

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

BY CLARA PARKER.

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When Brown saw that I had been interrupted, he, too, came to my side, and the pair groused themselves about me, and stared at me, expecting, and with reason, that now I had been given leisure for thought, lucid ideas must begin to flow from me, while, in reality, had I been thought for speech at that moment, I must have babbed forth mere scraps of the perplexing chaos with which my mind was reeling.

Was the girl insane? Was it my duty to hand over the little crumpled, quivering note to the stern, dark man beside me? Never! Whether the girl was insane or not, that note was mine. If insanity had been its inspiration, some reverent hand must deal with its own folly. If not insane—what then was expected of me? Why was I warned against the dog beneath her window? It is that she actually meditated a theatrical flight? If so, where were the needed ladders? What was to be done with the dog?

"And how do you find her, sir?" broke in Mrs. Hoskins cheerfully. "Pretty bad, ain't she? I had a nice one that was took the same way, and we was upwards of three days a-gitting her to sense things. If she would only take a little nateral sleep now."

Her words came to me like an inspiration. "Please be they waiting tonight, Hoskins, oh, long may it wave," went up my mental shout, while outwardly I said a few grave things about "nerves" and "mental pressure," which seemed to hit the mark somehow, for my listeners did not seem to be on the contrary looked reasonably impressed.

"To speak candidly," I exclaimed boldly, while I was groping for words as though grappling with a foreign tongue, "I fear congestion of the nerve centers, but I can't see anything more than a nervous headache than these symptoms. However, I shall give her a quieting powder, and in three or four hours I will be able to tell exactly how much we have to fear."

My proposal, which involved a long stay at the house, was not, however, as I had expected, met with the approval of Mrs. Hoskins, but it excited no suspicion, and with a faint gleam of hope glowing at my heart I took the water which Mrs. Hoskins was still holding, and, after pouring out half of it with a graceful and toy with managed, while apparently mixing it with the contents of a small black bottle which smelled like vanilla, to drop into it half a chocolate of cream which I nimbly extracted from a bon-bon dish on the table at which I was working. Indeed, I felt rather shocked at the light-fingered dexterity I suddenly developed; it seemed to indicate an aptitude for questionable practices anything but encouraging to contemplate.

They seemed to expect that I would administer my own medicine, but after carefully rinsing the candy about as long as I flared in my guilty effort to dissolve it and color the water a respectable brown, I handed the glass eagerly to Mrs. Hoskins, I had no right to the impudent look which had thrown herself on my honor under the false impression that I must be some peaceful old fellow with marriageable daughters and all that, though how she could have expected any such antiquated party to climb about through windows and toy with her hounds I could not, nor cannot yet conceive. However, her innocent blunders had nothing to do with my plain course of duty, so I looked on with what grace I might while the clumsy Hoskins lifted upon her the slender figure and forced my harmless dose between the scarlet lips, devoutly praying the while that the candy had dissolved.

Very neatly did the patient do her part. Not even a professional could have put to shame her restless impatience, the drowsy opening of her eyes and their soft closing. "We must have the room perfectly quiet now," I said. "Mr. Brown, would it be possible for me to have the use of a room next to this for an hour or so? The trouble with my tooth has used me up badly, but what can I expect? When one chooses the life of a physician he chooses a dog's life, let him be clever as he will. And then look at the thanks he gets. Let him drag a man out of his grave and into it's Providence that gets the credit, but let the man die and how quickly Providence is led off scot free."

"And yet a doctor's fee is not a bad thing to have in one's pocket, I imagine," but laughed, half sneered my companion. "But come below with me and we will have them set us out some lunch."

As may be imagined, all this talk had not been carried on in the sick room. Gradually we had drifted out into the hall, and stood there, lighted dimly by a lamp which Mrs. Hoskins carried. Of course I knew I must not go below, though the suggestion of lunch was tempting, indeed, so I still held to my ungracious bluster. "You are very kind," I said, severely. "But I must get my boots off and cover up warm. We physicians need some care, though our patients seem to doubt it. However," I added, more graciously, "I might pick at a little cold meat, if you would send it up; and that a glass of wine wouldn't be at all bad."

