

washing up the tea-things, and was moving about the kitchen singing "Rock of Ages," while her mother kept up a somewhat acrimonious monologue on the cussedness of having darters who didn't know their own minds and gave smart fellows the shake just because o' some fallal nonsense, for Mrs. Dubleek was a strong partizan of Peter.

Wishing to avoid a discussion, Miss Dubleek, whose hymn-singing always indicated or induced a condition of mild melancholy, presently retired to her own chamber under the pretence of tidying it. She did not require a light, she said, the reflection from the kitchen being sufficient.

Partly through habit, she went directly to her window and looked out upon the young night—in the direction of Jaggersville. After a while a dull spark began to glow from what she knew must be the upper story of the station-house. It flashed brilliantly a few seconds, was obscured suddenly, and went out apparently to shine more brightly a moment later. Miss Dubleek caught herself speculating on its significance, and then fiercely checking the thought, pulled down the blind. This reduced the room to darkness, since, inconsequently enough, she had shut the door on entering, and lest she should sprain her ankle by a fall over any of the furniture, as she opportunely remembered her Aunt

had succumbed to the deadly faintness creeping on him from loss of blood, was lying senseless by his window. Miss Dubleek's feelings toward him underwent an immediate change, the O'Grady episode receding to proper perspective, or, more properly, to vanishing-point. The girl was, she decided, a low-down flirt, unfit for and undeserving of serious consideration; and in a word, Peter was restored to his pedestal.

In a moment Sally reached the kitchen. "Mother, where's Seth?" she asked, imperiously.

"Don't know," drawled Mrs. Dubleek, who still felt a little huffed by her daughter's withdrawal. "Spects he's not started from Tree Fork yet," a neighboring village whither her son had gone on business earlier in the evening. Sally looked up at the clock. God! It was almost ten minutes to nine!

"Where's the men?" she cried desperately.

"Pop Hopkins is at Arrowfoot," her mother deliberately responded, "an' Josh is at Jaggersville by now, huntin' after that Kellowney gal, I dessay. You can't get much good o' a man like that; she refused him three times I hear, an' there he is follerin' her still! He ain't like others with fixed salaries as suffers in silence."

"Mother, for Heaven's sake stop. There's something awful goin' to happen," panted Sally. "Jaggersville station's held up an' they're on to wreck a gold train comin' Denver way. Peter's just signalled me. Oh, mother! Couldn't I take the mule an' ride to Jaggersville?"

"Yes, 'n crack yer neck before you were half way, or get held up by the road agents. Not if I know it!" the older woman replied, decisively. "You bet this is a big job, an' they're watchin' the roads, though what's possessed the Grand National to tote the gold around her is beyond me."

The girl wrung her hands. "Let's go out 'n have a look round, anyway," pursued the other; "perhaps someone 'ud be passin' along the road or somethin'."

Sally flung the door open, and both women hastily picked their way across the clearing in the immediate vicinity of the house, until further progress was arrested by a breast-high fence, a vantage point from which the shingle roofs of Jaggersville could be clearly seen by day. Now all this was blotted out, and only a red light, standing high against the inky background, indicated the position of the station. Instinctively Mrs. Dubleek shaded her eyes as she looked.

"Ah, they've got everything reg'lar," she observed, as a second light showed suddenly farther up, towards the distance signal. "This ain't no harum-scarum job, Sally, it's a deep game, an' the chaps who're in it are goin' nap for all they're worth!"

"Oh, God, what shall we do?" moaned the agonized girl.

"Pretty much nothing," replied the matron by her side. "Ah, the cunnin' devils," she continued as the two lights changed color, "there's the 'clear' signal, Sal. I ought to know—many's the time I've watched it from here. It's a reg'lar lure, my gal."

"Oh, but could nothing be done?" "Well, we ain't birds, girlie," replied the mother softly, "but if we were, I guess I'd fly across an' put that distance signal out: 'twould be the best thing for the train."

Sally had drawn herself up again and was putting her hair behind her ears—"Put the light out?" she echoed.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Dubleek; "'twould be a kind of warnin' that all wasn't right, though, of course, the guard should be on the jump, as this one's bound to be."

Sally was silent. "Your father could do it from this spot—it ain't quite three-quarters of a mile—with his Winchester; I've seen him do as fly things," pursued the other, placidly.

Sally clapped her hands, and darted back into the house. Presently she was in Seth's room, holding aloft a



"SHE BROUGHT HER OWN LAMP TO THE WINDOW."

Martha had done under similar circumstances six years before, she lit her lamp. The tidying of the trim little apartment did not progress very rapidly; indeed, it got no farther than taking the hand-glass from under the hair-brush. Observing a curl was out of place, she re-arranged it, and then fell to studying her own lovely face in the mirror. Involuntarily she smiled back at the coquettish reflection, and nodding her dainty head, stole to the window, lifting the blind cautiously once more.

Yes, there was the light still intermittently flashing, and evidently designed to attract her attention.

At first it seemed a meaningless jumble, but she was at last able to disentangle one word that looked like "help." Trying to smile, she openly brought her own lamp to the window and signalled: "What's up?" Again the word "help" was repeated, and again the light sank. Her cheeks white as the sheets of the bed behind her, she rushed to a drawer where she kept the code which she luckily had not destroyed, and returned to the window. The other light was there flashing its fateful message. Concentrating every energy of her soul upon the work, she at last grasped its tenor—"Wreckers—here—prisoner—stop Denver nine gold express," a very creditable performance, since the code was not designed for public service.

She could hardly trust her eyes. "Repeat," she signalled mechanically. As if in answer the far-off flame flared up brightly an instant, and then smouldered down to a flickering gleam that presently died, nor did it shine again, for Mr. Jackson, who

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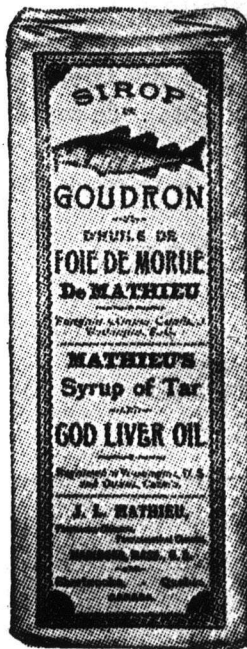
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