

with Miss Kennedy, Hazel was a little shy of him; somehow she half fancied that his quick eye had read her secret.

"Not possible, my dear. Rollo and I must be here all night on duty. And it is quite too dark for you to go alone."

"That poor man?" said Primrose. "Does he want you still? you and Dane?"

"No, it's not that. But some of that poor man's fellow-workmen have set their hearts, it is said, upon making a bonfire in one of Dane's mills,—to stop his making some people more comfortable than others, I suppose; and the bonfire may need care."

"A bonfire!" said Prim. "I should think Duke would put a stop to that."

"So he intends, but you cannot always stop a thing before it is begun."

Dr. Arthur leisurely warning one foot as he stood at the fire, took notice now that the third member of the company, not saying a word, was watching him with an interest before which even Prim's grew tame. And (all things being fair in the pursuit of science) suddenly intercepting the look, he found that it as suddenly retreated, in some confusion. Whereupon "standing attention" a little more, Dr. Arthur took the measure of the grey chair as accurately as he intended to have one made for himself, and then with a smile came back to the more selfish business of his warming his other foot. Therewith entered the temporary master of the house.

"Well, ladies?" said he; "have you come to any conclusion as to what is to be done?"

"We do not but half understand the case yet, Duke," answered Primrose.

He passed through the room to Wych Hazel's side.

"I have got to be in the Hollow to-night," he said. "The wife of the man who was hurt, in an impulse of gratitude, I suppose, has warned me that an attempt will be made before morning to fire one of my mills. I do not half believe it; and yet I think I must be on hand."

What will you and Prim do? There are only two things; for you to ride to Dr. Maryland's—and that is seven miles—alongside of Arthur's buggy; or that you should spend the night here. I think Gyda can make you comfortable, I have sent a messenger to Chickaree."

"Excuse me for interfering," said Dr. Arthur, "but as my buggy remains here, the honour of Miss Kennedy's company alongside would be of doubtful expediency."

"Nonsense, Arthur!" said Dane; "if she wanted to go, I should let you take the buggy. What do you say, Miss Kennedy?"

"I shall stay," said Hazel just ready to laugh at the unwelcome name. "Unless I can go alone."

"Sit down then," said he taking her hands and putting her back in her chair. "Arthur, take off your overcoat and make yourself comfortable if you can. Prim, I am glad to see you." And he went over to kiss her. "Now we have got the evening before us. Gyda, we are all going to stay. Is your kettle on?"

## CHAPTER XI.

He went out, probably to fill and put on the kettle himself; and came back with an armful of wood for the fire. In the light of a splendid blaze the four friends sat in a half circle round the fireplace, and the evening was falling grey outside.

"Do you expect they will really set fire to your mills, Duke?" Primrose asked.

"I do not know what to expect."

"But I thought they liked you so much?"

"Those are not the people who are talking of lighting up Morton Hollow. Do you know," he went on to Wych Hazel, "it is thought by some parties down there, that my doings are so much in want of explanation that the secret is probably to be found in Satanic influence."

"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub," said Prim, with her eyes fixed on the fire.

"And it would not pay to drench the cotton bales on an uncertainty"—said Hazel, her eye mentally fixed on one particular bale for which she had a kindness.

"I can't conceive how they should think so after all, Dane," said Primrose.

"It seems unnatural for a man not to take all he can get. Therefore it has not been very difficult, I fancy, to persuade some of the ignorant people that a deep scheme to wrong them must be hid under the apparent plan for righting them. It is easier to believe that than the truth."

"A little natural envy too," said Dr. Arthur. "Just when is this performance to come off?"

"Impossible to guess.—Arthur," said Dane suddenly, "I want you for my doctor."

"You have me, sir," said Dr. Arthur, bending his brows upon his friend. "What's the matter with you?"

"Do I have you? I want you for a permanent."

"I see. The case promises great interest. Well?—Begin with your most unpleasant sensations."