"You shall have them immediately," said Brown. "But let us say a bottle of wine instead of a glass, and by the way, sir, do you know that I have neglected to get your name? How very strange you must think me," and he paused, while his foot was actually raised to go and leave me in peace, to send that fatal broadside back into my shabby breastwork.

What under heavens was I to say? What did I know of his knowledge of the people in the city, where I was almost a total stranger?

"Well, well," I exclaimed, with a hollow laugh, "this is droll, certainly, but I took it

for granted that your servant had explained."

"I have not seen him," with the short reply, and, Hoskins moving forward at that moment, I stood revealed to the sharp eyes of my host in all the glare of light which the small lamp could boast.

"I am Dr. A., of whom you have perhaps heard," I said, boldly, setting fire to my ships with an unflinching hand. "I supposed that you had sent directly to me."

"I am something of a stranger here," was the evasive reply, and with a long look at me he was gone, leaving me in a state of feverish uncertainty as to whether I was unmasked or not.

Gladly now would I have entered the sick room alone, on some pretext or another, in hopes of a last word of explanation, but the slow-paced Hoskins was ever at my heels, and to all my suggestions that the young woman should be left entirely alone and that Hoskins herself might take some sleep while I kept watch, she brought forth the same rambling argument. "A quilt in a chair and me in it couldn't be in any ways disturbing to one more accustomed to company than to be without," she exclaimed, amiably, until I gave up, fairly worn out.

I took possession of the room assigned to me as soon as a lamp, a fire and a neatly set lunch table had made it ready. Once alone inside that room, the door shut on all intruders and brought before the bar of sober judgment, I felt that a straight-jacket was all I lacked for a fully equipped madman. Yet, condemn my folly as I would, I felt no desire to retreat. Even then I might have crept down stairs, on some pretext or other, have slunk from the house and made off without much chance of detection. But there I sat, turning over and over again every project that presented itself to my feverish fancy for carrying out the scheme of the crumpled note, which I now boldly consulted.

"Consult it as I will, however, there was nothing more to be got from it than that I was expected to help a perfect stranger, a young girl, apparently confined to her bed with a serious illness, to rise from that bed and bolt through a second-story window, guarded by an ugly bloodhound, out into a freezing night, in the care of a single man, of so reckless a character that he had, earlier in the evening, hidden himself in an innocent man's carriage, killed that helpless man, taken his belongings, and was now foisting himself upon my notice under an assumed name."

A black outline, which I was forced to admit, and don't mistake me by imagining I made light of the painful circumstances. I deplored them deeply, but what would you have had?

Had the lady been plain reason might have spoken with a louder voice, or, at least, its faint piping have been listened to, but as it was I merely decided by the time my lunch was finished that if anything was to be done I must immediately set in action some one of the many operations necessary.

Hoskins? What was to be done with her? And then, from what I could recall of her personality beyond her loosely balanced tongue and the fact that she was large and dark, one little thing came back to me which brought me to my feet, a hopeful smile struggling with the swollen melancholy of my features. She had a very red nose, which might result from a disordered stomach and might not.

Very softly I opened the door of my room, for I had no wish to disturb the slumbers of the rest of the household, and very softly I tiptoed to the door of the sick room, which I found standing a few inches ajar, on account of the heat. I surmised, for I could feel the hot air fanning my face as I peered in cautiously before entering.

Everything was quiet. The bed I could not see plainly, but before the fire, which was blazing brightly, Mrs. Hoskins sat leaning back on a chair, in a way that was, in fact, reckless disregard of the laws of grace and decorum, were hoisted upon a second chair, where they had slid from the red woolen blanket which had been wrapped about them, and confronted me as I approached, huge and motionless in their gray woolen casings, like sentinels before a sleeping city, for Mrs. Hoskins was sleeping. But even as I saw it and moved back with my heart thumping violently at the swift thought that before waking her that word of explanation, I might, as my right demand, could be spoken, she started peacefully awake.

