

Storyteller.

THE DOCTOR'S DECISION.

(Ethel M. Hayes.)

Bradford Gage nervously paced across the broad hall, anxiously awaiting the familiar step of the family physician. In a richly furnished room at the head of the stairs lay a beautiful girl. Often as he waited he heard from above screams and cries that seemed to tear the heart from his body. Memories, thoughts and sympathy that had slept long, came floating across his mind. Unconsciously he sinks into a chair, and for a brief space lives in the past—among the Pennsylvania hills. This is the picture he sees:

An old farmhouse, a sweet-faced mother and a kindly father; every inch of the dear old place with its familiar haunts. Down through the timber to the spring he patters again, barefooted calling in a shrill, childish voice, "Florence, O Florence." From somewhere comes the answer, "Yes, Bradford."

Through a hole in the old hedge fence emerges a pink sunbonnet, shading a pair of sharp black eyes with the merriest of twinkles, a rosy mouth, a dimpled chin, and black ringlets. She, too, is barefooted and is clad in gingham. For an hour they make mud pies. Then two dinner bells echoing from hill to hill call them home to the noonday meal.

Oh, these times! But hark, a step on the gravel, a familiar voice!

"Good evening, Brad. Why, what's the matter? You look as if you were a hundred years old. Ah, now you're smiling. You must have been living again your boyhood days."

Gage came to himself and said slowly, as though reluctant to return to the present, "Hugh, I've spent two hours of terrible suspense waiting for you, but there's no time for words, come with me."

They ascended the stairs and entered the sick room. By the bed sat Gage's wife, patiently though vainly trying to quiet the tossing figure. Gage said earnestly, "Do your best, Hugh."

The doctor seated himself and began to watch the movements of the girl on the bed. In the hall outside, Gage could be heard tramping steadily back and forth. Occasionally he stopped at the door and looked in, then resumed his walking.

Every nerve in the frail body jerked, her eyes were like coals of fire as

she fastened on the stranger an angry gaze. From time to time she muttered inaudibly. Once she clung to the wall, as if shrinking from some terrible apparition, and her body shook with sobs the heart of a wooden man could not withstand. Then, a pitiable pleading look crept into the dark eyes. Again and again she repeated these strange actions.

The doctor sat there for an hour, studying he knew not what. At last he arose and preparing a few powders gave Mrs Gage directions for administering them, and left the room. In the hall he said briefly to his friend:

"Let me hear by nine in the morning what the night has been." Without further remark he departed.

Neither Gage nor his wife thought of sleep. The same manoeuvres which the doctor had witnessed continued until daybreak, when from sheer exhaustion the patient slept.

At the appointed hour, Gage presented himself at the office of Dr. Brown. Many times before he had gone there for a friendly chat, but this morning—well—this was different! Dr. Brown greeted him in the usual friendly manner and then asked:

"Well, Brad, how's the patient by this time? Has she had any rest yet?"

"She was dozing when I left," Bradford replied.

"How long had she been sleeping?"

"Since daybreak."

"Did the medicine have no pacifying effect until then?" the doctor eagerly questioned.

"No, and I don't think it really quieted her at all. She was worn out, and slept from exhaustion. Now, Hugh, I have answered your questions. You answer mine. What is the matter with her?"

"Brad, you and I are old friends. Tell me one thing more: do you know this girl to be of strict moral character?"

"Yes, Hugh, I would not have her under my roof if she were not; I know her to be every inch a lady."

"Has she ever had a similar attack?"

"Not to my knowledge. Two years ago, when she came to our house, I thought her the most agreeable of persons. A few weeks ago my wife told me that she had on different occasions since her arrival appeared exceedingly irritable; her actions could hardly be endured. I spoke to her about the matter, and the

performance has never been repeated. Yesterday afternoon she was taken with a nervous headache, and went to bed. Her condition grew steadily worse, until I sent for you last night. But, Hugh, you haven't answered my question."

"I have practised medicine for thirty years, Brad, but a case never came to my notice that was such a puzzle as this one. Frankly, I don't know what is the matter, Gage. If she were a man, I'd say she had *dellium tremens*."

Gage sat silent for a while, then remarked, "Now, my doctor friend, you've given me your opinion; I'm going to tell you a story. As you know, I was born and grew to manhood on a farm in Pennsylvania. When a child my playmate was my cousin, Florence Gage. Such times as we had!

"When I was eighteen years old I came west, and worked my way through college. Then I went home, and immediately sought out Florence. I think she was the prettiest girl I ever saw, with black hair, and eyes that shone like diamonds. She told me she was soon to be married to a man of wealth and position, George Barrow by name.

"In the evening a party of guests, myself among them, were invited to her home, and I was introduced to her fiancée. He was a man of splendid form and features, and I admired him greatly, until later in the evening, when suddenly, as we were conversing on the front porch, he drew from his pocket a flask and offered me a drink. True to my early training, I refused. I was surprised and pained.

"Early on the morrow I again went to Florence's home, and asked her to go with me down to the spring, where as children we used to play. During the walk there I asked her if she was certain George's principles were absolutely square. She assured me that he was a thorough gentleman. I related to her my experience of the night before. She was greatly affected, and went hastily home.

"A few days later she came to me, her anxiety gone, and said that she had asked George about what I had mentioned. He admitted he was a moderate drinker, taking a little every day, but insisted that the amount he consumed wouldn't hurt anybody. I saw that it was useless to say more.

"In the early autumn they were married, and a handsomer couple I never have seen. Again I came west, and took up the practice of law. For