"You began with them this afternoon," said Dane gravely. "The case does possess interest, for it regards the sensations of fifteen hundred people, or more. I want you to take charge of it;—on a salary to be fixed as hereafter agreed upon. What do you say?"

"Thank you—I should like it very much,—if it were only for the pleasure of working with

you. And they want better care than they get."

"Thank you," said Rollo in his turn. "I thought you would, and yet it is a load off my mind."

"Why it will be delightful," cried Prim.

"Nothing could be nicer."

"The next thing is, Arthur, where will you live?"

"Why at home, can't he?"

"No. I will build a house for you, Arthur, if you can put a housekeeper in it."

"Don't let such a trifle stand in your way," said Dr. Arthur. "There'll be one in it when I am there. And when I am not it's no matter."

Dane uttered a low whistle, and looked at the other members of the little circle.

"Shews how much he knows about house-keeping!"

"For a particular man, which he is," said Prim.

"You wouldn't believe it," said Dane, his eye coming round to Wych Hazel, "but I shall have to make the tea carefully to-night because that fellow is here."

"All which proves that I know to make it for myself," said Dr. Arthur composedly. "But it is mere fudge, Dane, about building a house for me. Get your hands roofed in, and then don't do one other thing at present. I'll live somewhere."

"Lodge under a hedge, and dine in the top of a beech tree. Where would be a good place?"

"I do not mean, for the beech tree. Somewhere near the spot where the road to the Hollow leaves the Crocus road—that's about three miles. That would be in the way—of everything."

"But Duke," said Primrose, "are you in earnest? Couldn't he be at home?"

"Seven miles off, Prim? he was only just in time this afternoon. Arthur, I wish you would draw out a plan of a house you would like."

"But who could keep house for him?" Prudentia?"

"No," said Dr. Arthur, "I cannot manage any prudence but my own. But Dane, I am in earnest. I want you to let your reserve force rest. You may reach corners where you will need it all."

"What are 'corners' in mill-work?" said the silent little figure in the depths of the cushioned chair. Dr. Arthur turned to her instantly, listened with almost critical attention while she spoke; but then he drew back and waited for Rollo to give the answer.

"A corner," said Dane with critical gravity, "is a place where your path is crossed by another. Which indeed usually makes two corners; perhaps four."

"What do you do then?"

"Turn. That is, if I cannot go straight on."

"Therefore you see that with a train of fifteen hundred men, a corner is an awkward place," said Dr. Arthur.

Wych Hazel went back to her cushions and her pondering making no reply. And Dr. Arthur, waiting for the answer which came not, took out his pencil and a card and began idly sketching an imaginary house. "There," he said, handing it over to Rollo,—"see if you can execute that?"—Across the house was written:

"Make her talk. I want to hear her."

"There is another sort of corner," Dane went on meditatively, after glancing at the card:—"a corner where ways end instead of meeting. The corner of a wall, for instance, *inside*, where there is no way out but to jump the wall."

"Yes," said Hazel. "I thought perhaps that sort existed only in *my* experience."

"What is your experience of corners?"

"I have seen two fences—meet."

"Yes, but where were you?"

"Mr. Rollo, I am talking seriously. What corners may be 'ahead,' in this mill-work?"

"None, I hope, that I cannot get round. But if we are to speak more seriously, suppose that there should be a sudden failure of orders?"

"So that he could make in two days more than he could sell in six," said Dr. Arthur, who with arms folded and eyes on the floor was listening keenly.

"But the man could not stop eating because he stopped selling."

"Of course," said Dane laconically.

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"Then if the work went on as usual—But how long could you do it? That is what Dr. Maryland means," said Hazel.

"You see the corner."

Hazel saw it, and retreated again to her own among the cushions.

"I am not in it yet,"—said Dane looking at her.

"No. And I should not think you would call any place where you ought to be, 'a corner,'" said Hazel, who was generally impartial in her reproofs.

"Not if it was a corner?" said Rollo with the most innocent gravity.

"No."

She laid her hand up against the side of the chair, leaning her face upon it, watching the fire. Turning slightly, from under the shadow of his own hand, Dr. Arthur studied her.

