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CREEPING JENNY

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WILLIS BOYD ALLEN

FOREST HOME SERIES No. 2.





A DARK FIGURE APPEARED AT THE WINDOW.
See page 55.

The Forest Home Series. No. 2.

A SEQUEL TO THE MOUNTAINEER SERIES.

CREEPING JENNY.

BY

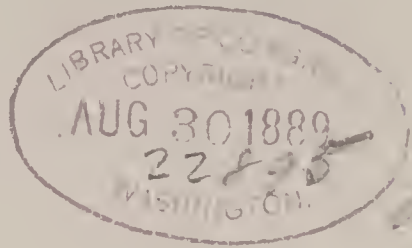
WILLIS BOYD ALLEN,

AUTHOR OF "THE MOUNTAINEER SERIES," "CHRISTMAS
AT SURF POINT," "PINE CONES," "SILVER RAGS,"
"THE NORTHERN CROSS," "KELP," ETC.

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TO
MY LITTLE CAMBRIDGE NIECE,
ANNIE LOUISE.

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CREEPING JENNY.

CHAPTER I.

MOLASSES AND SNOW.

THE little girl who had been left with the Aldens in the midst of a terrible snow-storm thrived wonderfully in her new home. Back and forth she crept over the uneven floor of the log cabin, until, as we read in "Prince's Pine," the first volume of these stories, she earned the name of "Creeping Jenny."

"Mother," said Winthrop one day, "did n't you say something about a kind of evergreen named just like baby?"

“There was a kind we called ‘creeping Jenny’ when I was a girl,” replied Mrs. Alden. “I don’t know what they call it nowadays.”

“What does it look like?”

“Oh, it has shiny little leaves, all flat and branching out into fingers. And it runs along the ground like the prince’s pine.”

“Is it good for any thing, mother?”

“Yes, Winnie; it’s the very best kind of evergreen for decorations at Christmas time. People in the cities buy a great deal of it to trim churches and houses.”

“I wish I could earn a little money that way,” said the boy half to himself.

Money was very scarce with

the Aldens, and Winnie made up his mind that if it were a possible thing he would make some evergreen trimming that very next Christmas, and sell it.

How he succeeded we shall see in the last volume of this series.

You will remember that it was at this time about midwinter, and that the weather was very cold and stormy.

One evening Mr. Alden brought up from his little store a brown jug.

“What is it, John?” asked Mrs. Alden. “Vinegar?”

“No, Polly; it’s some nice molasses that came by the train this afternoon. I thought I’d bring some up, and we’d have a little fun this evening.”

“Oh, good! good! molasses candy!” cried Winnie; and the other children were as much delighted as he.

“We’ll have both kinds,” said Stella; “flat and pulled.”

As soon as supper was eaten and the table cleared, Mr. Alden hung a kettle on the crane in the big fire-place, and poured in about three pints of molasses. It looked very rich and nice as he poured it from the jug.

“May I stir, mother?” asked Winthrop eagerly.

Mrs. Alden gave him a long-handled wooden spoon for answer, and he took his post by the kettle with an important air.

For some time the molasses



MAKING MOLASSES CANDY. Page 10.

looked as dark as ever, but pretty soon it began to have light-brown streaks and patches.

Winnie stirred gravely, and never took his eyes from the kettle.

Little Creeping Jenny was asleep in Mrs. Alden's arms. "She supposed the child ought to be in bed," Polly said, "but she believed she would hold her awhile first, and let her get nicely warmed through."

"And now, mother," said King, Winnie's brother, "why can't we have a story?"

"What! while the molasses is boiling?"

"Certainly," put in Mr. Alden. "Why not?"

Just then Stella came back from

the window, where she had been looking out at the snow.

“I never saw the moon so bright,” she said. “Every thing is as light as day.”

“Just see how big and yellow it is!” exclaimed King, looking out in his turn.

“Does any body live in it, mother?” said Winnie, stirring slowly.

“No, dear; it is only a dry cinder, rolling round through the air.”

“Then what makes it shine so?”

