

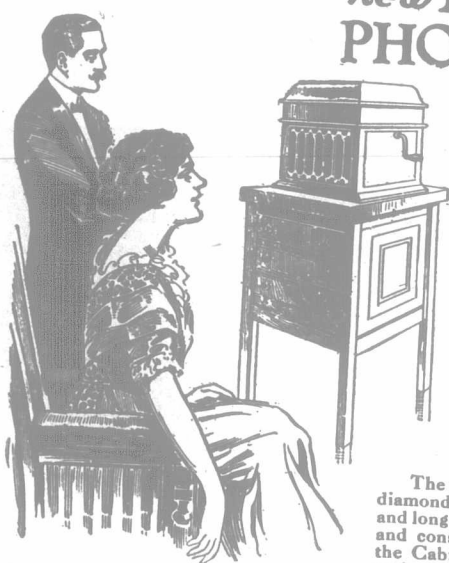
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short cut from the station to where her father lay. Her face was drawn; her eyes bloodshot from restrained tears—all the color gone from her cheeks.

"You bring Aunt Felicia, Uncle Peter, and the bags;—I will go ahead," she said, tying her veil so as to shield her face. "No, I won't wait for anything."

News of Ruth's expected arrival had reached the village, and the crowd at the station had increased. On its inner circle, close to a gate leading from the platform, stood a young man in a slouch hat, with his left wrist bandaged. The arm had hung in a sling until the train rolled in, then the silk support had been slipped and hidden in his pocket.

Under the slouch hat, the white edge of a bandage was visible which the wearer vainly tried to conceal by pulling the hat further on his head.—this subterfuge also concealed a dark scar on his temple. Whenever the young man pressed closer to the gate, the crowd would fall back as if to give him room. Now and then one would come up, grab his well hand and pat his shoulder approvingly. He seemed to be as much an object of interest as the daughter of the injured boss.

When Ruth gained the gate the wounded man laid his fingers on her gloved wrist. The girl started back, peered into his face, and uttered a cry of relief.

"Mr. Breen!" For one wild moment a spirit of overwhelming joy welled up in her heart and shone out of her eyes. Thank God he was not dead!

"Yes, Miss Ruth,—what is left of me. I wanted to see you as soon as you reached here. You must not be alarmed about your father." The voice did not sound like Jack's.

"Is he worse? Tell me quick!" she exclaimed, the old fear confronting her.

"No. He is all right," he wheezed, "and is going to get well. His left arm is broken and his head badly cut, but he is out of danger. The doctor told me so an hour ago."

"And you?" she pleaded, clinging to his proffered hand.

"Oh! I am all right, too. The smoke got into my throat so I croak, but that is nothing. Why, Mr. Grayson,—and Miss Felicia! I am so glad, Miss Ruth, that you did not have to come alone! This way, everybody."

Without other words they hurried into the carriage, driving like mad for the cottage, a mile away; all the worn look gone from Ruth's face.

"And you are not hurt my boy?" asked Peter in a trembling voice—Jack's well hand in his own.

"No, only a few scratches, sir, that's all. Bolton's hand's in a bad way, though; lose two of his fingers, I'm afraid."

"And how did you escape?"

"I don't know. I got out the best way I could. First thing I knew I was lying on the grass and some one was pouring water over my head; then they got me home and put me to bed."

"And MacFarlane?"

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"Oh, he came along with me. I had to help him some."

Peter heaved a sigh of relief, then he asked:

"How did it happen?"

"Nobody knows. One of the shanty men might have dropped a box of fulminates. Poor fellow,—he never knew; they could find nothing of him," Jack whispered behind his hand so Ruth would not hear.

"But when did you get out of bed?" continued Peter. He was less anxious now.

Jack looked at Ruth and again lowered his voice; the sound of the carriage preventing its hoarse notes from reaching her ears.

"About half an hour ago, sir; they don't know I have gone, but I didn't want anybody to frighten Miss Ruth. I don't look so bad, do I? I fixed myself up as well as I could. I have got Bolton's hat; I couldn't get mine over the bandages. My wrist is the worst—sprained badly, the doctor says."

If Ruth heard she made no answer, nor did she speak during the ride. Now and then she would gaze out of the window and once her fingers lightened on Miss Felicia's arm as she passed in full view of the "hill" with the gaping mouth of the tunnel beyond. Miss Felicia was occupied in watching Jack. She saw what neither Peter nor Ruth had seen—that the boy was suffering intensely from hidden wounds and that the strain was so great he was verging

on a collapse. No telling what these foolish Southerners will do, she said to herself, when a woman is to be looked after,—but she said nothing of all this to Ruth.

When the carriage stopped and Ruth with a spring leaped from her seat and bounded upstairs to her father's bedside, Miss Felicia holding Jack's hand, her eyes reading the boy's face, turned and said to Peter:

"Now you take him home where he belongs and put him to bed; and don't you let him get up until I see him. No—" she continued in a more decided tone, in answer to Jack's protest—"I won't have it. You go to bed just as I tell you—you can hardly stand now."

"Perhaps I had better, Miss Felicia. I am a little shaky," replied Jack, in a faint voice, and the carriage kept on its way to Mrs. Hick's leaving the good lady on MacFarlane's porch.

MacFarlane was asleep when Ruth, trembling with excitement, reached the house. Outside the sick room, lighted by a single taper, she met the nurse whose few hurried words, spoken with authority, calmed her, as Jack had been unable to do, and reassured her mind. "Compound fracture of the right arm, Miss," she whispered, "and badly bruised about the head, as they all were. Poor Mr. Breen was the worst."

Ruth looked at her in astonishment. That was why he had not lifted his hat, she thought to herself, as she tiptoed into the sick room and sank to her knees beside her father's bed.