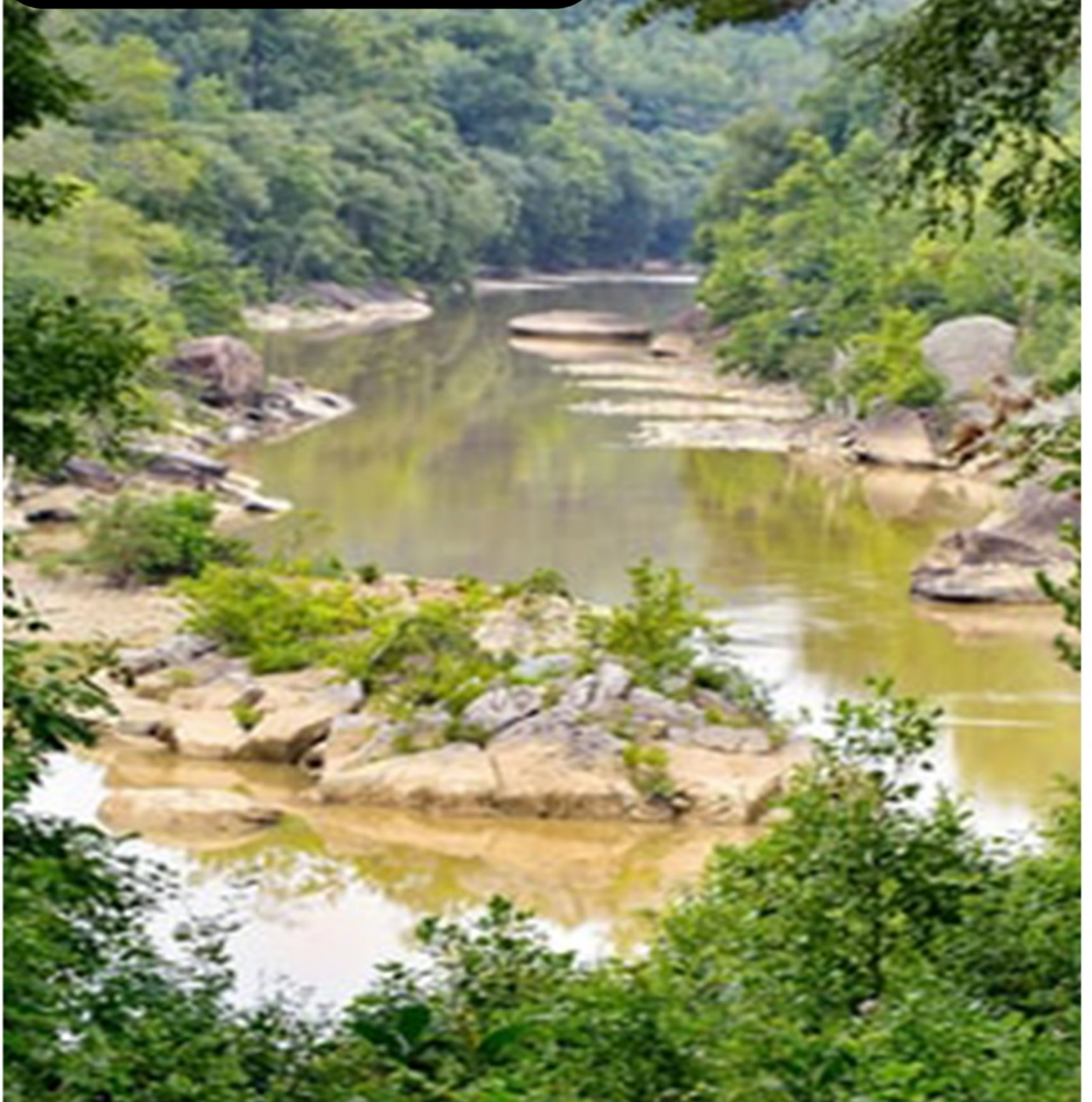


***JAMES LANE  
ALLEN***



***AFTERMATH***

**James Lane Allen**

# **Aftermath**

**Part second of "A Kentucky Cardinal"**

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# I

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I was happily at work this morning among my butterbeans—a vegetable of solid merit and of a far greater suitability to my palate than such bovine watery growths as the squash and the beet. Georgiana came to her garden window and stood watching me.

"You work those butterbeans as though you loved *them*," she said, scornfully.

"I do love them. I love all vines."

"Are you cultivating them as vines or as vegetables?"

"It makes no difference to nature."

"Do you expect me to be a vine when we are married?"

"I hope you'll not turn out a mere vegetable. How should you like to be my Virginia-creeper?"

"And what would you be?"

"Well, what would you like? A sort of honeysuckle frame?"

