

'Donaldson thinks the pressure is too heavy, since the rains,' said Becky's father as he ate his dinner. 'He's worried about the dam, though that doesn't mean much, for Donaldson always sees the black side. However,' concluded the doctor cheerfully, 'I'll feel better for looking it over myself. When a man pitches camp in front of a cage of wild animals, he must be sure that the bars are good and strong.'

'Is it a circus?' asked Becky's little brother, Bob, pricking up his ears; and the doctor laughed, and acknowledged that it was something of the sort. And Bob's imagination having been aroused, nothing would do but that he should accompany his father. The two drove away soon after dinner, the doctor looking out of the buggy to tell Becky what to say in case Mrs. Sharpe should call up about Johnny's cough. The afternoon passed uneventfully enough till about 4 o'clock. Two or three times the telephone rang, apparently causing his mother anxiety, but old Mrs. Wright wanted more of her rheumatism medicine, and Mrs. Clifford asked that the doctor should run in and take a look at the baby. Becky wrote these calls on the doctor's slate, and a moment later was called to answer the door bell.

The woman at the door wore a sunbonnet, and led a barefooted child by the hand. 'One of the Benders,' Becky said to herself. Two miles below the village, the streams curved abruptly to the east, and in the angle of this elbow huddled a little settlement of shabby houses, known as Hickory Bend. There was something distinctive about the inhabitants of Hickory Bend, the 'Benders,' as Becky irreverently christened them. The women were all lank, the men slouched, the most of the children were ragged. A sorry little blot on the greenness and beauty of the spring world was Hickory Bend.

'Doctor home?' The woman's voice was shrill. The face looking out of the sunbonnet was faded and apathetic.

'No, he won't be home till supper time.'

The woman sighed. 'It's a good bit of a walk from the Bend here,' she complained. 'My old man thought maybe somebody'd give me a lift along the road, but there warn't but two waggons passed me, and they was goin' the other way.'

'Another time you'd better telephone and see if the doctor's here,' Becky began thoughtlessly. The woman uttered a short, disconcerting laugh.

'Telephone!' she said. 'Bless you, there ain't no telephone at Hickory Bend. If you want a doctor, you've got to hoof it and take your chances.'

'You'd better sit and rest a while,' Becky suggested, her hospitable instincts aroused by the woman's look of weariness. She gave the unprepossessing pair chairs on the shaded porch, and brought out two glasses of clear, cold water. The two drank thirstily, and the mother, with a sudden stirring of responsibility in the matter of training her offspring, told the child angrily to say thank you to the young lady. Then the telephone called Becky away, and when she re-

turned, the two had started on their homeward journey: two plodding, unlovely figures set against the greenness of the spring afternoon.

In the absence of society Becky found herself suddenly sleepy. She flung herself down on the well-worn couch in the doctor's office, where her father caught many a brief nap in preparation for an all-night vigil. With her healthy nerves and sound body, Becky could fall asleep as promptly as a kitten. In sixty seconds by the clock she was breathing regularly, and her nap had lasted a good hour when it was interrupted by the telephone bell.

Becky opened her eyes drowsily, tried to remember whether it was day or night, and jumped all at once, as a full realisation of her responsibilities dawned upon her. She took down the receiver, trying to recall just what her father had said about Johnny Sharp's cough. A woman's voice, a hoarse, intense voice, was shouting something incredible in her ears.

'The dam's broke. The water's coming down on you. Run for the hills!'

Becky put the receiver back on the hook, stood for a moment in a daze, and then ran for the door. Her mind was mechanically calling the roll of the household. The older boys had gone off hunting that afternoon. That would take them to the highlands, and Aunt Susan's friend, too, lived on the hill. Bob was with her father. She must trust her father to save them both.

In the streets people were running towards the hills. Mothers carried babies in their arms. Older children dragged along the younger ones. In the distance Becky could see old Mrs. Wright making for the high land at a rate of speed that did not suggest rheumatism. It was clear that the warning which had come to her was general. Somewhere an operator was sticking to her post, sending the message into home after home, giving the people time to save their lives before the flood was upon them.

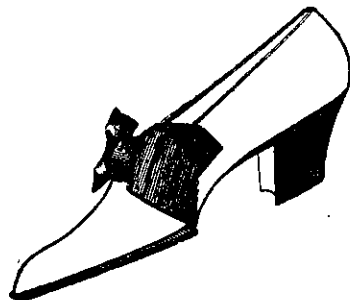
All this flashed through Becky's mind on her way from the front porch to the gate. And then like a picture thrown on a screen, she saw a woman and a child plodding on the way to Hickory Bend, where there was no telephone. How was Hickory Bend to be warned? She looked back toward the house, and the handle-bars of Tom's bicycle flashed in the afternoon sunlight. It was Becky's answer.

A moment later she was flying down the road, everything but time in her favor. The wind was at her back. The sandy soil had drunk in the spring rains and was thirsty again. Down the dry, sloping road she flew like the wind, every sense alert for some sound of her merciless pursuer. Already her heart was pounding, and her throat was dry. The thought of self-preservation, forgotten for the moment, came back insistently. How far away the hills looked, the hills where there was safety.

On ahead she saw two figures resting by the roadside, and even at that distance recognised the stoop of the woman's shoulders and the listless droop of the

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