

happy little dinner party it seemed. Perhaps the young doctor's assistant was the least happy of them all, and this was strange. It was not every day that he had invitations to dinner at the Hartleys, who were one of the best families in the small village of Althorpe, and the adjoining country. But Jack Duff had, if not a previous engagement, at least somewhere, where he would be expected that evening, and where he would fain be. However, neither his politeness nor his reason would let him refuse. And his politeness was sufficient to enable him to hide his disappointment, for, like charity, it can cover a multitude of sins. He was a bright, clever-looking young fellow, and, if not good-looking, his fair hair and clear eyes spoke of Saxon courage and honesty. He spoke but little, but when he did, it was shrewdly to the point.

Mark Hilyard's eyes rested approvingly on the lad, for he was little more, once or twice. "I did not expect to find you going to dinner," he said once. "I thought you would nearly have finished. I knew I was taking a privilege that only an old friend could take in coming so late. Of course, it was your accident that kept you so late, Mrs. Hartley."

"Yes; I can't think how I could have been so foolish. My foot slipped, and I fell on my hand somehow, and felt as if I had broken all my sinews. By the same token it does not feel so wonderfully comfortable just now. What it would be without Mr. Duff's bandage and cold arnica I cannot think."

"It will take the pain out of it before long, I hope, Mrs. Hartley. It is not the worst kind of sprain."

"Thank you; it does not feel so very bad. By the way, Mr. Hilyard, our clock has stopped, I see. Do you know what the time is?"

"Mr. Hilyard pulled out his watch. 'A quarter to nine,' he said as he looked at it.

"Hello! Hilyard, where did you get your watch?" Mr. Hartley cried, as his eyes fell on it. "Why it is a counterpart of an old heirloom of a one I have."

Hilyard detached his and handed it to his host. "That is curious," he said. "I thought mine was rather unique in size, anyway, if not in beauty."

Hartley rang the bell. "Maria," he said, when the maid appeared, "bring me an old silver watch you will see in the left hand drawer of the dressing-table. 'I really must compare them—the likeness is so odd,' he went on, turning to Hilyard again. "There it is. There, see, Hilyard; I thought I was not mistaken. They are almost exactly the same size, and, by George, the same tracing on the outside. How very odd. See, Meg, you could hardly tell which belonged to the old Lieutenant and which was Hilyard's. Upon my honour, it is odd."

"Is it an heirloom, did you say, Mr. Hartley?" Duff said, looking curiously at the old silver turnip.

"Now, Mr. Duff, you will set him going with one of his old, old yarns. Now, Henry, I am an invalid, and am going to be indulged. I will not be banished while you enjoy your cigars. You must let me stay with you, will you not? Or let us go into the smoking room? It is so lonely in the drawing-room, all by myself!"

"On one condition, then, Meg—that you let me spin all the yarns I like. Remember you have no right to interfere there."

"I will not interfere, Harry. I will sit still and laugh at you as long as you like. Come now. I really feel as if I ought to be lame with my right arm in a sling. Mr. Hilyard, may I take your arm?"

"Duff," Mr. Hartley said, "will you take a cigar?"

"Thank you, Mr. Hartley, I do not smoke."

Again Hilyard's eyes glanced approvingly at the young fellow. "A nice young fellow, that Duff," he murmured to Mrs. Hartley, who, enthroned in a crimson cushioned chair, was watching her husband light his own cigar, with amused eyes.

"What in my young days would have been called a proper fellow. I should like to do him a good turn. What is he? An incipient sawbones? Well, I do not feel called upon to sacrifice my bodily health for him. But I will keep my weather eye open."

"Ah! Mr. Hilyard, you always feel a righteous approval for anyone who does not give the same blind allegiance to my Lady Nicotine as yourself. When do you intend to light your pipe. You know how thoroughly I enjoy the incense you burn at her shrine even when I am consumed myself with jealousy."

"With your permission, then, madam," and old Mark Hilyard bowed in his courtly way.

"Harry, do you not see Mr. Duff is longing to hear the yarn I warned him of, in spite of the warning."

In fact, Jack was still handling the old timepiece with curious fingers.