"Oh, anything! Only support me and give me plenty of room to bloom."

I do not always reply to Georgiana, though I always could if I chose.

Whenever I remain silent about anything she changes the subject.

"Did you know that Sylvia once wrote a poem on a vegetable?"

"I did not."

"You don't speak as though you cared."

"You must know how deeply interested I am."

"Then why don't you ask to see the poem?"

"Was it on butterbeans?"

"The idea! Sylvia has better taste."

"I suppose I'd better look into this poem."

"You are not to laugh at it!"

"I shall weep."

"No; you are not to weep. Promise."

"What am I to promise?"

"That you will read it unmoved."

"I do promise—solemnly, cheerfully."

"Then come and get it."

I went over and stood under the window. Georgiana soon returned and dropped down to me a piece of writing-paper.

"Sylvia wrote it before she began to think about the boys."

"It must be a very early poem."

"It is; and this is the only copy; please don't lose it."

"Then I think you ought to take it back at once. Let me beg of you not to risk it—" But she was gone; and I turned to my arbor and sat down to read Sylvia's poem, which I found to be inscribed to "The Potato," and to run as follows:

"What on this wide earth  
That is made or does by nature grow  
Is more homely yet more beautiful  
Than the useful Potato?"

"What would this world full of people do,  
Rich and poor, high and low,  
Were it not for this little-thought-of  
But very necessary Potato?

"True, 'tis homely to look on,  
Nothing pretty even in its blow,  
But it will bear acquaintance,  
This useful Potato.

"For when it is cooked and opened  
It's so white and mellow,  
You forget it ever was homely,  
This useful Potato.

"On the whole it is a very plain plant,  
Makes no conspicuous show,  
But the internal appearance is lovely  
Of the unostentatious Potato.

"On the land or on the sea,  
Wherever we may go,  
We are always glad to welcome  
The sound Potato."[\*]

[\*]The elder Miss Cobb was wrong in thinking this poem Sylvia's. It was extant at the time over the signature of another writer, whose authorship is not known to have been questioned. Miss Sylvia perhaps copied it out of admiration, or as a model for her own use.

**J.L.A.**

In the afternoon I was cutting stakes at the wood-pile for my butterbeans, and a bright idea struck me. During my

engagement to Georgiana I cannot always be darting in and out of Mrs. Cobb's front door like a swallow through a barn. Neither can I talk freely to Georgiana—with her up at the window and me down on the ground—when I wish to breathe into her ear the things that I must utter or die. Besides, the sewing-girl whom Georgiana has engaged is nearly always there. So that as I was in the act of trimming a long slender stick, it occurred to me that I might make use of this to elevate any little notes that I might wish to write over the garden fence up to Georgiana's window.

I was greatly taken with the thought, and, dropping my hand-axe, hurried into the house and wrote a note to her at once, which I thereupon tied to the end of the pole by a short string. But as I started for the garden this arrangement looked too much like catching Georgiana with a bait. Therefore, happening to remember, I stopped at my tool-house, where I keep a little of everything, and took from a peg a fine old specimen of a goldfinch's nest. This I fastened to the end of the pole, and hiding my note in it, now felt better satisfied. No one but Georgiana herself would ever be able to tell what it was that I might wish to lift up to her at any time; and in case of its being not a note, but a plum—a berry—a peach—it would be as safe as it was unseen. This old house of a pair of goldfinches would thus become the home of our fledgling hopes: every day a new brood of vows would take flight across its rim into our bosoms.

Watching my chance during the afternoon, when the sewing-girl was not there, I rushed over and pushed the stick up to the window.

"Georgiana," I called out, "feel in the nest!"

She hurried to the window with her sewing in her arms. The nest swayed to and fro on a level with her nose.

"What is it?" she cried, drawing back with extreme distaste.

"You feel in it!" I repeated.

"I don't wish to feel in it," she said. "Take it away!"

"There's a young dove in it," I persisted—"a young cooer."

"I don't wish any young cooers," she said, with a grimace.

Seeing that she was not of my mind, I added, pleadingly; "It's a note from me, Georgiana! This is going to be our little private post-office!" Georgiana sank back into her chair. She reappeared with the flush of apple-blossoms and her lashes wet with tears of laughter. But I do not think that she looked at me unkindly. "Our little private post-office," I persisted, confidingly.

"How many more little private things are we going to have?" she inquired, plaintively.

"I can't wait here forever," I said. "This is growing weather; I might sprout."

"A dry stick will not," said Georgiana, simply, and went back to her sewing.

I took the hint, and propped the pole against the house under the window. Later, when I took it down, my note was gone.

I have set the pole under Georgiana's window several times within the last two or three days, It looks like a little dip-net, high and dry in the air; but so far as I can see with