“The light of the sun shining on it. All it has to do each night is to say: ‘Oh, please shine on me, great, warm sun. I’m all black my-

self, but if you will shine on me hard, I will try to light up some dark places down in that little earth, with your light.' Then the sun does shine, and the moon helps, and we call it a beautiful moon-light night."

"How about the story, Polly?" said Mr. Alden, who liked to listen as well as the rest. "Can you remember one with any thing in it about the moon?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Polly cheerfully; "it's a story of a little girl who tried to get the moon all for herself."

Here it is, as she told it:—

"How the wind did blow! Gretchen curled up her toes, and

cuddled down under the blankets until only her blue eyes and her brown tousled hair were left outside. It had been snowing hard all day, and now the last few flakes of the storm were fluttering about on tiny white wings, and peeping in through one small clear space on the frosty window. The clear space had been made by Gretchen's warm little nose, when she had tried to look out just before saying her prayers and jumping into bed.

“ Perhaps I ought to have said, in the first place, that in the country where she lived the winters are always very long and dark, for the sun only shines four or five hours each day, and the snow is very

deep. If you will look on the map of Europe, Winnie, and find a big piece on the right-hand side (it used to be painted yellow on my map), reaching away up to the polar-bear country, you will see these letters mixed in with the mountains and rivers: R-U-S-S-I-A. That is where Gretchen lived. Her father's house was on the border of a broad, desolate plain, where trees had once grown, but had long since been cut down and burned. So the wind had great fun when it came to this plain, and for once had plenty of room to dance and roar in without disturbing any one except the hungry wolves, which objected very much to having their hair stroked the

wrong way, and their tails blown over their backs almost to the tips of their noses. But when the wind reached the edge of the plain where Gretchen lived, it would only give the house a few little pats, and laugh down the chimney, and puff the ashes out into the room until they came down on Gretchen's shoulders like a 'small snow-storm with warm flakes.

“To-night the wind was tumbling about over the plain, piling up the drifts into forts and giants and all sorts of queer shapes, like a boy at play. Gretchen could hear him laughing, and, in spite of her warm bed, began to wish she were outside too.”

At this point of the story Winthrop suggested that it was time to "try" the molasses.

A shout of laughter went up from the rest, for the molasses had barely begun to boil. But King brought in a cup of snow, and a spoonful of molasses was solemnly poured into it.

It was still very soft, but the boys divided it, and seemed to enjoy it quite as much as real candy.

"Now please go on, mother," said Winnie.

CHAPTER II.

HUNTING FOR THE MOON.

“‘I COULD put on my furs,’ thought Gretchen” (Mrs. Alden continued), “‘and jump right into that snow-drift under the window, and then perhaps the wind would show me strange things.’

“But just then she forgot all about the wind, for something was certainly looking in at the round hole in the window-pane. What a bright, bright eye it had! Gretchen could n’t help running up to the window and looking out, and then it was like a fairy story. On the edge of the sky lay the forest, dark



WALKING RIGHT UP INTO THE SKY. Page 18.

and gloomy; in front, and as far as the little girl could see, the white, glistening snow stretched away mile after mile. The sky was full of stars, and the snow seemed full of stars too, sparkling and twinkling until they made Gretchen wink her eyes hard for their very brightness. But far out on the plain, just at the top of the little hillock, was the most wonderful, beautiful thing of all. A great, gleaming ball of gold rested upon the snow so lightly that it never sank into it by a hair's breadth, filling the air and covering the plain with a flood of light so fair that Gretchen's little heart beat faster and faster.

“ If she could reach the top of

the hill before that ball rolled out of sight! If she could just put her hands on its smooth, radiant sides, and lay her cheek against their shining gold! If she could roll it toward the house, so that her father would find it in the morning, and they would be rich forever!

“Gretchen remembered perfectly well that her mother had often taken her upon her knee and told her to have nothing to do with gold. ‘It is a bad, bad thing for most people,’ she said, ‘and only those who are very good and wise can touch it safely.’ Then she had told her how the wise men had brought gold to the Babe at Bethlehem, but that was because He was



GRETCHEN'S MOTHER. Page 20.

so very good. 'And even then,' she added, 'I don't know what He ever did with it. He was poor enough, Gretchen, to work with wood and tools until he was a grown-up man, and then he had nowhere to lay his head.'