"Meanwhile, let us consider the plan of the doctor's house. I cannot show you his card, for it is not all quite as straight as Dr. Arthur's plans generally are; but I wish you two ladies would make any suggestion that occurs to you; and I will make a note of them."

"It needn't be a large house, I suppose, Dane," said Primrose.

"Mem. To be a small house."

"A hush, Duke!" said Prim. "That is not a suggestion. But this is; have plenty of closet room."

"Item; with large closets."

"Hazel, do tell him something," said Primrose. "He is laughing at me."

Hazel smiled, but she was not much inclined to enter the lists.

"I am sure he has been laughing at me," she said. "And I do not know about the house—only it ought to be perfectly bright and pretty in every way. Because Dr. Maryland will see so much pain in the course of his work, that he ought to find nothing but a welcome when he comes home."

"Are you satisfied, Arthur?" said Dane, as he gravely added to his notes.

"Quite. One should be, with perfection," said the doctor. "If Prim will kindly let me arrange my own closets."

Prim was silent, and what she was thinking of, this story does not tell; but her next words made rather a bound from these.

"Dane," she said suddenly, "is there any necessity for your going down to the mills to-night unless you are sent for?"

"I think it would be proper," said Dane, making his notes.

"Then you will go?"

"I suppose so."

"But if you had set men to watch, I should think they might have prevented all the trouble."

"I did not want to prevent it."

"Not? Why, Duke?"

"If it is to come, I would rather it should come now, when I am here and expecting it."

"Is there danger of any rough work?"

"Among the men? I cannot tell."

"O Duke! if you had set men to watch, I should think they could have put out a fire without you."

Hazel roused up suddenly. "Prim, how can you talk so?" she said in quick emphasis. "Of course he must go."

Dr. Arthur smiled.

"I do not see the must," Primrose answered.

"You do not know what a mill-fight is, Hazel."

The girl shrank back among her cushions. "But he must go—" she repeated, half to herself.

"I do not expect to hear of many more mill-fights in Morton Hollow," said Dane very calmly. "What is it, Gyda? Supper? Well, some of our friends here will be very glad of it."

There was porridge and cream and flad-brod, of course; there was hung beef and honey; altogether it was rather a sumptuous meal. Rollo attended to the coffee on the hearth, and made the tea; as usual did half of the serving himself, and took care that his old nurse should not exert her strength beyond very gentle limits. They voted to disregard the table and keep their places round the fire. So in a grand red illumination from the blaze they took their cups of coffee, which Dane filled from the pot on the hearth; and handled their plates of porridge and cream; and but for the night's work in prospect, would have regarded it as a piece of grand fun. To the young men indeed that circumstance was not enough to make it any less than fun, and to one of them it was much more. Gyda, whose little black eyes watched them all keenly, found it a pleasant sight; for the smile on her old lips was as sweet as May. Though indeed Gyda's smile was quite wont to be that. She sat where Rollo placed her and suffered him to attend to her wants; but she said never a word unless spoken to.

It was still not far on in the evening when the supper was disposed of and the room was again in company order. The little circle gathered somewhat closer together. They had been talking gaily, yet something in the social atmosphere hindered conversation from the buoyancy natural to it in happy circumstances; it acted like a wreath of chimney smoke in a damp morning. In a pause which had come, no one knew why, Primrose remarked, "I wish you would sing something, Duke."

"Why, because I like to hear you."

"Yes, do," said Dr. Arthur. "Prim's nerves are sadly out of tune."

"I don't think my nerves are ever out of tune," Prim answered gently.

"Not when they have work to do," said Rollo. "Nor ever at another time, that I know."

"But you can sing, if I don't want tuning."

"Certainly. But in all questions that are not of duty, you have to consider the effect."

The lazy deliberateness with which this was spoken, was at least as provoking as it was comical. Wych Hazel from her place was silently watching them all, her eyes going from one speaker to the other with wide open consideration. Now, her lips just parted and curled and came back to their gravity.

