

The injured man opened his eyes, and his free hand moved slowly till it rested on his daughter's head.

"I got an awful crack, Ruth, but I am all right now. Too bad to bring you home. Who came with you?"

"Aunt Felicia and Uncle Peter," she whispered as she stroked his uninjured hand.

"Mighty good of them—just like old Peter. Send the old boy up—I want to see him."

Ruth made no answer; her heart was too full. That her father was alive was enough.

"I'm not pretty to look at, am I, child, but I'll pull out; I have been hurt before—had a leg broken once in the Virginia mountains when you were a baby. The smoke was the worst; I swallowed a lot of it; and I am sore now all over my chest. Poor Bolton's badly crippled, I hear—and Breen—they've told you about Breen, haven't they, daughter?" His voice rose as he mentioned the boy's name.

Ruth shook her head.

"Well, I wouldn't be here but for him! He's a plucky boy. I will never forget him for it; you mustn't either," he continued in a more positive tone.

The nurse now moved to the bed.

"I would not talk any more, Mr. MacFarlane. Miss Ruth is going to be at home now right along and she will hear the story."

"Well, I won't, nurse, if you don't want me to—but they won't be able to tell her what a fix we were in—I remember everything up to the time Breen dragged me from under the dirt car. I knew right away what had happened and what we had to do; I've been there before, but—"

"There,—that will do, Mr. MacFarlane," interrupted the nurse. "Come, Miss Ruth, suppose you go to your room for a while."

The girl rose to her feet.

"You can come back as soon as I fix your father for the night," she pointed significantly to the patient's head, whispering, "He must not get excited."

"Yes, dear daddy—I will come back just as soon as I can get the dust out of my hair and get brushed up a little," cried Ruth bravely, in the effort to hide her anxiety, "and then Aunt Felicia is downstairs."

Once outside she drew the nurse, who had followed her, to the window so as to be out of hearing of the patient and then asked breathlessly:

"What did Mr. Breen do?"

"I don't know exactly, but everybody is talking about him."

At this moment Miss Felicia arrived at the top of the stairs: she had heard Ruth's question and had caught the dazed expression on the girl's face.

"I will tell you, my dear, what he did, for I have heard every word of it from the servants. The blast went off before he and your father had reached the opening of the tunnel. They left your father for dead, then John Breen crawled back on his hands and knees through the dreadful smoke until he reached him, lifted him up on his shoulders and carried him out alive. That's what he did; and he is a big, fine, strong, noble fellow, and I am going to tell him so the moment I get my eyes on him. And that is not all. He got out of bed this afternoon, though he could hardly stand, and covered up all his bruises and his broken wrist so you couldn't see them, and then he limped down to the station so you would get the truth about your father and not be frightened. And now he is in a dead faint."

Ruth's eyes flamed and the color left her cheeks. She stretched out both hands as if to keep from falling.

"Saved daddy!" she gasped—"Carried him out on—Oh! Aunt Felicia!—and I have been so mean! To think he got up out of bed and—"

Everything swam before her eyes.

Miss Felicia sprang forward and caught her in her arms.

"Come!—none of this, Child. Pull yourself together right away. Get her some water, nurse—she has stood all she can. There now, dearie—" Ruth's head was on her breast now. "There—there—Such a poor darling, and so many things coming all at once. There, darling, put your head on my shoulder and cry it all out."

The girl sobbed on, the wrinkled hand patting her cheek.

"Oh, but you don't know, aunty—" she crooned.

"Yes, but I do—you blessed child. I know it all."

"And won't somebody go and help him? He is all alone, he told me so."

"Uncle Peter is with him, dearie."

"Yes,—but some one who can—" she straightened up—"I will go, aunty—I will go now."

"You will do nothing of the kind, you little goose; you will stay just where you are."

"Well, won't you go, then? Oh, please—please—"

Peter's bald head now rose above the edge of the banisters. Miss Felicia motioned him to go back, but Ruth heard his step and raised her tear-drenched face half hidden in her dishevelled hair. "Oh, Uncle Peter, is Jack—is Mr. Breen—"

Miss Felicia's warning face behind Ruth's own, for once reached Peter in time.

"In his bed and covered up, and his landlady, Mrs. Hicks, sitting beside him," responded Peter in his cheeriest tones.

"But he fainted from pain—and—"

"Yes, but that's all over now, my dear," broke in Miss Felicia.

"But you will go, anyhow—won't you, aunty?" pleaded Ruth.

"Certainly—just as soon as I put you to bed, and that is just where you have got to go this very minute," and she led the overwrought, trembling girl into her room and shut the door.

