

As he lay down his glasses and the letter to reach for the poker to stir the fire and put more wood on for the night, he heard a heavy stamping of feet on the verandah. Quickly he raised himself, turning at the same time and still holding the poker in his hand, an eager, expectant look fastened on the door as it swung open.

"Merry Christmas, Doc!" cheerily called out James Walker, the farmer who had married his housekeeper the previous spring, as he walked in and closed the door, still continuing stamping the snow from his feet and shaking it from his big gray ulster.

"My, Jim, you scared me! I must be getting old and nervous when a sudden call like this will so upset me. Pull a chair up to the fire! I was just going to fix it up and go to bed," and he began hurriedly to poke the fire and put a couple of fresh sticks in the stove. "I have a pipe?"

James Walker took the proffered pipe which Old Doc reached from a drawer in the table, pulled up an arm-chair and stretched his feet under the side of the box-stove.

"Any of the boys coming home for Christmas?" was his first question.

"No, I guess not. Not that I've heard of," a little slowly and sorrowfully. "There wouldn't be much Christmas here now if they did."

"Doc, you ought to go and live with your daughter or with John. The neighbors are all talking about you. This is no place for an old man like you to be living all alone. Some thief will come along some night and rob you, and maybe worse, murder you for your money," and the farmer, his pipe gone out, drew another match across the stove.

"Humph! They'd get a lot," mumbled the old man under his beard, answering the latter admonition and ignoring the first.

"Well, that's what they're saying, anyway, and they think it, too, Doc," proceeded the farmer. "They say it is not right of you to stay on here, much as we all like to have you with us, and not right of your family to let you live on here alone, with all your money in the house, too."

"Money! Who says I have money?" placing his hands on the arms of his chair and bending forward, looking straight into the farmer's eyes.

"Why, everybody. It's well known you're a rich man; and the neighbors all think you keep a lot of it with you."