"Go on—will you?" said Dr. Arthur. "I have a perplexing question to decide before to-morrow; and it rather helps me to have somebody make a noise."

"If you would tell us the question, perhaps it would help us make a noise," said Dane with the same placid gravity.

"Profound!"—said Dr. Arthur. "Well—give us something in that line."

"What line?"

"Original and scientific observation."

"That's your line. I was thinking—how would you define 'noise'?"

"Extraneous sounds come pretty near it, with me," said Dr. Arthur.

"But you wouldn't call music 'a noise,'" said Primrose.

"Wouldn't I!—When Miss Powder has wandered off alone in the Sands of Dee and doesn't want to be interrupted!"

"But what you would call a noise, isn't music, Arthur. Now Hazel, I wish you would just sing one of your little songs and confound him!" Primrose spoke entreatingly.

"I should be more happy to be confounded—in that way—than I can tell," said the doctor.

"Thank you," Hazel answered laughing; "my songs are quite too small to do that for anybody. And besides, as I once heard somebody say, 'I was not asked first.'"

"You are asked to be the first," said Rollo. "I remember one night at Newport—" Dr. Arthur began. Hazel interrupted him.

"Need I not?" said the doctor smiling. "Agreed!—I like this much better. But one night when you were singing to Kitty Fisher, in her room, she had secretly posted an ambush underneath the window. It would be hard to forget those songs, or to cease wishing to hear them again."

"Kitty Fisher!"

"You will certainly do for Prim what you would do for Kitty Fisher," remarked Rollo.

"I suspect I did it for myself then," said Hazel; and "for self" was the way she liked best to sing. But if he wished it—So without more ado the song came. Not one of her gay little carols this time, but a wild Border lament; imitatively sweet, tender, and true.

As effortless in the giving, as forgetful of auditors, as if she had been a veritable bird among the branches; for Wych Hazel always lost herself in her music.

Then more was called for, with a general soft shout. And then, by and by, as Wych Hazel sang, a soft rich accompaniment began to chime in with her notes. Those two had never sung together before; doubtless that was forgotten by neither; and it is not too much to say that the one voice came caressingly attending upon the other; playing around her notes with delicious skill, accompanying, supporting, contrasting, with a harmony as gracious as it was wilful; till at the close of a somewhat longer piece than usual there was a universal burst of applause. Small audiences are not generally wrought up to such a pitch; and when they had done they all sat and laughed at each other.

"Ah!" said Dr. McArthur, "I asked for a noise, and after all had to make it myself!"

They had got intoxicated with melody. They went on singing, of course. Various and diverse things, but for the most part of the deeper and thoughtful styles of music; sometimes together, sometimes alone. At last Gyda asked for a hymn. Rollo looked at Wych Hazel. The two spots of colour which had been burning in her cheeks, changed suddenly to a grave flush.

"That is for you," she said softly.

He waited a moment, and then sang,—

"Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott!"

To hear Rollo sing a hymn, or any other song, was to have the meaning given with not less but more than speaking expression, and Wych Hazel's winter studies had enabled her to follow the words. The listeners were all very still, and no applause followed. But when the last line was ended, Rollo rose and announced it was time to go. As soon as he and Arthur had left the cottage, Hazel sprang up.

"Mrs. Boerresen, which window best commands the Hollow?"

"You can't see into the Hollow from any one of 'em, my lady."

"Where then?"

"You know there's a bend in the Hollow, Hazel," Prim remarked. "We cannot see into it from anywhere here."

Wych Hazel stood looking down into the burnt out fire, her hands knotted tight together. If she were but alone!—Could she in any possible way elude her companions and not be found out?—especially the first. Certainly she was a wayward creature, they might think. Five minutes ago listening to that hymn with the most quiet, subdued child's face; and now fairly sparkling with energy and purpose. How could she manage? Prim was putting on her bonnet and shawl.

"It is not very cold," she remarked. "I am going as far as the top of the road."

(To be continued.)

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