Peter stood for an instant looking about him, his mind taking in the situation. Ruth was being cared for now, and so was MacFarlane—the white cap and apron of the noiseless nurse passing in and out of the room in which he lay, assured him of that. Bolton, too, in the room next to Jack's, was being looked after by his sister who had just arrived. He, too, was fairly comfortable, though a couple of his fingers had been shortened. But there was nobody to look after Jack—no father, mother, sister—nobody. To send for the boy's uncle, or Corinne, or his aunt, was out of the question, none of them having had more than a word with him since his departure. Yet Jack needed attention. The doctor had just pulled him out of one fainting spell only to have him collapse again when his coat was taken off, and the bandages were loosened. He was suffering greatly and was by no means out of danger.

If for the next hour or two there was anything to be done at MacFarlane's, Peter was ready to do it, but this accomplished, he would shoulder his bag and camp out for the night beside the boy's bed. He had come, indeed, to tell Felicia so, and he meant to sleep there whatever her protests. He was preparing himself for her objections, when she re-entered the room.

"How is young Breen?" Miss Felicia asked in a whisper, closing the door behind her. She had put Ruth to bed, where she had again given way to an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

"Pretty weak. The doctor is with him now."

"What did the fool get up for?" She did not mean to surrender too quickly about Jack despite his heroism—not to Peter, at any rate. Then, again, she half suspected that Ruth's tears were equally divided between the rescuer and the rescued.

"He couldn't help it, I suppose," answered Peter, with a gleam in his eyes—"he was born that way."

"Born! What stuff, Peter—no man of any commonsense would have—"

"I quite agree with you, my dear—no man except a gentleman. There is no telling what one of that kind might do under such circumstances." And with a wave of his hand and a twinkle in his merry scotch-trier eyes, the old fellow disappeared below the handrail.

Miss Felicia leaned over the banisters: "Peter, Peter," she called after him, "where are you going?"

"To stay all night with Jack."

"Well, that's the most sensible thing I have heard of yet. Will you take him a message from me?"

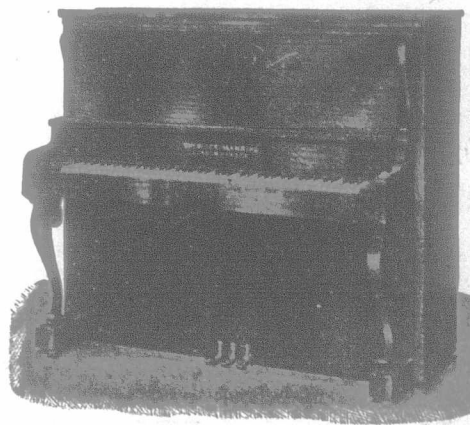
Peter looked up: "Yes, Felicia, what is it?"

"Give him my love."

(To be continued.)

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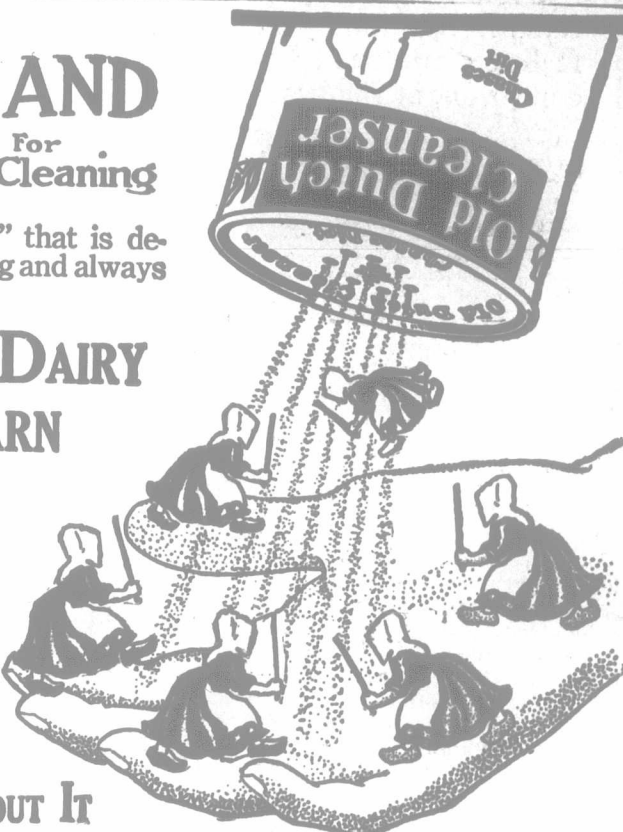
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