

JOHN'S TELEPHONE.

There was a sudden loud but not unpleasant jangle of old-fashioned sleigh bells in the yard, and with their handsome heads well up, a pair of big, high-stepping red roan horses swung by the pleasant sitting room window. The little woman watching there waved her hand at the broad shouldered driver with a smile. A big, furry mittened hand waved back in reply, as team, driver and "bobs" passed on to the barn.

"John's come, father," the little woman said, cheerily, still watching from the window. The gray-haired man reading by the stove put down his paper and gave the fire a jig. "I see he has!" he granted, with forbidding grimness. "I saw his four-hundred dollar high steppers go by, and I heard 'em—jangling their bells fit to raise the roof."

"Why, father!" Helen Carter turned a reproachful face toward the old man. "You know that John needed a new team, with all the extra work he has planned for next season, don't you? Bob and Old Mary?"

"Needn't have planned such heavy work, then," interrupted her father, stubbornly. "He could have got along with the old team if he'd had a mind to, and saved his money. I never owned a team worth the half of four hundred dollars, and we paid for this farm,—your mother and I,—remember that."

A flush crept into Helen's face. "John thinks the team will pay, father. We think—"

"Yes, yes, I know! You think this and you think that. But you'll find that you've got to be saving. You—"

Buzz! Buzz z-z! Buzz! Buzz z-z!
The old farmer turned with a jerk and scowled darkly at the telephone on the wall. Then the fire received another dig from the poker.

"I could have stood the new team—at a pinch, Helen," he said, slowly, after a portentous interval; "useless as it is; but that telephone, now,"—he stopped and glared at the shining apparatus,—"for all senseless extravagance caps the climax! Helen," he turned toward his daughter, and the set look on his face softened a little. "I'm concerned for you—you and John. It won't do to—"

"But John paid for it in work,—every bit of it, father,—hauling and selling poles; and he and David will need it every day with their new lumber job. We find it already a great convenience."

The old farmer took up his paper abruptly, as he said, "There's a limit to these things, Helen. I hope you'll understand it before you come to actual want. I do hope John won't undertake to build a trolley-road single-handed, to haul his stuff to market on. I hope he'll draw the line somewhere!" With this last shot his shrewd old face, now somewhat flushed, disappeared behind his paper.

Martin Dent had been a successful farmer. With the help of his equally thrifty wife, he had, by shrewd management and rigid economy, paid for his farm, as he had said. Now, in his declining years, he was enjoying the rest that he considered fairly earned.

Unweary by most of the affairs of the busy world, he yet could not throw aside his uneasiness at what he considered the unwarranted extravagance of his daughter and her husband. He failed to realize that the ever-widening industries of the world created new environments, necessitating new adaptations.

This was especially true in regard to his energetic son-in-law, John Carter, who often introduced innovations at variance with the other man's ideas.

Helen, with whom Mr. Dent had made his home since the death of his wife, found constant need for all her tact and skill to preserve harmony between the two. Her father's disapproval of the new telephone had been instant and emphatic. Not one of John's "new schemes," as he called them, had stirred his resentment so strongly—not even the newly acquired team.

It was often the old farmer's custom, when he was unusually roused, to betake himself to the home of his other daughter, Gertrude, who lived fifteen miles away, in the town of Picoer. After a day or two—never more than two—he would return mollified, and things would progress much as usual for a time.

The morning after his talk with Helen the old farmer was early afoot.

"I guess I'll drive over to Pitcher and see Gertie," he said, in answer to his daughter's inquiries. "Old Mary's stood still for a week, and needs driving."

"Do be careful, father!" enjoined his daughter, as he was leaving. "You mustn't get tired, you know. Remember what the doctor said." She waited a moment, then added hesitatingly, "I—I wish you'd let John take you, father. You'd go quicker and easier."

"I'm all right, Helen; don't worry about me," said Martin Dent, confidently. And he added, "I don't need any high-priced high-steppers to pull me around the country, either—not yet. Old Mary's good enough for me."

Helen Carter watched the light cutter out of sight with a little sigh. "Father will go his own way," she said, "and I suppose John

will go his. Sometime I hope they'll understand each other."

The winter sun shone warmly upon the town of Pitcher. About noon, however, a thin haze began to gather. Martin Dent watched it with weather-wise eyes. At two o'clock he amazed his daughter by suddenly announcing his determination to return home at once.

"There's a big storm coming, Gertie," he said in explanation. "I'm sure of it—a big snow storm. We may be shut in for a week. I couldn't stand the town for a week. The roads are fine. Old Mary'll take me back in a little over two hours. I shall get in ahead of the storm if I start right now."

Persuasion and remonstrance were alike useless. He was determined to start at once, and did. The old mare had had her usual bountiful midday feed of hay and oats, and took the road willingly enough, out across the wide, level valley toward the slope that led to Hemlock Hill.

The old farmer watched the gathering clouds uneasily, but chirruped reassuringly to the mare. "Once we get across the top flat on Old Hemlock, old girl," he said to her, "we'll be all right. We ought to make it before dark easy enough."

