

## CHAPTER X.

### THE DEVIL OF SILENCE.

RALPH had reason to fear Small, who was a native of the same village of Lewisburg, and some five years the elder. Some facts in the doctor's life had come into Ralph's possession in such a way as to confirm life-long suspicion without giving him power to expose Small, who was firmly entrenched in the good graces of the people of the county-seat village of Lewisburg, where he had grown up, and of the little cross-roads village of Clifty, where his "shingle" now hung.

Small was no ordinary villain. He was a genius. Your ordinary hypocrite talks cant. Small talked nothing. He was the coolest, the steadiest, the most silent, the most promising boy ever born in Lewisburg. He made no pretensions. He set up no claims. He uttered no professions. He went right on and lived a life above reproach. Your vulgar hypocrite makes long prayers in prayer-meeting. Small did nothing of the sort. He sat still in prayer-meeting, and listened to the elders as

a modest young man should. Your commonplace hypocrite boasts. Small never alluded to himself, and thus a consummate egotist got credit for modesty. It is but an indifferent trick for a hypocrite to make temperance speeches. Dr. Small did not even belong to a temperance society. But he could never be persuaded to drink even so much as a cup of tea. There was something sublime in the quiet voice with which he would say, "Cold water, if you please," to a lady tempting him with smoking coffee on a cold morning. There was no exultation, no sense of merit in the act. Everything was done in a modest and matter-of-course way beautiful to behold. And his face was a neutral tint. Neither face nor voice expressed anything. Only a keen reader of character might have asked whether all there was in that eye could live contented with this cool, austere, self-contained life; whether there would not be somewhere a volcanic eruption. But if there was any sea of molten lava beneath, the world did not discover it. Wild boys were sick of having Small held up to them as the most immaculate of men.\*

Ralph had failed to get two schools for which he

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\* The original from which this character was drawn is here described accurately. The author now knows that such people are not to be put into books. They are not realistic enough.



had applied, and had attributed both failures to certain shrugs of Dr. Small. And now, when he found Small at the house of Granny Sanders, the center of intelligence as well as of ignorance for the neighborhood, he trembled. Not that Small would say anything. He never said anything. He damned people by a silence worse than words.

Granny Sanders was not a little flattered by the visit.

"Why, doctor, howdy, howdy! Come in, take a cheer. I am glad to see you. I 'lowed you'd come. Old Dr. Flounder used to say he larnt lots o' things of me. But most of the doctors sence hez been kinder stuck up, you know. But I know'd you fer a man of intelligence."

Meantime, Small, by his grave silence and attention, had almost smothered the old hag with flattery. "Many's the case I've cured with yarbs and things. Nigh upon twenty year ago they was a man lived over on Wild Cat Run as had a breakin'-out on his side. 'Twas the left side, jes below the waist. Doctor couldn't do nothin'. 'Twas Doctor Peacham. He never would have nothin' to do with 'ole woman's cures.' Well, the man was goin' to die. Everybody seed that. And they come a-drivin' away over here all the way from the Wild Cat. Think of that air! I never was so flustered.





But as soon as I laid eyes on that air man, I says, says I, that air man, says I, has got the shingles, says I. I know'd the minute I seed it. And if they'd gone clean around, nothing could a saved him. I says, says I, git me a black cat. So I jist killed a black cat, and let the blood run all over the swellin'. I tell you, doctor, they's nothin' like it. That man was well in a month."

"Did you use the blood warm?" asked Small, with a solemnity most edifying.

These were almost the only words he had uttered since he entered the cabin.

"Laws, yes; I jest let it run right out of the cat's tail onto the breakin'-out. And fer airesipelus, I don't know nothin' so good as the blood of a black hen."

"How old?" asked the doctor.

"There you showed yer science, doctor! They's no power in a pullet. The older the black hen the better. And you know the cure fer rheumatiz?" And here the old woman got down a bottle of grease. "That's ile from a black dog. Ef it's rendered right, it'll knock the hind sights off of any rheumatiz you ever see. But it must be rendered in the dark of the moon. Else a black dog's ile a'n't worth no more nor a white one's."

And all this time Small was smelling of the un-



corked bottle, taking a little on his finger and feeling of it, and thus feeling his way to the heart—drier than her herbs—of the old witch. And then he went round the cabin gravely, lifting each separate bunch of dried yarbs from its nail, smelling of it, and then, by making an interrogation-point of his silent face, he managed to get a lecture from her on each article in her *materia medica*, with the most marvelous stories illustrative of their virtues. When the Granny had got her fill of his silent flat-tery, he was ready to carry forward his main purpose.

There was something weird about this silent man's ability to turn the conversation as he chose to have it go. Sitting by the Granny's tea-table, nibbling corn-bread while he drank his glass of water, having declined even her sassafras, he ceased to stimulate her medical talk and opened the vein of gossip. Once started, Granny Sanders was sure to allude to the robbery. And once on the robbery the doctor's course was clear.

"I 'low somebody not fur away is in this 'ere business!"

Not by a word, nor even by a nod, but by some motion of the eyelids, perhaps, Small indicated that he agreed with her.

"Who d'ye s'pose 'tis?"

But Dr. Small was not in the habit of supposing. He moved his head in a quiet way, just the least perceptible bit, but so that the old creature understood that he could give light if he wanted to.

"I dunno anybody that's been 'bout here long as could be suspected."

Another motion of the eyelids indicated Small's agreement with this remark.

"They a'n't nobody come in here lately 'ceppin' the master."

Small looked vacantly at the wall.

"But I 'low he's allers bore a tip-top character."

The doctor was too busy looking at his corn-bread to answer this remark even by a look.

"But I think these oversmart young men'll bear looking arter, *I* do."

Dr. Small raised his eyes and let them *shine* an assent. That was all.

"Shouldn't wonder ef our master was overly fond of gals."

Doctor looks down at his plate.

"Had plenty of sweethearts afore he walked home with Hanner Thomson t'other night, I'll bet."

Did Dr. Small shrug his shoulder? Granny thought she detected a faint motion of the sort, but she could not be sure.

"And I think as how that a feller what trifles



with gals' hearts and then runs off ten miles, maybe a'n't no better'n he had orter be. That's what I says, says I."

To this general remark Dr. Small assented in his invisible—shall I say *intangible*?—way.

"I allers think, maybe, that some folks has found it best to leave home and go away. You can't never tell. But when people is a-bein' robbed it's well to lookout. Hey?"

"I think so," said Small quietly, and, having taken his hat and bowed a solemn and respectful adieu, he departed.

He had not spoken twenty words, but he had satisfied the news-monger of Flat Creek that Ralph was a bad character at home and worthy of suspicion of burglary.

## CHAPTER XI.

## MISS MARTHA HAWKINS.

"It's very good for the health to dig in the elements. I was quite emaciated last year at the East, and the doctor told me to dig in the elements. I got me a florial hoe and dug, and it's been most excellent for me."\* Time, the Saturday following the Friday on which Ralph kept Shocky company as far as the "forks" near Granny Sanders's house. Scene, the Squire's garden. Ralph helping that worthy magistrate perform sundry little jobs such as a warm winter day suggests to the farmer. Miss Martha Hawkins, the Squire's niece, and his house-keeper in his present bereaved condition, leaning over the palings—pickets she called them—of the garden fence, talking to the master. Miss Hawkins was recently from Massachusetts. How many people there are in the most cultivated communities whose education is partial!

"It's very common for school-master to dig in

\* Absurd as this speech seems, it is a literal transcript of words spoken in the author's presence by a woman who, like Miss Hawkins, was born in Massachusetts.