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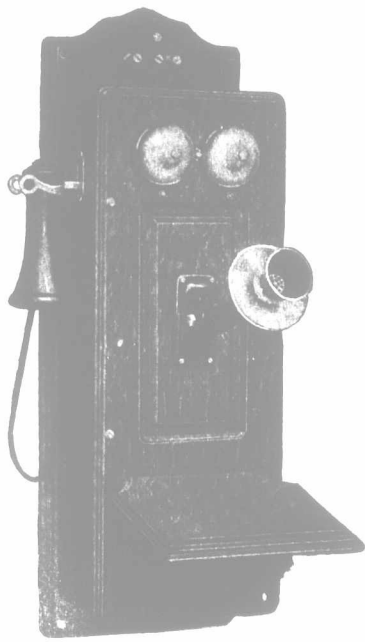
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to think of anything save of screening Gay, and too little accustomed to the direction of affairs to be able to offer a single definite suggestion. "Isn't Choddy here?" I asked, thinking that the stout lad of fifteen might be well able to take a message to Saintsbury. "Couldn't he go on horseback?"

"Why, now, yes," she said, "I never thought o' that. He's not used to ridin' after dark, but he knows the road to Saintsbury, 'n' the skiff o' snow makes it a little light. . . . Choddy dear," going to the door, "Gay's home, over at Mrs. Might's. Git Jerry out o' the stable 'n' find yer father. Quite like ye'll meet him. Tell him Gay's home, jist; 'n' be sure 'n' put on yer overcoat."

"Huh! Gay over again!" scoffed Choddy, who had evidently been his mother's confidant, "Makin' a racket fer nothin'! If she'd given me that note, instead o' that softy of a Toddy, I'd have smelled a rat, I bet ye, 'n' all this fuss 'ud been saved!" "You would, eh?" growled Toddy. "Yes, you'd ha' been a sneak 'n' looked in!"

"Wouldn't, neither! You better shut up!" retorted Choddy, drawing on his boots, while Mrs. Torrance put an end to the altercation by inquiring if he were "scared to go."

"Scared? No!" said Choddy, with supreme scorn. "Me scared o' goin' to Saintsbury!"

But the question had put him on his mettle, and he shuffled off with a sense of greater importance to the stable.

"Where's Choddy's overcoat?" said Mrs. Torrance, "'n' his scarf? Toddy, did you hev' it on?" . . . And presently the whole house was in an uproar, with children running here and there exploring every corner from the dining-room cupboard to the woodshed.

When the overcoat had been at last discovered on top of the ash barrel in the shed, and the matter of the scarf had been settled by Choddy's consenting to wear Toddy's, Mrs. Torrance had come to a more normal state of mind, and when Choddy had started off on a gallop, anxious to show what he could do, she came back ready to question me in detail.

"Poor child," she said, weeping afresh, "I hope her father 'll not be too hard on her. She didn't understand, 'n' indeed, who'd ha' thought it o' Dr. Jamieson. 'N' we were all taken with him jist as much as Gay, only Dave always said he hoped he'd not be sich a white-livered man as his father—whatever that meant, fer I'm sure Jim Jamieson never looked as if he had anything wrong with his liver more'n any other man. . . . No, no, it'll be better fer Gay to stay away till her father's got cooled off. . . . Poor dear child, it'll all be a sore trouble to her, 'n' if I could only trust the children not to upset the lamp or play with the fire, I'd go right over with ye, 'n' see her."

"I'll stay with the children," I said.

"Thank ye, thank ye," she said, with real gratitude, "I'll jist throw a shawl over my head 'n' go, then; 'n' I'll not be long, fer mebbe Dave 'll be home, soon, 'n' if he isn't too much set against the child, mebbe we can git her home to-night."

As I pinned the shawl about her, I saw that something seemed to be on her mind.

"I hate meetin' Mrs. Might," she said, timidly. "What 'll I tell her if she asks questions?"

"I think she'll ask no questions," I said.

In perhaps an hour she came back, anxious to know if Dave had come, and if Choddy was back safely. Indeed the poor woman seemed to have quite lost track of time, and it took some pains to make her understand how impossible it was for either to be home so soon. However, she took much comfort out of the fact that Mrs. Might had asked no questions.