

sweets. "Stay close to me." John cleared his throat, "We would like to have a penny bag of mixed sweets." "Do you have the price of it? Lay your money down on the counter." John Hale laid down his penny. "Is that all you do?" "Watch now!" A fat grocerman looked down at the small boy; he had a twinkle in his eye. "First time you had some store bought sweets?" "Sure Mister." The grocerman filled the bag and said good day. A white lady wearing a wide brimmed hat gave her order to the grocer. "Now they have the price of candy" she mumbled. The store man shrugged, "I don't care who eats candy, just so they pay."

Samson Johnson held tightly to his prize bag. "Aren't you going to give me a piece?" John Hale looked at him. "Count for me how many are in the bag, Mr. Hale." They sat on the rock by the road and counted the candy. "I can't count that far like you can." "There are ten pieces." "I have eight brothers and sisters." John Hale took the boy's fingers in his hand and counted to eight. "Now see how many fingers you have left." "Two." "One for you and one for me." "Taste good, Samson?" "Good, Mr. John Hale."

John Hale sent Samson running to his shack outside of the town limits. The Knoxville weather promised to shine without any trace of rain. John Hale was in high spirits as he deposited one Samson Johnson, a youngun with the bag of penny candy clutched tightly in his hand. Samson waved back to John as he disappeared into his shack by the seat of his flour sack pants. A large Mama with a willow stick dragged him in. John shouted from the fence, "He won the candy fair and square." Whatever the consequences, Samson had a bag of candy to sooth his willowed bottom.

John looked around the corner to see if Fannie Gray had any more chores to do outside. A curtain moved slightly. Fannie Gray peeked a little at the gawking John Hale. She went back to her candle making and smiled. "Just a big handsome coal miner, he is!"

The walk to the fruit orchard was slow and easy. The warm sand of the road was soft between his toes. He dawdled and acted as if he had spring fever. John reached up and picked a flower bud. He tossed it around in his hand. Such a lovely face. Everywhere he seemed to see her image; in the trees and flowers, the horizon, and in the still not dried up water puddle.

John Hale finished his first day of fruit picking and walked to Miss Gray's farm to see if he could secure a good meal. A couple of coins jingled in his pocket; they clanked against his leg. A bunch of wild flowers stuck out of the tie holding up his pants. He reached the fence and called out, "Can you spare a meal for a hungry fruit picker? Sure, I will pay for it." "No need, come on in." John Hale stepped over the wooden stoop in the doorway and looked around the plain, but clean room. Fannie Gray was pleased, but she said nothing. "You can wash in the back at the pump." The meal was filling

to the stomach, and pleasing enough for any hungry man. "Might I see you again, Miss Gray?" "If it be alright with God Almighty, and I find you're good in your soul." "The best intentions are within me, Miss Gray."

John Hale stayed the summer in Knoxville, Tennessee and courted Miss Gray. On an August afternoon, when the heat of the day had moderated and the air was cool and pleasant, Mr. John Hale took for himself a helpmate, Miss Fannie Gray, in the year of our Lord 1882.

Following the big coal miner around from job to job had it's good and bad effects on married life. The household things had to be constantly packed up. What John couldn't carry on his back, they borrowed a mule for a few miles until they found the next miner's living quarters. Sometimes the bed was a bare floor with straw for a mattress. What they lacked in material comfort, they made up in love for one another.

Fannie Hale recalled the day: "I sent John to work in the mines in Victoria, Tennessee. The winds were blowing more than usual that day. Sort of spooky it was; like a wind of a bad omen. I felt sick in the stomach, and I laid down on the mattress so I could see the wind blowing from a large hole in the wallboard. Every time I tried to get up I just wanted to go back to sleep. John came home, and his dinner was not on the table. I was still asleep. "I am sorry", I said, and I ran to empty my stomach. John laid me down and put a coverlet over me. John scratched his head. "I am not much for women's sickness, but I do remember some women on the plantation. "Mama Grady will help you Fannie. Seems nature takes over a lot of it." I had fallen asleep again.

John sat and watched me sleeping. He got some fresh goat's milk. "You will need it. We're going to have a son or daughter, or both." I opened my eyes. "One is enough for now." John held me close. "I just hope you don't sleep so much; a man can get mighty hungry in nine months."

Claude Hale was born in 1884. "He has my big eyes and a strong chin." said the pleased Fannie Gray.

A beautiful daughter, Annie Hale, came along, a bit smaller than Claude, but with just as lusty a cry. Melinda joined her sister in the Hale household.

John put Claude on his shoulders, and the fat little legs dangled. He wiggled his toes and whacked his horsey daddy to go faster. Fannie made Claude a flannel shirt with a pair of pants with easy buttons in the back. He always called anyway from the outhouse, "Can't reached, come and unbutton me."

John Hale had his family now. They would go west with him, the big daddy coal miner.