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Carolyn of the Corners
 By **RUTH BELMORE ENDICOTT**
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CHAPTER XVII.
"Two's Company."
 Toward the east the forest tract was completely burned to the banks of Codler's creek. As the wind which had sprung up had driven the fire westward, there was little danger of the flames pressing nearer than the creek to Sunrise Cove and The Corners. Joseph Stagg led the horse out of the water and advised Miss Amanda and Carolyn May to get into the seat of the buckboard again. Then he set forth, leading the horse along the narrow beach, while Prince followed wearily in the rear.

It was a rough route they followed, but the blackened forest was still too hot for them to pass through, had they been able to find a path. This was a lonely strip of shore and they saw no living soul but themselves. It was a long tramp, and the horse, the dog, and the man were alike wearied. Carolyn May went fast asleep with her head pillowed in Miss Amanda's lap. The latter and Joseph Stagg talked much. Indeed, there was much for them to say after all these years of silence.

The woman, worn and scorched of face, looked down on the smuttied and sweating man with an expression in her eyes that warmed him to the marrow. She was proud of him. And the gaze of love and longing that the hardware merchant turned upon Amanda Parlow would have amazed those people that believed he had consideration and thought only for business. In these few hours of alarm and close intimacy the man and the woman had leaped all the barriers time and pride had set up. Nothing further could keep Joseph Stagg and Amanda Parlow apart. And yet they never for one instant discussed the original cause of their estrangement. That was a dead issue.

The refugees reached The Corners about nine o'clock. Jedidiah Parlow had hobbled up to the store and was just then organizing a party of searchers to go to the rescue of the hardware dealer and those of whom he had set forth in search. The village turned out en masse to welcome the trio who had so miraculously escaped the fire. Aunty Rose's relief knew no bounds. Mr. Parlow was undeniably glad to see his daughter safe; otherwise, he would never have overlooked the pitiable state his horse was in. Poor Cherry would never be the same unblemished animal again.

"Well, I yum!" he said to Joseph Stagg, "you done it! Better'n I could, too, I reckon. I'll take the horse home. You comin' with me, Mandy?" Then he saw the burns on the younger man's shoulders and arms. "The good land of Jehoshaphat! here's work for you to do, Mandy. If you air any sort of a nurse, I reckon you got your hands full right here with Joe Stagg," he added, with some pride in his daughter's ability. "Thev! them's bad-lookin' burns!" "They are indeed," agreed Aunty Rose.

It was a fact that Mr. Stagg was in a bad state. Carolyn May had suggested that Aunty Rose would dress his burns, but Miss Amanda would allow nobody to do that but herself. When the curious and sympathetic neighbors had gone and Miss Amanda was still busy making Joseph Stagg comfortable in the sitting room, Aunty Rose came out into the kitchen, where she had already bathed and helped Carolyn May to undress, and where the little girl was now sleepily eating her supper of bread and milk. "Well, wonders don't ever cease, I guess," she said, more to herself than to her little confidant. "Who'd have thought it!" "Who'd have thought what, Aunty Rose?" inquired Carolyn May. "Your uncle and Carolyn Parlow have made it up," breathed the woman, evidently much impressed by the wonder of it. "Yes, indeed!" cried the child. "Isn't it nice? They aren't mad at each other any more." "No, I should say they're not," Aunty Rose observed with grimness. "Far from it. It's a fact! I wouldn't have

believed it if a man'n seen it with my own eyes. Holding hands in there like a pair of— Well, do you know what it means, Carolyn May?" "That they love each other!" the child said boldly. "And I'm so glad for them!" "So am I," declared the woman, still in a whisper. "But it means changes here. Things won't be the same for long. I know Joseph Stagg for what he is."

"What is he, Aunty Rose?" asked Carolyn May in some trepidation, for the housekeeper seemed to be much moved. "He's a very determined man. Once he gets set in a way, he carries everything before him. Mandy Parlow is going to be made Mrs. Joseph Stagg so quick that it'll astonish her. Now, you believe me, Carolyn May." "Oh!" was the little girl's comment. "There'll be changes here very sudden. 'Two's company, three's a crowd,' Carolyn May. Never was a truer saying. Those two will want just each other—and nobody else."

"Well, Carolyn May, if you've finished your supper, we'd better go up to bed. It's long past your bedtime." "Yes, Aunty Rose," said the little girl in muffled voice. Aunty Rose did not notice that Carolyn May did not venture to the door of the sitting room to bid either Uncle Joe or Miss Amanda good-night. The child followed the woman upstairs with faltering steps, and in the unlighted bedroom that had been Hannah Stagg's she knelt at Aunty Rose's knee and murmured her usual petitions. "Do bless Uncle Joe and Miss Amanda, now they're so happy," was a phrase that might have thrilled



"Yes, isn't it Nice They Aren't Mad at Each Other?" Aunty Rose at another time. But she was so deep in her own thoughts that she heard what Carolyn May said perfunctorily. With her customary kiss, she left the little girl and went downstairs. Carolyn May had seen so much excitement during the day that she might have been expected to sleep at once, and that soundly. But it was not so. The little girl lay with wide-open eyes, her imagination at work. "Two's company, three's a crowd." She took that trite saying, in which Aunty Rose had expressed her own feelings, to herself. If Uncle Joe and Miss Amanda were going to be married, they would not want anybody else around! Of course not! "And what will become of me?" thought Carolyn May chokingly. All the "emptiness" of the last few months swept over the soul of the little child in a wave that her natural cheerfulness could not withstand. Her ache in the love of Uncle Joe and Miss Amanda was swept away.

The heart of the little child swelled. Her eyes overflowed. She sobbed herself to sleep, the pillow muffling the sounds, more forlorn than ever before since she had come to The Corners. (To be continued next week.)

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