The mare pricked up her ears and laid the miles of the pleasant valley road behind her.

But as they rose from the valley on the long lift of the hill the wind struck home with a searching power that made the old farmer settle into his greatcoat and draw the thick robe round him with a shiver. Borne on the wind were occasional flurries of snow, fine and sharp.

"It's coming, old girl!" he said again. "A little quicker than I thought for—a regular blizzard. But never mind; we'll make it."

But the drive of the morning had tired the mare somewhat, and the long hill took time. The storm, too, rapidly increased, and Martin Dent began to feel a strange uneasiness.

Then, when they were about half way through the lonely cross road that led across the long, flat top of bleak Hemlock Hill, the great blizzard suddenly swept down in all its power and fury.

It seemed hardly a moment before the fences, rocks and scattered trees of Hemlock Hill were swallowed up in the wild whiteness of the storm. It was as if the old landmarks had never been. The fierceness of the wind, the downright force of its nearly swept the mare from the path; but urged on by her master's voice, she staggered forward slowly. A quick, strange fear fell upon the heart of Martin Dent as he watched the laboring animal. Ah, the pitiless storm—how it cut and chilled!

For a few moments the mare struggled on, feeling out the road uncertainly. Then, with a false step, she stumbled sidewise and lurched headlong into the snow of a drift. Twice she tried to regain the hard road, but her twenty odd years of service told now.

At the third attempt she went down on her side. There was a sharp cracking sound, and leaning forward, the old farmer saw that both shafts were broken.

With a groan of dismay he struggled forward from partially overturned cutter to see what could be done. But in the deep snow, cumbered with heavy coat and wraps, he could hardly move. The exertion tired him terribly. For a little space he tried with numbed, trembling hands, to readjust the broken shafts, and then a sudden faintness, a strange clutching sensation at the heart seized him. Ah, the old trouble! Twice before he had experienced it—the weakness of the heart in regard to which the physician had cautioned him.

Febly, dizzily he groped his way back to the cutter and cowered down beside it. He knew that he was face to face with death—alone, with the blizzard howling round him. There was not one chance in a thousand, on that lonely road and in that wild storm, that a passing team might help him.

But he was no coward. Although faint and helpless, he drew the sleigh robe round him as well as he could, and looked out steadfastly at the biting storm. He wished he might see his children again—Gertie and Helen and John—yes, John. He wondered if he had not been a little unreasonable with John sometimes—good-hearted, self-reliant, big-voiced fellow.

Then his thoughts trailed away vaguely. The roar of the wind changed to a weird humming in his ears, and he seemed himself to be drifting away with the storm as he slipped down deeper into the snow.

Presently he roused himself with a little jerk. He almost fancied that his ear had caught a faint, far-away tinkle of bells. But no, he reflected, that could never be. There could be no such godsend as a team on Hemlock cross-road in this storm; again he sank back.

Then once more he roused himself to listen, for suddenly, above the roar of the storm and close at hand he caught it—the clean-cut jangle of bells. Sudden hope lent him momentary strength, and with a great effort he lifted himself slightly and gazed with longing eyes into the whiteness of the storm.

Louder and nearer rang the bells,—those blessed bells!—and then he saw, looming up suddenly out of the storm, a pair of powerful horses. Wallowing breast-deep in the

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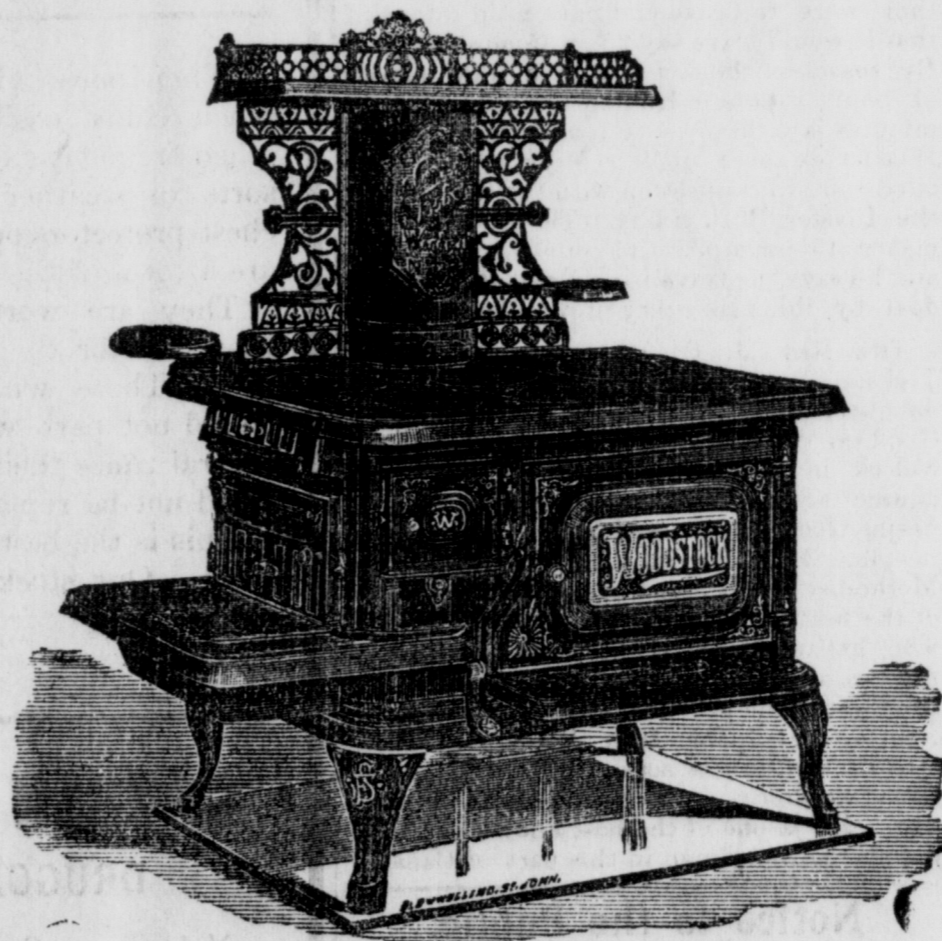
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WOODSTOCK, N. B., FEB. 8, 1905.

