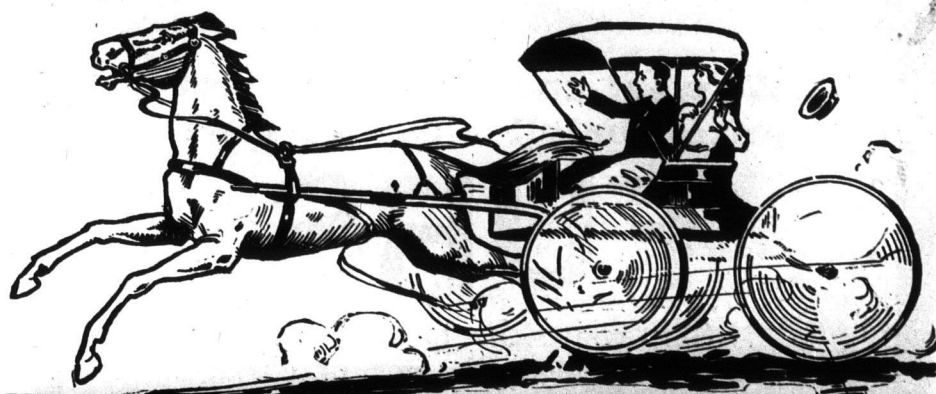


of the kitchen to sleep in. He said he would rather have that, because it was so handy for him to build the fire in the morning, and I did not have the first suspicion that anything was wrong until the night of the day but one before Christmas. I had been sleeping well since Samuel came, through feeling so safe, though I had, as I afterward remembered, often started awake, because I thought I heard a noise, but that night I did not go to sleep as soon as usual. I was very much excited thinking about Christmas and father and mother coming home. Samuel had gone down to the village that morning and got a letter for me from mother, in which she said that they were coming home Christmas morning since Uncle William was well enough to be left. We were all delighted, the more so because we thought that now Samuel could stay and have our Christmas tree with us. He laughed and thanked us when we said so, but a moment afterward I noticed that he looked very sober, even sad. Well, thinking over everything made me very wide

a faint light shining from the dark bedroom and I knew I had not been mistaken. Then all of a sudden I thought that father and mother might have come home and father be looking to see if the money was safe. I thought I would make sure before I called Samuel.

I went into the sitting room and crept across to the dark bedroom, keeping close to the wall. I peeked in, and there was Samuel rummaging in the chest where the money was. Then I knew that, however good Samuel might be in other ways, he would take things. It was an awful shock. I wonder why I did not scream and run, but I kept still. I went back upstairs and locked myself into the chamber and sat down on the edge of the bed to think. It did not seem to me that it was of any use for me to stay downstairs and watch Samuel. I did not think he could find the secret drawer without any help. I could not stop his taking the money if he was determined. Then, too, I reasoned that if he did not find it that night there would be time enough for me to



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awake, and I guess it must have been as late as 11 o'clock when I was sure I heard somebody downstairs in the sitting room, which was directly under our room. I thought at once that it might be a robber and perhaps I ought to speak to Samuel in case he should not hear the noise. I waited till I heard the noise again very plain and was sure that I knew where it was—some one trying to open the door of the dark bedroom, which stuck and had to be forced down before pulling. The children did not wake, and I made up my mind that I would not speak to them and get them scared to death. I thought that I would go downstairs very softly, steal past the sitting room door and go through the other way to the kitchen and wake up Samuel.

I got up and put on my dress. Then I went downstairs, and I don't believe I made any more noise than a cat. I saw

hide it tomorrow, and father and mother were coming home next day.

I did not sleep any that night. I took off my dress and lay down. Before day-break I had my plans all made. I tried to treat Samuel just as usual when I saw him in the morning, and I guess I did. After breakfast I carried a pitcher of water into the parlor as if I were going to water the plants. Then I lighted a match and touched it to one of the candles on the Christmas tree to make it appear as if I had only wanted to see how it would look, and then I touched it to the tree, and it blazed up. I waited until I dared wait no longer, and then I dashed on the water and screamed fire at the top of my lungs. They all came running in, Samuel first. He rushed for more water, and the fire was out in a minute, but the tree was badly singed, and the children began to cry.