"Gretchen had not forgotten all this, by any means, but the ball of gold seemed so grand and large and near that she resolved this once to disobey her mother, and try to bring it home. 'I'll give it all to her but a little, tiny piece,' she thought.

"So she was soon covered up to her ears in furs, mittens, and boots, and in another minute had put on a small pair of snow-shoes her father had made for her, and was

plunging along through the snow towards the hill. The wind had gone off somewhere for awhile, and at first the air did not seem very cold. The ball seemed to have sunk into the snow a little, and to have rolled along on the top of the ridge. Sometimes Gretchen went down into the snow as far as her waist, but that was not often, for she had learned to walk bravely upon her snow-shoes. This kind of walking is very hard, you know, and before long the little lass began to breathe heavily. Presently she stopped to rest. The gold ball had sunk so deep into the snow that only its bright rim was to be seen above the hill. Gretchen pressed on faster

than ever. But now the snowshoes began to knock against each other and trip her up. Once or twice she fell flat, and then it was hard work to get up again, for she sunk deeper at every struggle.

“Suddenly it seemed to grow dark about her. Gretchen glanced up; the gold ball had sunk quite out of sight! The sky looked black and cross, with all its fiery little eyes snapping at her. The wind too seemed to notice her for the first time, and began to pinch her ears and throw bits of stinging ice and snow into her eyes. Oh, how tired she was, and sleepy and cold! The driving snow that whirled from the edges of the

huge drifts formed a veil over her eyes, and she could no longer see where she was going.

“Gretchen was too brave, although she was only a mite of a girl, to cry, so she just kept whispering, ‘Mother! mother!’ very easy. At last she could n’t do that, because she should cry if she moved her lips. Then she kept *thinking*, ‘Mother! mother!’ under her brown hair and in behind the blue eyes, until it began to drive the tears right out. So she could n’t do that any more either.

“Now she grew too sleepy to walk. She looked dimly about her, and saw a flock of woolly white sheep and lambs lying on the snow here and there. She

was n't much surprised at this, for it all began to seem pretty much like a dream, and choosing one of the woolliest of the lambs, she lay down beside it, cuddled up into its fleecy neck, and wearily dropping her head upon her arm, shut her eyes and went to sleep.

“By this time the wind began to repent of his roughness, and set about doing something to help little Gretchen, whom he knew very well.

“‘If that pack of wolves will stay in the woods where I drove them half an hour ago,’ he muttered, ‘I can risk leaving her. Well, there’s no time to talk. Here goes.’ So he hurried off to the little hut on the edge of the

plain, and knocked hard at the window of the room where Gretchen's mother was sleeping. In a minute she was wide awake.

“ ‘ How the wind roars to-night ! ’ she thought. ‘ I must see if my little Gretchen has plenty of warm clothes upon her bed. ’ Just then a biting cold draft touched her cheek, and made her shiver.

“ ‘ Why, the wind must have blown the window open, and ’ — there was the empty bed.

“ ‘ Henri, Henri, up, quick ! The child has been carried off, or walks in her sleep ! ’

“ How they peered down into the drift beneath her window, and followed the little print of the snow-shoes one by one, the lantern

swinging to and fro, and the stars looking down as if each one wanted to lead them to where the young child was.

“At last they came to a tract of land where the trees had been cut away hastily, many years before, and a small portion of the stumps had been left in the ground. These were now covered with snow and rose in little white mounds on every side.

“‘Be careful not to trip thyself upon the tree-stumps, wife!’ cried Gretchen’s father. ‘I no longer see the tracks of — Ah! what is here?’

“And the father’s trembling hands unclasped Gretchen’s little fur mittens from a projecting root,

and raised her from the ground where she had been lying closely nestled up to the rough bark.

“Got well? Why, of course she did. I should n’t have told you the story if she had n’t. I don’t believe in having stories that don’t end nicely, do you? There are enough real things in the world to feel badly about, without any make-believe ones at all.

