

"We—ll," Bill somewhat hesitatingly replied; "yes, I—I did happen to be at the station when she came. She—you know the stage is quite expensive."

"Is she nice?" Lizzie repeated.

"She's all right. Goin' down to the church this afternoon, Lizzie?"

"Sure, preacher's depending on us. Miss Darrel wants us to practice our pieces after the work's done, too. You're coming, Will?"

"I guess so," replied Bill.

With that they turned into the yard of Tom Graham's farm, and with a flourish of the whip and the music of bells drew up at the farm-house door.

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The white church was Presbyterian in its plainness. It stood on the section line about two miles from Bill's homestead. Small, oblong, straight-ridged and painted white, it differed from the usual type of country churches and schools in only one particular. Its windows were round on the top instead of square, a mark of architectural beauty of which the congregation was justly proud. On ordinary days a solemn silence reigned in and around the church, but to-day the place rang with bustle and laughter. A roaring fire filled the stove. Young men stood around it talking and laughing. A heap of cedar branches lay on the floor and a group of matrons busied themselves in binding the twigs together into wreaths for door and windows. Others were gathered about a table anxiously debating how to cut out the letters for the motto. Lizzie was there, busy with her scissors, manufacturing borders and frills of bewildering complexity out of colored paper. Two huge beams stretched across the church, and on one of these Bill sat, absorbed in the task of fastening up bunches of evergreens. It is difficult to say whether Bill's mind was altogether taken up with the work in hand. Certain it is that he completely ignored the remarks and jokes flung at him by the boys below, and once he dropped a handful of cedar on the head of the preacher, who was passing underneath.

"I—I beg pardon, Mr. Da—Mr. Hill," he exclaimed. "It slipped out of my hand."

"Don't apologize, Mr. Graham," laughed the preacher, "It is not every one that can get a laurel wreath so easily."

By and bye the matrons made preparations for going home.

"You'll wait and hear us sing, Mr. Graham," said the preacher approaching.

"I guess I will. There's nothing much to do down home," replied Bill.

"Quite so, quite so. But I wonder what is hindering Miss Darrel. She surely can't have forgotten about the practice."

"She is pretty late. The snow's rather deep, though, and it must be hard walking. Maybe it would be better if I—if you would send someone after her," suggested Bill.

"Perhaps that would be best. I'll ask Jim Lavoy. He—I beg your pardon."

"I was just saying that I've nothing particular to do myself."