"Ah! yes. Well, it has been through a few adventures, that old watch. It belonged to a great uncle of mine, a naval lieutenant. It sounds as if he were old, but he wasn't when that watch was the death of him, for they say it was. He went overboard in the Bay of Biscay—and it sank him. At any rate he went down and never came up alive, and it anchored him where he lay. Afterwards it was fished up through the merest accident, and he came too. They could not think what they could have got hold of—it was so heavy. When they saw it, they did not wonder. It was not my great uncle that weighed the most. They found the key and wound it up, and it was still going when it came into my possession. I am proud of the old fellow. It was all I ever got from my great uncle, who spent his money himself. But I never take this chap on any voyages."

"My husband's geography is a trifle mixed, Mr. Duff. It was in the river Thames, I believe, that it proved itself as an anchor worth its weight in iron. Except for that ship the tale is true, and for that reason famous for 'iniquity'—and anti-quity amongst our friends."

"Meg, Meg, I shall certainly have to relegate you to the drawing-room, if you are so fearless and impudent in these hallowed precincts. Really, my dear, you mustn't."

"You would think, Mr. Duff, that he was in the habit of sending me where he would," Mrs. Hartley said sweetly; "but I who know 'his tricks and his manners' assure you that he is shaking in his shoes. You have not seen the inscription on the inside of the watch yet? Let me open the case and show you it. Ah!" with a quick breath, "I forgot my wrist. No, you must open it yourself. There it is:

"Presented to Lieutenant Hartley this 25th day of June, 1807, as a token of the life-long gratitude and admiration that

the passengers and crew of the Dolphin will ever feel for one who risked his life so nobly and successfully to save theirs."

"Poor fellow, it was in at his own death after all. It is said he was young, brave and handsome."

"The watch must be very precious to you. It is a curiosity in any case, and I am very fond of old curiosities myself. May I see when it was made? Ah! as I thought at the end of the 18th century. It is a very old specimen."

"Mr. Hilyard, may I see your watch again; Hilyard was talking politics rather eagerly with Mr. Hartley, but he took out the watch which he had slipped into his pocket, chain and all, it being too big for his watch pocket, and received it again almost without noticing that he did so. Jack Duff and Mr. Hartley were gradually drawn in to the discussion, and when Jack took his leave an hour later he was fain to confess he had rather enjoyed his evening though the disappointment of not being able to go to Reed-fen that night was still there. And Essie would be so sorry he knew. Dear little Essie, who was Esther, or Miss Reed, to every one but him. He was glad his road led him past Reed-fen, though the windows were dark, and it was hard to think he had not spent the long cool twilight there. And so home to his small room where Jack lived alone, having been brought up by an uncle who had died when he was a boy of nineteen, and where he had so often chafed at the smallest of things in general before he had found out how dearly he loved Esther Reed, when the world had suddenly seemed very bright and big, only over-topped by himself, who was ready to conquer and overcome that and anything else for Essie and fame. They had been engaged six months now and Jack had often talked of the time when he should get his diploma and come back to Althorpe to take her to some brilliant future. And yet they talked practically too. Essie was young but she had lived with her grandmother ever since she could remember, and taken care of her and the house and looked after Jane, the servant, and had many little household cares in her merry young life that seemed made to sail in smooth waters even through the usually troubled course of true love. Grandmamma sanctioned the engagement, and Jack and she were so prettily loving and practical as a pair of young birds. Just now they grudged every moment they spent apart, for only next month Jack was going up to London to study and pass his examinations and it would be a long time before they saw each other again. It was with rather a sore heart that Essie watched in vain for her young lover's coming that night, and at last went her rounds, lamp in hand to look doors and windows as was her custom. Grandmamma looked gravely up over her spectacles as Essie kissed her good-night with just a touch of indignation in her clear eyes.

"Esther, Esther," she said gently, "you must not be so impatient, childie. Be sure he has had some good reason for not coming. He did not promise?"

"Grandma! He would not break his promise to me."

"Run away to bed then darling and have bright eyes for Jack to-morrow. Don't try to make little injuries out of nothing or real troubles will come."

"I'll give him a good scolding, though," Essie said to herself, "being a little wilful he does deserve it. It is very naughty of him; and then if he likes to make it up