“It took a long time though for Gretchen to get well, and for a good many days the doctor could n’t have told you what the end of this story would be. But I happen to know that when the fever was gone and the bright summer days came again, Gretchen was as strong and well as ever. And she does n’t

want any gold — at any rate not until she is a good deal older. Besides, she says she was half-asleep, anyway, or she would have known it was the moon !”

CHAPTER III.

A MOUNTAIN CANDY-PULL.

DURING all the last part of the moon-story the molasses was boiling furiously, and Winnie stirring with all his might.

There were several pauses, also, when the candy had to be tried.

At last the spoonful dropped in the snow was found to break easily, and the candy was pronounced done.

Mr. Alden swung the heavy crane round, kettle and all, and poured out about one half into a broad, shallow pan, which was set outside the door to cool.

The rest was poured into a bowl, and as soon as it could be handled was divided into portions for pulling.

How they did work!

“Just look at father’s!” cried Winnie, as he tugged away at his long loop of candy. “It’s almost white.”

“Mine sticks to my fingers all the time,” said King.

“Put flour on ’em.”

“Here, King, you pull with me.”

Stella and her brother put theirs together and each held one end of the loop. The whole kitchen was filled with the delicious smell of molasses candy, and the frolic was at its height, with baby (who had waked up to attend her first

candy-pull) crowing, and calling out musically, "Den! Den!" at the top of her voice, when there came a heavy knock at the door.

As every hand was full of candy, nobody could go to the door; but a chorus of "Come in!" arose, followed by a glad shout:—

"It's Hugh! it's Hugh!"

Hugh was the big, good-natured lumberman who lived at the Mill Settlement, and had befriended the Mountaineers more than once.

The children all rushed up to him, and no sooner had he taken off his coat and mittens than he was set to pulling candy like the rest.

"Wal, I do declare," said he, "this is reel comfortable. Haow's Jenny?"

The baby answered for herself by stretching out both arms to Hugh and smiling into his face.

“There,” said he, “I b’lieve I must hold her jest a minute. You take this candy off my hands, Stella, will ye?”

There was another laugh, for Hugh could do nothing until the long, yellow, sticky loop was lifted off like a skein of yarn.

“Naow, miss,” said he, turning with a beaming look to the child, “I guess we ’ll hev a trot.”

He took Jenny on his knee, and holding her fast, gave her a lively trotting which delighted her till she screamed with fun.

All this time Mrs. Alden had been wondering what brought

the backwoodsman up the mountain after dark.

Pretty soon Hugh's face began to look troubled, and he forgot to trot baby.

"I'll tell you what 't is, John," said he slowly, "I'm a leetle bit consarned abaout this 'ere chipmunk," glancing at the child on his knee.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Mr. Alden and his wife, both at once.

The children looked up from their candy in alarm.

"Thar's a feller raound here that claims her for his. I don't believe she's his darter any more 'n she's mine, but he says his wife an' baby were travelin' on the

cars an' they got off at a station below here fur somethin' to eat. While they were in the station the train started off, baby an' all, and left 'em."

"Where does he say his wife is now?"

"Says she went on to Montreal, visitin'. I don't believe a word on 't, for my part. It's my opinion he wants to get some money out of it somehaow."

"How did he know about Jenny, then?"

"Oh, the railroad men are all talking abaout it. I guess the Mountaineers' Creepin' Jenny is known putty nigh all the way to Portland; ain't ye, leetle gal?"

"Den! Den! Goo-ah-h!" re-

marked that young lady earnestly, wriggling back and forth to remind Hugh that he was her horse.

“I only wanted to tell ye what I was afeard on,” added Hugh, with a look of great tenderness at the laughing baby on his knee, “so’s you’d be prepared ef that feller should come up here after her. He’s an ugly-lookin’ chap as ever walked the ’arth, and I would n’t give up Jenny to him without he proves fa’r an’ squar’ that he’s her father. Now I must be goin’.”

“Going! I guess not to-night! You’ve got to stay till morning, now you’re here, old fellow! And thank you a thousand times for coming,” Mr. Alden continued.

“Wal, ef so be thet I c’n sleep before this ’ere fire on my old b’ar-skin, I ’ll stay.”

Hugh always called it his bear-skin, because, as you will remember, he hunted and shot the bear which had worn it.