mass, white with snow from hips to forelocks, with their burly, fur-coated driver guiding them with steady hand, on they came, resolutely, grandly, their big, honest eyes flashing with unabated courage.

The old farmer saw their great muscles rise and fall, and gloried weakly in their strength. Then he gave a gasp of surprise. Why, he knew the team—the splendid red roans of his son-in-law; and the big, steady driver—surely it was John! He waved his hand and tried to shout, then slipped back helplessly.

John Carter felt a great fear as he bent over the old man. He had come too late? "Father!" he cried, anxiously.

"Yes, John," came feebly from the depths of the fur robe.

Then the old farmer was dimly conscious that a pair of strong arms were round him and that he was lifted, greatcoat, robe and all, into the sleigh; the hot soapstones were placed at his feet; that strong hands were wrapping more robes and blankets round him dexterously, and that a great, hearty voice was booming encouraging words in his ears.

Old Mary stood near by with drooping head turned from the wind. She whinnied a plaintive welcome to the roans. The young farmer stripped the harness from her back and secured her behind the sleigh; then he took up the lines, and the roans steadily followed the homeward track.

"John," said the old man, faintly.

"Yes, father."

"How—did you ever—happen, John?"

"No 'happen about it. Gertrude began to get anxious as the storm increased, and called us up by the telephone to tell us you had started. I was afraid the mare could never make Old Hemlock crossing, so I came right out with the roans. Old Hemlock needs the best there is in a blizzard."

The tedious "top flat" was made in silence and Carter drew a long breath of relief when at last the welcome South Valley slope showed through the storm.

"All right, father?" he asked, for the muffled figure at his side seemed all at once to lean against him more heavily.

"I—I guess so, John, but—I'm—dreadful tired."

John Carter quickly reached back and snipped the halter from Old Mary's head. "Follow if you can, old girl," he said; then he spoke to his team. They took the long home stretch at a steady lope.

Yes, it was a pleasant sitting room. From his place on the couch—drawn out by the crackling wood fire—Martin Dent surveyed it with a new and most kindly criticism. In fact, he had made up his mind that it was about the pleasantest room he had ever seen. Through the door he could see his daughter stirring briskly about, preparing the belated evening meal, and sending now and then a glance of loving inquiry in his direction. What a good child Helen was!

The big yellow house cat rubbed against his hand and purred companionably; the clock on the mantel ticked a message of comradeship. Yes, it was a pleasant room, and he was glad to be in it. Now and then he gave a little shiver as his thoughts went back to that awful top flat.

"Helen," he called, suddenly, "where's Old Mary?"

"She came in a while ago, father, dead tired. John put her in a warm stall, with two blankets on her."

The old farmer settled back with another sigh of contentment.

"John's a good man, a right good man, Helen," he said, presently.

Between the house and barn a lantern flashed now and then in the storm. Helen Carter turned to watch it a moment. Then she said in a subdued voice:

"Yes, father, he is."

Directly, with a great stamping of feet, the young farmer came in. The belated "chores" were finished at last.

"Coming on all right, father?" he called.

"First rate, John!" Then Martin Dent added slowly and in tones of deep conviction, "That's a splendid good team,—those red roans,—a cracking good team, John!"

"Pretty good, that's a fact," said his son-in-law.

"I didn't think they could be so much ahead of the old horses, John, and—"

Whir-r-r! whir-r-r! whir-r-r! buzzed the telephone, sharply. Somewhere some one was talking through the stormy night.

The old farmer turned and stared at the instrument. This time there was no scowl on his face.

"Yes, they're an uncommon good team, and—I say, John, do you know, I'm—er—" he still looked contentedly at the shining apparatus—"I'm mighty glad you put in that telephone."

Into Helen Carter's face there stole a sudden happy light. She knew there was peace, enduring peace between these two.

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