

MARK AND TOTTY'S WONDERFUL ESCAPE.

It was Saturday afternoon! The mid-summer sunlight lay warm and bright on the green New England hills, and crept in waves of glimmering gold over the white, sanded floor of Deborah Hunter's tidy kitchen.

The father and mother hastened up. There, in the yielding earth, were little footprints, the unmistakable impress of Totty's chubby shoes, and broken flowers, and presently, away out upon the yellow, angry waters of the pond, they espied Mark's little cap.

As she recognised it the poor mother uttered a piteous cry. "Oh, my precious babies! They are gone—they are drowned!"

"Yes," replied the father hoarsely, "they are gone! I must get help and drag the pond. My poor wife, you had better come home."

But Deborah shook her head, and crouched down upon the shore of the yellow pond. And there she sat, with the pitiless storm beating on her unsheltered head, waiting and watching in the very patience of despair.

Her husband went for help, and his neighbors responded to his call. They hurried to the spot by scores, and the pond was dragged, but the bodies of the children could not be found.

The storm had spent its fury, the thunders rattled far away in the distance, and through the rifts in the black clouds a full summer moon poured down its silver light.

Debbie and her neighbors followed through the dripping moonlit forest. As they neared the spot the dog heard them coming, and the howl changed into a joyful bark.

There they were, side by side on the reeking moss, little Totty fast asleep, with her curly head pillowed on Mark's arm.

The moment he caught sight of his mother, he burst into tears. "Poor mother," he cried out, "I was a naughty boy to make you suffer so; but I didn't mean to do it."

"What can make them stay so?" she thought, looking out again, and finding the sky well-nigh overcast, and the great black thunder-cloud rolling rapidly up before the rising wind.

The poor mother, now thoroughly frightened, caught up a shawl, and throwing it over her head, closed the door and ran down toward the wood, calling her children as she ran.

She searched and called in vain; they were nowhere to be seen, and, half frantic with anxiety, she ran back again and met her husband just returned from his labor at the door.

"Oh, Nathan," she cried, "the children are gone—lost in the wood. What shall we do?"

He turned without a word to the huge Newfoundland dog that stood behind him.

"Gyp," he said, "the children are gone; come, we must find them!"

And Gyp trotted soberly after him, followed by the poor, distracted mother. As they reached the wood the storm broke upon them in all its fury.

The clouds rolled up in great masses, blotting out the waning daylight, and the lightning blazed and flamed in every direction, while the thunder rattled from hill to hill, and the winds tore and shrieked amid the trees like a pack of demons.

"Oh, my children!" she cried; "my poor little Totty, what will become of her?"

The father hurried on, followed by Gyp, on and on, till they were in the very heart of the wood. But no trace of the children appeared.

"Gyp," said the father, turning to his dog again, "can't you find the children? Come, good dog, try!"

"And Gyp, with his nose to the ground, went off like an arrow. The parents followed, heedless of the pelting storm. On and on, into the heart of the wood and round to the shore of the pond!

There the poor fellow stopped, with a peculiar, mournful cry. The father and mother hastened up. There, in the yielding earth, were little footprints, the unmistakable impress of Totty's chubby shoes, and broken flowers, and presently, away out upon the yellow, angry waters of the pond, they espied Mark's little cap.

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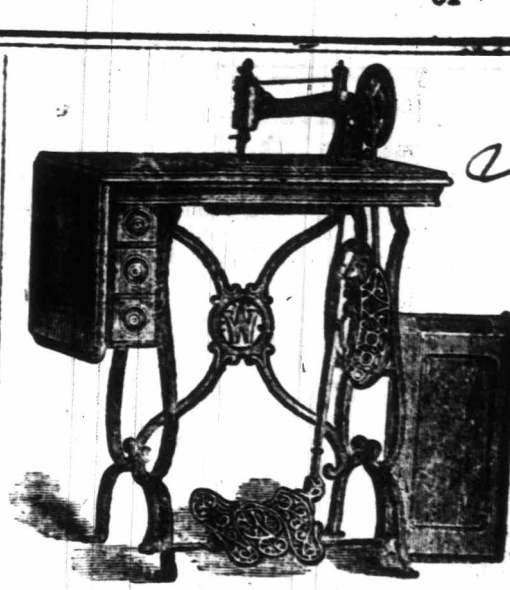
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