Throwing off their anxiety for the time, the Mountaineers once more began their fun. The candy was at last ready, and, being drawn out into long, light strips, was cut into sticks and drops and set away on a board to harden. The “flat” candy was brought in and passed around.

Little Creeping Jenny was put to bed before this part of the program, and before long the little cabin, half-buried beneath the snow,

was as quiet as the fir-trees outside in the moonlight, save for the soft rustling and crackling of the glowing fire-brands; before which, on the black, shaggy bear-skin, was stretched the long, ungainly form of Hugh the lumberman. Long after every body else in the house was asleep, he lay there looking into the bright coals, with that same troubled look on his face. The lonely man had already learned to love the baby so dearly; and now — if she should be taken away!

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT A SNOWFLAKE DID.

WHEN the Aldens rose the morning after the candy-pull, they found that Hugh had already gone. He was always very careful not to burden his friends; much more than he needed to be — really.

“He was a powerful eater,” he used to say, “and there was no call to feed him as well as keep him all night.”

The clear skies of the evening before were now covered with clouds, and by ten o'clock the first small flakes began to fall, promising another storm.

Stella had already been out with some crumbs and a handful of grain to feed the birds, as she did almost every day.

At noon it was snowing hard, and the children were caged in the cabin.

“Oh, dear,” said Winnie mournfully, after dinner, “it’s nothing but snow, snow, snow. Do you suppose it ever will stop, mother? Will it ever be spring?”

“All in good time, my boy. If it were not for the snow there would be no spring at all, you know.”

“But, mother, there’s been so much of it! And it’s all got to melt away, and — oh, dear! I want to go out and play in the woods, and have a garden, and” —

“Winnie, suppose you put your head on my shoulder, so that you can look out at the storm, and I will tell you a true story. That is, it is partly true and partly made up. It’s too dark for me to sew any longer.”

“Oh, that’ll be nice! Is it about a bear, or fairies, or the little girl asleep in the palace, or” —

“Just about a tiny white snowflake. He had been fast asleep in the clouds all night, when one morning he felt himself falling towards the earth. This was n’t pleasant, for the earth looked quite brown and muddy; but fortunately, it seemed, he spied just beneath him a tall white church steeple.

“‘There,’ thought he, ‘there’s my chance! I will stop on the very tiptop of the steeple and so keep myself nice and clean.’

“So he tried with all his might, and succeeded in clinging to the weather-vane, which was swinging to and fro, pointing every way in one minute.

“‘Oh,’ said the snowflake, ‘this is dreadful! It makes one lose one’s breath so! But it’s high up, and there’s that disagreeable mud down there, and’ —

“Puff! came the wind. There was no help for it. And away he went, now up, now down, until he alighted in a miry hollow close beside the road, for the church was in a little country town.

“The flake first gave himself up for lost, it was so wet, and — well, the snow all around him did look more like brown sugar than any thing else, and pretty soon his own nice white crystals were soiled like the rest. Soon afterwards the air seemed to grow colder, then more flakes fell into the hollow, faster and faster, until, before very long, he was covered up quite out of sight.

“What he thought about all these long weeks that followed I can't tell you, Winnie. Perhaps he began to think he was a selfish little flake ; that he had been sent to do some good in the world, whether he fell in the mud, or on a tree-top, or on a church spire.

At any rate, he began to stir himself a little to find out what he could do. He could no longer rise, for ice and snow lay heavy upon him, so he quietly worked his way down into the ground. There he found what seemed to be a great number of wee white fingers begging for something he carried. Bit by bit he gave them all the precious things he had brought from the sky. He was surprised to find how much he had. A little pure sky-water, a pinch of cloud-sugar, a shade of blue from a last summer's rainbow — one by one he gave them all. At last every thing was gone; but still the wee fingers were stretched out, and then — he gave himself.

“ A few weeks later, when the snow had all melted away, and the brooks had begun to dance down hill, and the birds to sing in the trees, a little girl ran out from a house not far from the white church steeple, and began to look eagerly about her. The air was soft and delicious, and the setting sun shone so brightly in the west that it was like walking right up into the sky in a path of light. But the little girl hardly glanced at the sky. She was in such a hurry that she had even forgotten to put on her hat, and now she was searching for something in the grass beside the path. The turf was green and soft as a velvet cloak with golden dandelion but-

tons on it; but that was not what she wanted.

