

'OUR BURGLAR.'

'NESTA, what was that?'

I awoke to find my twin-sister Lucie standing at my bedside. She had turned up the gas a little, and the faint light shone on her startled face, as she laid her hand on my shoulder, and, raising her finger, said, 'Hark!'

I listened; in the stillness of night the sound of some one trying a latchkey at our front door came horribly clear and distinct to my ear, and half asleep as I still was, I guessed at once the thought in my sister's mind.

Not long before this our dear father had died suddenly, and we had brought mother to this quiet suburban road, intending to start a girls' school. Mother was left with enough to keep her, but she was anything but strong, and we girls were anxious not to break up the home. Mother was now staying with Aunt Jessie, until we got straight in our new abode, and our one servant was no doubt sleeping soundly in her room at the top of the house. Now, only that morning Lucie had lost her latch-key, and ever since we had felt rather uneasy. We had another, so were not inconvenienced, but I wondered now, half sleepily, if someone had picked it up, and was entering our house by its means.

Whoever it was seemed going stealthily to work; the lock was stiff—we had discovered that—and the intruder was evidently anxious not to be heard. Just then the clock from the chapel at the corner of the road struck twelve. Lucie hastily slipped her feet into soft slippers, put on her dressing gown, and then opened a locked cabinet which had been our father's. From it she took a revolver.

'Lucie,' I gasped—I was terribly afraid of firearms, and knew it was loaded—'what are you going to do?'

With her lips firmly set and her big blue eyes flashing, she answered melodramatically, 'I am going to defend our lives and property.'

Creak went the uncarpeted boards. Oh, horror! The burglar, if such he was, and we did not doubt it, was creeping upstairs! I also donned dressing-gown and slippers, and peeped over my more courageous sister's shoulder, as she opened the door, and advanced to the head of the stairs. By the faint light issuing from our room I saw, with a strange sinking of heart, that the burglar was an unusually big man; Lucie looked a mere child as she stood fronting him, her fair hair in a long plait down her back, and her usually merry *riante* face set and hard.

'Move a step farther and I fire!'

Her voice rang out clear and distinct as a bell. The burglar, who carried a little bag in his hand, gave a start, a half articulate cry, then, to our horror, lost his balance, and fell backward down the steep flight of stairs he had ascended. Lucie gave a little shriek, laid the revolver aside, and ran down to him. How could she!

'Nest,' in a moment, she called, 'get me a light.'

Shaking all over, like the coward I was, I went downstairs, passed where Lucie crouched by the silent figure, into the kitchen, and lit a candle. My sister knelt on the bare boards of the hall, supporting the burglar's head, but when the light gleamed on his deathly pale face, I soon saw it was no housebreaker who lay there so still.

'Lu, is he dead?' I gasped.

'I don't know,' she mourned. 'Oh, Nest, we have



BEATTIE, PHOTO.

LADIES OF THE WONDERLAND.

made a terrible mistake. Wake Sarah and send her for a doctor or something.'

Just at that moment the young man—he only looked about six and twenty—opened his eyes, and murmured, 'What has happened?'

In a few moments he was able to struggle to his feet, and then sit on the bottom stair. With the exception of a big bruise on his head he seemed unharmed, though of course a good deal stunned by the fall, and I do not know when I felt more thankful. I know Lucie's heart was full of gratitude; she had not meant to kill even a burglar, unless he had attempted our lives, and this was no burglar evidently.

Well, to make a short story of a long one, it appeared that the young man, who was a commercial traveller, had, two days before we had moved into our new abode, taken a house two doors below for himself and sisters. Having just returned from a journey, and being anxious not to disturb his sisters, who were much older than himself, and tired after several days, packing and unpacking of household goods, he had made his entrance as quietly as possible, only being not yet familiar with the house, each of which was built exactly alike, and with his thoughts full just then of business, he had entered ours by mistake, with his own key, which, however, was found to fit both doors.

He was so sorry for the fright he had occasioned, and behaved in so gentlemanly a manner about his accident, caused by the sudden apparition of Lucie's white figure and loudly uttered threat, that my heart quite warmed to

him, and the acquaintance began so strangely grew into a friendship between the two families.

No, I did not become his wife; it was Lucie who married 'Our burglar,' but in the day she, in a pretty white dress and veil, stood at the altar with Nugent, I was there also, in a like costume, with his great chum, Raymond Price, and everyone said the double wedding was one of the prettiest ever seen. And as both our husbands are travellers we live together, 'to keep each other company,' and the only point on which the two families differ is as to which is the finer child, my little daughter, or Lucie's little son.

The 'Woman of To-day' is now distinguishing herself as a mountain climber. Miss Annie S. Peck, who has already scaled the Matterhorn, and is described as the greatest woman mountain climber who has ever lived, is about to undertake the most daring feat of her venturesome career, in making the ascent of the Mexican mountains Popocatepetl and Orizaba. Both the mountains are volcanoes, of an unintermittently eruptive nature, both are practically unknown to the most intrepid explorers, and both present difficulties in the way of precipices, gorges, and treacherous surfaces, that are almost insuperable. Miss Peck does not embark on the enterprise from a spirit of mere bravado, but for scientific purposes.



H. Utting, photo.

GROVE OF POHUTAKAWA AND KAKAKA TREES, MOTUTARA, WEST COAST.