"Lor' a mercy," she muttered pettishly, her eyes glaring at me wild and bleared, but she followed me willingly enough when I beckoned her into the hall, where we might talk without disturbing our patient.

"Was she took any way that you heard?" she asked in a hoarse whisper, her mouth working with an abortive yawn. "I'm troubled with inflaming of the lids, an' set mostly with my eyes shut. It's more saving on 'em than glasses, besides being more handy."

eyes of any kind to make her sleep? and I glared at the woman as sternly as the limited use of my right eye would admit. Her wife were fogged with sleep and stirred slowly, but after staring duly at me for a moment, she brightened visibly, evidently fired with the hope of answering me and getting rid of me. "Yes, sir," she answered eagerly, "she do sometimes use a powder, an' it's often 'n' often I've told her she had'n' order; but—she's that stubborn and set, you'd hardly believe it, when she gets a notion."

"She has some left? Bring them," I said sternly. "I shall sift this matter to the bottom."

"Upwards of a dozen, I should say, sir," and with a step heavy with sleep she moved away, returning after a few moments with a small green box in her hand. "These are 'em," she said, giving vent to a mighty yawn which had been convulsing her since she started from her sleep.

"You look all used up," I said, fastening a professional eye upon her. "You need something to brace you up. Have you nothing in there that you can make, a little wine now or even a drop of straight whisky?"

"Ah, I had not been mistaken. Her eyes lighted greedily, and then were overcast with helpless resentment. "I haven't a drop of nothing," she said, and then she went on to say that she had a little wine, but it was all used up. "But the dog!" was the next dismayed exclamation. "They've let him down there just a moment ago. Oh, you may depend on it, we can never get out if he isn't done away with."

"I had forgotten the brute, and I must confess that but for the fact that the fine eye, which had grown plainer and developed into a pair, I should have felt much vexed at the reminder. If I could only give him

some hidden spring, the door responded instantly, and through a slight aperture a wisp of dark hair waved and the gleam of a fine eye shone on me, as a whispering voice asked me what I wanted.

"It is I," I faltered, idiotically, forgetting that I had as yet no identity with my questioner beyond the rather vague one of a medical man. "I'm the doctor, you know."

I added, huskily, my tongue refusing me the service of a glib lie.

"Oh," with a most delightful infection, and the door swung an inch or two farther open, but in place of accepting this friendly advance I skulked back into the shade of the unit hall like some assassin.

"Where is Mrs. Hoskins?" came in the same guarded whisper. "Look out for her. She may be in hiding somewhere. She does that lots, and then dodges out. Oh, she's just horrid."

"She won't now. She—she's asleep," I faltered. "I gave her something—some of your powders; but she's asleep, and I'm not the man to be in there with her. What if, after all, it was not the wine which had affected her; what if even then she was breathing her last, in some horrid death agony? The thought was sickening."

"Oh, oh, how awfully clever!" And there was a sound as of the hammer beaten together gently. "But the dog!" was the next dismayed exclamation. "They've let him down there just a moment ago. Oh, you may depend on it, we can never get out if he isn't done away with."

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again to the table. What did Dr. A. keep in his chest anyhow? Drugs designed solely for the use of teaching children? And yet who could tell? Perhaps my method might be bad. I might be doing up poisons and antidotes in the same bundle. This time I mixed powders and liquids with an impartial and liberal hand, but it was with only the faintest hope that I gathered up the third dose, and again sought my post at the window. The dog was not there! Was not there, nor was he dead! I could see him, see him plainly. If that mass of moving snow and fur could be a dog, faint, angry yelps rose from the tossing heap and my hair was tugged away under a cap to match. I looked, the mass took shape and rose and ran as nothing dependent on mere legs ever ran before, melting away into the darkness beyond, with a long, low howl which struck stone-cold upon my fainting heart.