“All at once she gave a little cry of delight.

“‘It is! it is!’ she said aloud. ‘Now Rob can have it, and it will make him better, I know!’

“Stooping down she picked with great care one wee bright-faced violet and carried it away lovingly to the sick boy.

“I don’t suppose she knew, Winnie, what the snowflake had done, or where the violet had found its blue. But He who sent the snowflake knew, and He was glad; and — why, Winnie, are you asleep? Wake up, dear! I hear father outside the door.”

CHAPTER V.

HUGH AND JENNY.

WINNIE rubbed his eyes, laughed, and ran to the door to let his father in. Mrs. Alden rose from her chair and lighted a candle in order to begin her preparations for tea. The snow had ceased falling in the afternoon, after all.

King and Stella had gone down to the Mill Settlement to carry a basket of good things to Mrs. Ensling, a little German woman who lived there, very poor in all the unimportant things of life, — such as money, food, fuel, and clothes, — but very rich in the best

things: a sweet spirit, a pure and gentle heart, and love to her Father in heaven.

“It is very easy,” she would say, “for the rich to wear poor clothes, just for fun. I am a King’s daughter, and I do not mind the poor clothes.”

Then she would repeat from her dear old German Bible the words:—

“Den Abend lang wahret das Weinen, aber des Morgens die Freude.”

If you want to find what that means, look at the last half of the fifth verse of the Thirtieth Psalm. Only Frau Ensling rarely wept, and she looked up and smiled through her tears, even in the night.

In the Mountaineers' log-cabin, you see, there was nobody left, on this particular afternoon, but Mrs. Alden and Winnie and the baby.

Creeping Jenny was, in fact, asleep in her day-bed, not far from the big kitchen fire-place. The bed was made from a shoe-box, with one side cut down, and the rough boards covered inside and out with a cheap but bright print which Mr. Alden found in his stock at the store.

Just as she was lighting her candle, Polly heard the sound of a strange and angry voice at the door. It was not her husband, then, after all! She remembered suddenly that he did not

expect to reach home before six o'clock. It was now only half-past four.

With a dread that she could not explain she hastened to the door, calling, —

“Winnie, Winnie, what is it?”

At the same minute there was a cry of pain, followed by a slam of the door, and the boy came running back, holding his hand to his head.

“He hit me, mother! He hit me!”

“Who hit you, Winthrop?”

Mrs. Alden was a brave woman, but her voice shook as she took the little fellow in her arms.

“That ugly man out there,” sobbed Winthrop. “He said he’d come after baby” —

“After baby?”

“Yes ’m. He said she was his girl, and he was going to take her away.”

“Well?” breathlessly, with a glance at innocent little Jenny, asleep in her box-crib.

“I told him to wait till father got home, or to go down to the station and see him. Then he swore dreadfully and said he would n’t, and that he was coming in now and get her. I stood in his way” —

“My brave boy!”

“And he — he struck my head with his fist. But I jumped into the entry and shut the door and bolted it just as quick. O mother, hear him bang at it now!”

Mrs. Alden bowed her head a

moment, and her lips moved silently. Then she looked Winnie quietly and steadily in the face.

“You must do something very hard, Winthrop.”

The boy wiped away his tears and looked at her, sobered by her manner.

“You must hurry down to the station and tell your father to come,” continued Mrs. Alden in low tones. She blew out the candle as she spoke.

Bang, bang, bang! at the door. The man was getting angrier every moment.

“Put on your coat and cap quick, my son. I’ll let you out of the back window, and you can

go round behind Whiteface's shed while I talk with this man at the door. It's so dark he won't see you."

"But, mother, I'm afraid to go out there alone!"

And Winthrop's lips quivered.

"You won't be alone, dear. I've asked God to walk right along beside you. He can stay with you in the snow and ice just as well as in a fiery furnace. He will take care of you."

