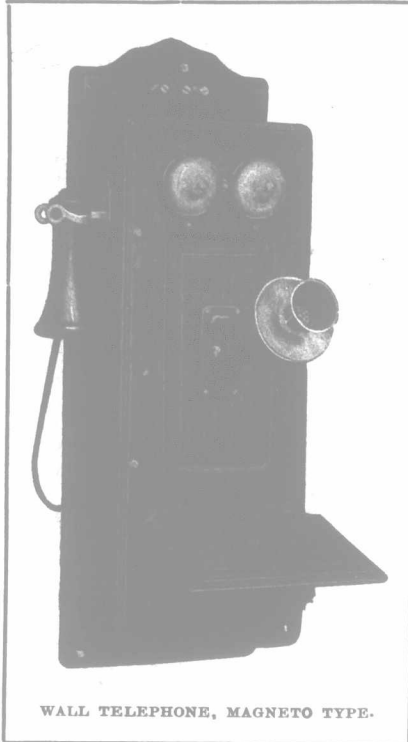


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me. But my eyes met hers unflinchingly, for now I had told her the truth.

"Indeed, mother, I did not promise to let him come with me," I said, and then I told her all the story.

"I believe ye, Peggie," she said, when I had finished, "fer never onst, even when ye were a little girl, did ye lie to me. I s'pose it seemed natural, as ye say, fer ye were great friends when ye were little, 'n' that was my fault, not yours. I s'pose, too, when ye tried to go back, that he forced himself on ye, fer that's the rough, go-ahead way o' the Carmichaels, 'n' Dick's gettin' every day to be more a chip o' the old block, so they say. But look ye here, Peggie"—with the hard, strained voice returning—"if ye care anything about yer old mother and the memory o' yer father, ye'll keep clear, from this day out, from Dick Carmichael."

"I will have nothing to do with him. Indeed I will not talk with him again," I said, ready to promise anything in the depth of my contrition, for, whatever Dick might be, would it not be ill-fitting enough for me to have aught more to say to the son of the man who had wrought us such ill, and who had, perhaps, as my mother believed, been the cause, if the indirect cause, of my poor father's tragic death?

My mother put her hand on my hair and stroked it gently.

"Ye're a good girl, Peggie," she said, "if ye weren't ye wouldn't ha' fretted so. . . . Well, well, after all no harm's done, 'n' if Dick carried ye over the muddy plowin', why it saved yer boots, fer ye couldn't ha' picked your steps goin' through the bush-road in the dark; 'n' it 'ud ha' been a pity to ha' spoiled them nice new ones. I know ye'll keep yer promise, Peggie. Ye're a good girl, 'n' ye've been a great help to me on the farm."

So the interview passed over less disastrously than I had anticipated, and when I arose and began to go about my daily duties, it was almost joyfully. Now that my promise had been again given, I would keep it. From this time henceforth I would have nothing whatever to do with Dick Carmichael, and would be able to look my mother in the face without shame. So I sang, free as a bird in the glad sense of emancipation that comes of feeling that one has made a good resolution and cut off a bond that would fetter.

But alas for human nature! When the strenuous work of the morning was over, and I had time to sit and think over my sewing, I found myself living over and over again the event of the preceding night, walking with Dick up the calm, moonlit road, climbing the fence with him, listening to his low, deep voice, plunging again into the lake of mist with his arms bearing me high and dry above the muddy, uneven ground.

Again and again, with the consciousness of doing wrong by even permitting myself to think, and that so pleasantly, of that quiet walk with Dick, I beat away the memory of it, and forced my thoughts upon something else. And at every struggle old Chris's maxims would ring in my ears: "It's what's behind the actions 'n' the words that counts most—fer yerself. If ye think what's

CHAPTER XII.

A Discovery.

Upon the following morning I set out, as I so often did, upon horseback, to make a tour of the farm, this to be a final one, to see that all was in good order before winter.

As I rode slowly along, nearer and nearer to Carmichael's farm, I was annoyed to find that the consciousness of Dick and the Carmichaels was again uppermost. Instead of attending to my own fields, I found myself looking across at Carmichael's, noting the improvements, and marking how much fall plowing had been done—so many, many furrows, straight and even, as only Dick could

plow; and, instead of hurrying to get through and to my sewing, I was presently looking idly at the trees about the Carmichael home, and thinking of how sweet and kind Mrs. Carmichael was, and wondering whether she were as frail that fall as usual.

As I rode nearer to the back barn, however, these wonderings were arrested by the sound of a loud, angry voice, Carmichael's voice. He was evidently in a fury with someone. It could scarcely be with Dick, for, in all my knowledge of them, I had never heard of his being in a real passion with Dick. . . . Yet, too, after Dick's determination to ask an explanation, who knew what might happen!

With sinking heart I rode on a few paces further, then my worst fears were realized, for, standing out in the barnyard with his father, I could see Dick, with both hands in his pockets, evidently listening, quite quietly, while his father stormed.

I urged my horse on, for what they might have to say was no affair of mine, and the morning air was still; yet I hoped the man of thunder would not be too hard on Dick, poor Dick, who had been so faithful during all those years, and whose heart had been so wrung because of the one who now, it seemed, was daring to upbraid him.

How could he fault Dick—I thought, savagely—he who had done so much evil, and who, worse than all, had tried to cover up his misdeeds, and had fancied himself successful! How strange it was that all the other neighbors had little but good to say of Henry Carmichael! . . . And yet, it had been my father only whom he had hated! And he had had his revenge!

At the old home spot I drew rein and got off. It had been my mother's fancy to have it left untouched, except to cut out the weeds, and so, through all these years, the phlox, and sunflowers, and the meadow-sweet, had grown up and blossomed, and the lilac bushes and snowdrops had spread into great masses. Under the leafless cherry trees the grass was quite long and dry, so I lay down there to think.

This morning I did a sort of fierce penance in looking at the charred heap of stones piled up where the house had been, and at the depression beyond which marked the site of the old barn; one by one I called up the details of that night before me, and held them there, as one presses on an aching tooth. Above all did I dwell on that short and fatal interview between my father and Carmichael, and was almost glad when I found the old resentment against my father's enemy, which had sometimes slept, rising bitter as ever in my heart. I must never see more of Dick Carmichael. I had promised; and it was well that every reason for our utter separation should be vividly before me.

It was a last act of renunciation that I was performing there in the forsaken garden, with the dry grasses shaking about me, and the crisp, brown lilac leaves rustling like paper on the lilac bushes; and, resolute once more, I got up and led Prince out through the gateway.

As I turned to shut the gate I heard a step on the hard road, and, looking up, saw the last one whom I had wished to meet—Dick Carmichael—striding toward me with a grip in his hand.

Before I could mount, he was close to me.

"Peggie? Again?" he said, with a grim smile. "At least I am not sorry to have the opportunity of saying good-bye."

"You—you are going away?" I said.

"Yes," he said, then stood for a moment looking very far away, with serious eyes, while I, my brain in a whirl, stood clinging to my horse's mane, and wondering if Carmichael's rage had driven Dick away.

Something pitiable about me must have touched him, for, in a moment, when he looked at me again, his