

as an old lady than she had been as a young one, and the happier she grew the better she looked, like all women, young or old. She bustled about, with neat, housewifely fussiness. She knew that her husband thanked heaven for her New England home-craft—none of your “easy” Southern housekeeping for Levi Matthews. What would have become of the man?

It was quarter-past nine. Mrs. Matthews’ head grew a little muddled from excitement. She began again at the top of her voice:

“How firm a foun-da-tion, ye sa-aints of the Lo-ord!
Is laid for your fa-aith in an ex-cel-lent home!”

The clock, wedged between the concordance and the dictionary, struck half-past nine. Mrs. Matthews stopped singing. She went to the window. The coffee was boiling over. The corn-cake was done brown. She pulled aside the curtain uneasily. The pine-wood fire flared, and blinded her with a great outburst of light. She could see nothing without, and stood for a moment dazzled. Then she began to look intently, and so accustomed her eyes to the masses of shadow and the lines of form outside. The road wound away abruptly, lost in the darkness like a river dashed into the sea. The cornstalks closed over it, stark and sear; she opened the window a little and heard them rustle, as if they were discussing something in whispers. Above the corn shot the gaunt arm of a prickly locust, burned and bare. The outlines of the mountain were invisible. The valley was sunk in the night. Nothing else was to be seen. She leaned, listening for the sedate hoofs of old Hezekiah, or the lame rumble of the blue waggon wheels. A silence that was indescribably appalling settled about the place. Nothing broke it. Even the cornstalks stopped. After a significant pause they began again; they seemed to raise their voices in agitation.

“What in the world are they talkin’ about?” she said impatiently. She shut the window, and came back into the middle of the room. The corn-cake was burning. The coffee must be set off. The supper would be spoiled. She looked at the Methodist clock. Mr. Cruden and the Rev. John Wesley seemed to exchange glances over its head, and ‘hers.’ It lacked seven minutes of ten.

“But it isn’t time to worry yet!”

The woman and the clock faced each other. She sat down before it. What was the use in freezing at the window, to hear the talking corn? She and the clock would have it out. She crossed her work-worn hands upon her chocolate calico lap and looked the thing in the eye.

Five minutes before ten—three—two. Ten o’clock.

“But, oh, not quite time to worry yet!” Ten minutes past. A quarter past. Twenty minutes. The woman and the clock eyed each other like duelists. Twenty-five minutes past ten.