By this time Winthrop, who in all his fear and doubting, had been putting on his snow-shoes just the same, was nearly ready. A few moments more and he was standing at the open window, and while his mother went to the door he

slipped out quietly, closed the window, and was gone.

“What do you want?” demanded Mrs. Alden in clear tones.

She did not open the door, but voices could easily be heard through it.

“I want that gal, and you’d better give her to me quick!”

“I don’t know who you are.”

“I’m her father,” growled the man savagely. “You open this door.”

Another bang.

“How can I tell that you are speaking the truth?”

Her only idea was to gain time for Winnie.

“I’ll let ye know what I’m speaking, if ye don’t open this door.”

And he kicked it until it shook on its hinges.

“Why don’t you ask my husband about it?”

Before the man could answer, a low cry arose from the kitchen. Baby had waked up, and hearing the harsh tones outside the door, was disturbed.

Mrs. Alden flew to her side to quiet her, but baby insisted upon being taken up.

As Polly turned, with little Jenny in her arms, a dark figure appeared at one of the low front-windows, and an evil-looking face peered in. He could see every thing plainly in the firelight — the cosy room, the little home-made bed, the brave woman standing there, and the baby in her arms.



“Look here,” called the man loudly, “I’ll give ye jest one minute to open that door. If ye don’t then, I’ll break this ’ere window and come in anyhow!”

Mrs. Alden said nothing, but stood there in the firelight as motionless as a statue, her eyes fixed upon the dark pair gazing in through the frosty panes, her heart praying silently for help.

“Minute’s up! I’m comin’!” shouted the man, raising his fist to beat in the glass.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, he tumbled backward, head over heels, and disappeared in a snow-bank.

“What air ye tryin’ to do, stranger?” said a familiar voice, which made Polly’s heart leap for joy.

She rushed to the window, and there, sure enough, was the long, homely figure of Hugh.

Covered with snow, and muttering savagely, the man picked himself up and was about to sneak off, when Hugh laid his hand on his shoulder in a way that made him stop.

“You seemed so anxious to get into the haouse,” remarked his captor, “I guess we’ll let ye. Halloa, John, come ’long an’ help me tend to this chap.”

A shout from the path a little below answered him, and four figures, at first dimly seen in the darkness, hurried up to the cabin.

It seemed that Mr. Alden finished his business sooner than he

had expected, and, overtaking King and Stella on their way home from Mrs. Ensling's, had walked up with them. They met Winnie about halfway from the station, and learned from him of the danger to Jenny. As for Hugh, he had heard at the mill that the strange man had been seen walking up the track, and, fearing trouble, he had come "across lots" to the Mountaineers', arriving, as we have seen, just in time.

Well, the man did not dare resist, but went sullenly into the house with them.

"You've got to give her up, anyways," said he, with a dogged air, pointing to Jenny, who was

engaged in climbing up Hugh as if he were a new and particularly attractive kind of tree.

“I guess not,” replied John calmly. “Here is a letter from conductor Harkins. He has looked up the matter and finds that the child’s father and mother died in Boston six months ago. She was left in the care of some distant relatives, who got tired of her and abandoned her on the train. As for you, sir,” he continued sternly, “you are a Canadian discharged last month from the saw-mill twenty miles above here, and never set eyes on the child before to-night.”

The man looked so utterly mean and crestfallen that they actually pitied him.

“Here,” said Mrs. Alden, her heart overflowing with thankfulness for the help that had come and the safety of her dear ones, “take some hot supper before you go.”

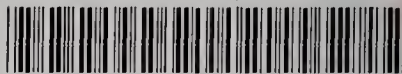
“Ye’d better,” observed Hugh, as the man hesitated. “She means it; it’s jest like these folks. Ye’d better eat a good supper when ye can, fer you’ve got a long walk before you. When the men daown t’ the Settlement hear abaout ye, and the trick ye tried to play on the Mountaineers, the country won’t be safe for ye ten miles araound.”

Without a word the strange man ate his supper, put on his hat, and slouched off into the

darkness. Nor was he ever heard of again in those parts.

If you want to hear a little more about Winnie, and King, and Jenny, and the rest, you must read the next number of this series, entitled "FIR BOUGHS."

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