

**LIFE AT SHUT-IN  
VALLEY AND OTHER  
PACIFIC COAST TALES**

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Life at Shut-In Valley and Other Pacific Coast Tales by Clara Spalding Brown

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— BY —

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*To the Memory of  
My Brothers,  
Two of Nature's Noblemen.*

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

LIFE AT SHUT-IN VALLEY.

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SHUT-IN VALLEY lay bathed in sunlight—the bright, intense sunlight of California, that burns and crisps but does not wilt. Down the white, winding road a cloud of dust betokened the swift gallop of a stray horseman—some hunter, probably, or a visitor from the town, twenty-five miles away, to one of the ranches still farther up the mountains. No further sign of life was manifest, save in the doorway of a low, weather-beaten cabin at the extreme lower end of the valley, where a young woman in a plain calico gown stood, with her deep blue eyes wearily scanning the landscape. Not even the rude and uninviting setting of this living picture could detract from its plainly apparent claim to more than ordinary interest. It was a graceful figure and a high-bred face—delicate, sensitive, full of intelligence and refinement, of sadness, too, as its owner slowly turned away and disappeared from sight.

"What a life!" Marian Curtis was saying in her heart. "How can I endure it?"

Five years ago this solitary woman had been a



successful teacher in a bustling New England town. A town not too large for sociability and genuine enjoyment, but far removed from the dullness and utter isolation of her present life. She had been well known, respected, admired, had possessed the means to gratify, in moderation, her æsthetic tastes and to preserve an innate fastidiousness in regard to apparel and surroundings. When Harvey Curtis, a prepossessing young man, from what the Coolville people denominated "the West" (albeit the territory in this case was the State of Indiana), came to visit his sister in her Yankee home, and without much loss of time proceeded to court the pretty teacher who chanced to be boarding in the house, grumblings suppressed but heartfelt were heard among the eligible masculines native to the town. Miss Hunter had no fortune at her command, and even "worked for a living," yet more than one appreciative resident had been known to declare her "a prize for any man;" and it certainly was Miss Hunter's own fault that she had not, ere this, exchanged her school of forty roguish, restless pupils for one very different in requirements.

She abdicated at last, in favor of this black-browed, broad-shouldered man of thirty, whose strong will and passionate devotion swept away every objection. And for a year after their marriage she was

happy. Harvey was fond and proud of his gentle young wife, his means were amply sufficient for their wants, and the current of life flowed smoothly. If Marian at times noticed little things that jarred upon her finer nature, was now and then sensible of an indescribable disappointment, the momentary unpleasantness was so speedily followed by a contrasting impression that she gave no deep thought to the matter, but dismissed the subject with the reflection that men were not like women, and doubtless she had expected more than she had a right to enjoy.

Then Harvey took the California fever. At first Marian could not bear to hear him talk about it. She was one of those who can not lightly break home ties, and her heart fainted within her when she contemplated what her situation would be, far out on that strange Pacific Coast, where no dear familiar features, save her husband's, could ever meet her eye, and the great distance and expense of the journey across the continent would forbid visits to the "old folks at home." But Harvey had the fever hard and strong. His mind was really set upon going, and the winter being an unusually severe and changeable one, Marian, never very robust, began to cough.

"That settles it, Marian," declared Harvey; "you *must* go. I can't let consumption get hold of you." Even Marian's relatives thought it best, and the up-

shot of it all was that just as the June roses were bursting into bloom, and the bright-breasted robins were twittering gaily in the cherry trees, she bade a sorrowful good-bye to the old haunts she loved so well and turned her face as bravely as might be toward the setting sun. "I have my husband," she thought, trying to dispel the dark cloud over her spirits; "I can be happy with him anywhere. California must be a lovely place; we shall soon make friends, and all will be well."

In due time the tedious, though interesting journey was accomplished, and after a brief survey of San Francisco the couple took passage on the *Ancon* for San Diego. Here Harvey had an acquaintance, and the climate being recommended as just the thing for his wife, here he proposed to establish a home in some way to be determined upon after inspection of the place. He found the town smaller than he had anticipated, with no promising openings for business, San Diego being a sufferer at that time from the unkept promises of the Texas & Pacific Railway Company. Several months passed in looking over the ground, and finally Harvey determined to buy a ranch—the best thing he could do, people said. Plant it in wheat and he could have an income the very first year, besides raising his own garden stuff, having plenty of fresh eggs and milk and butter,