

after her rabbits, when a man came in. It was a man whom her father occasionally employed, but he was an idle, worthless fellow, and therefore was not likely to be kept on at such a time. He had a very bad character, and Helen would have been afraid of him if she had been alone, but the dogs were in the kitchen, and some of the farming men, as well as the women-servants.

The men came from the front to the back kitchen fire to talk with this Grim Jim, as the man who had come in was called. He was still on the look-out for a job, and gave low, bear-like growls as he scraped his snow-balled boots on the hissing bars. "Two fires a-burnin' here," he muttered. "Rabbits and sich like warmin must be fed, an' Chris'ns left to starve."

The cook-housekeeper gave him something to eat, and he ate it as if he really was hungry, but did not express or seem to feel the least gratitude. "I needn't come here," he grumbled, "eatin' up other folk's leavin's as ain't a mite better nor me, if the bears was only about, but they hide so cunnin', confound the beggars, there ain't so much as ketching a sight on 'em."

"You wouldn't say so, Jim," answered the cook with a laugh, "if you was to our garden. I went this mornin' to see if I could get a bit o' kebbidge, and there—there was a good dozen on 'em scrappin away at the snow."

"Much good 'twould be for me to come lookin' for 'em theer," Jim growled in reply; and took his leave, giving Helen, still busy with her rabbits, a look very different from those to which she was accustomed.

That night she was awoke from her sleep by a sudden glare. Starting from her bed, she saw one tongue after another of red flame licking out of the black smoke rolling round a rick. They shot up into a sheet of fire, by the light of which he saw a figure she fancied she knew well, hurrying down the lane. It slipped behind a pollard elm, and the next moment she saw a face about which there could be no mistake—pale even beneath the flush of fire—looking with fiendish satisfaction on the mischief that was being done. By this time the farm-house people were aroused, and neighboring cottagers had huddled

on their clothes, and were gaping at the fire. The gapers soon became a crowd. A few of them were shamed into assisting the farmer and his sons and kept on men in their attempts to put out the fire; but the bulk, including men who had often worked for Farmer Hellen, contented themselves with gaping. A good many did not seem to regret, in the least, what had happened. "Twas a good thing to get a warm anyhow—what call had they to slave for them as didn't kear a mite for them?—bread, maybe would git cheaper if the farmers got to see the carn they was hoardin' up burnt about their ears"—such were the comments freely passed on the calamity. Hellen and his sons rushed about like men beside themselves. It was easy enough to smash the night's films that had frozen over

its thatch every now and then caught, as sparks fell and burning fragments were whirled upon it.

Having saved all they could of their live stock, the farmer and his sons devoted themselves to saving their home, and in this they succeeded; but a dreary waste of jumbled blackness, grey ashes, red embers, and cooling embers above which little flames ever and anon still flickered, and frozen snow and earth, dung and straw, thawed and trodden into viscous, blacking-like mire, spread around.

When all the mischief was done, the fire-engine arrived from Romanchester, where the glare of the flames had been plainly seen—a ruddy flush pulsing on the sky, and sometimes separate flames leaping up in it. The engine was drawn by twelve horses, and a posse of men,

and that he would murder her in consequence—at any rate, if she ever said a word to anyone about having seen him.

She had not said a word, but it was not simply dread of Grim Jim that had kept her from doing so. Her father was a very violent man, and his losses had temporarily made almost a madman of him. His little daughter shuddered to hear him talk. In the most horrid language he would vow that if he could only find out the man who had fired his ricks, he would cheat the gallows of him—or rather keep the law from cheating him of him. Hanging was too good for him, the infuriated farmer would say, and at once gratify and inflame his wrath by devising all kinds of torture to which the villain was to be put before his worthless neck was wrung.

Hellen believed that the fire was the work of a stranger. He had a very good opinion of himself, and, in spite of the inactivity of his neighbors at the time of the fire, had no idea that he was disliked in his own parish, much less that he was hated by a man who, however fitfully, had often worked for him.

The sluggishness I have referred to he attributed to his suspicions had never once fallen upon Grim Jim. But Helen lived in constant dread that some chance word, or even look, of hers might turn them in that direction; in which case she felt almost sure that Grim Jim would murder her; and that, whether he did or not, her father would kill him and be

hanged in front of the county gaol. Accordingly little Helen rejoiced when the weather broke, even though a burst of almost summer heat, which melted the snow as it melts in Norway, brought out her bees prematurely from their snug hibernacula, and scores of them came to grief, dropping like withered flowers when they passed from the sunshine into the still keen air of the shade.

The thaw, for a time, made the roads almost as impassable as they had been in the time of the deepest snow. Ere long, however, they grew hard enough for traffic, and Helen swung of for Romanchester in the great family gig, which was big enough to hold her two boxes also without inconveniencing her second brother, who drove her,

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



the duck and goose holes, but what was the good of water when the bucket-gang was so scanty and so half-hearted? On rick after rick, stack after stack, the twelfth-cake-like covering of frozen snow melted as the flames spread to them, but it merely fed the fire. The cart-lodges caught, both barns with all they held were utterly destroyed; it was with the greatest difficulty that the terror-frenzied horses were got out of the flaming stables. The wildest clamor and confusion had succeeded the sullen silence that had so long brooded over the farm. Poultry, pigs, sheep, cattle, horses, added their frantic voices to the shouts of men and the roaring of the flames. The farm-house, fortunately, did not stand directly to the leeward of the fire, but

bathed in perspiration in spite of the cold, pushed behind, and wrenched round each snow-clogged wheel.

It was with very sulky hospitality that Farmer Hellen set food and drink before these latest arrivals.

They had come to the rescue, but they had come too late. He was insured, but not nearly to the amount of his loss.

Soon after the fire the weather broke, and Little Helen was not sorry; home was no longer the cosy home it had been a little while before. She would be better out of the way at school.

Moreover, home no longer seemed to her the secure place that it had been. She had got it into her head that Grim Jim knew that she had seen him peeping from behind the pollard elm,