

**MARY NOAILLES
MURFREE**



**HIS "DAY
IN COURT"**

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1895

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By Charles Egbert Craddock

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It had been a hard winter along the slopes of the Great Smoky Mountains, and still the towering treeless domes were covered with snow, and the vagrant winds were abroad, rioting among the clifty heights where they held their tryst, or raiding down into the sheltered depths of the Cove, where they seldom intruded. Nevertheless, on this turbulent rush was borne in the fair spring of the year. The fragrance of the budding wild-cherry was to be discerned amidst the keen slanting javelins of the rain. A cognition of the renewal and the expanding of the forces of nature pervaded the senses as distinctly as if one might hear the grass growing, or feel along the chill currents of the air the vernal pulses thrill. Night after night in the rifts of the breaking clouds close to the horizon was glimpsed the stately sidereal Virgo, prefiguring and promising the harvest, holding in her hand a gleaming ear of corn. But it was not the constellation which the tumultuous torrent at the mountain's base reflected in a starry glitter. From the hill-side above a light cast its broken image among the ripples, as it shone for an instant through the bosky laurel,

white, stellar, splendid—only a tallow dip suddenly placed in the window of a log-cabin, and as suddenly withdrawn.

For a gruff voice within growled out a remonstrance: “What ye doin' that fur, Steve? Hev that thar candle got enny call ter bide in that thar winder?”

The interior, contrary to the customary aspect of the humble homes of the region, was in great disarray. Cooking utensils stood uncleaned about the hearth; dishes and bowls of earthen-ware were assembled upon the table in such numbers as to suggest that several meals had been eaten without the ceremony of laying the cloth anew, and that in default of washing the crockery it had been re-enforced from the shelf so far as the limited store might admit. Saddles and spinning-wheels, an ox-yoke and trace-chains, reels and wash-tubs, were incongruously pushed together in the corners. Only one of the three men in the room made any effort to reduce the confusion to order. This was the square-faced, black-bearded, thick-set young fellow who took the candle from the window, and now advanced with it toward the hearth, holding it at an angle that caused the flame to swiftly melt the tallow, which dripped generously upon the floor.

“I hev seen Eveliny do it,” he said, excitedly justifying himself. “I noticed her sot the candle in the winder jes' las' night arter supper.” He glanced about uncertainly, and his patience seemed to give way suddenly. “Dad-burn the old candle! I dunno *whar* ter set it,” he cried, desperately, as he flung it from him, and it fell upon the floor close to the wall.

The dogs lifted their heads to look, and one soft-stepping old hound got up with the nimbleness of expectation, and,

with a prescient gratitude astir in his tail, went and sniffed at it. His aspect drooped suddenly, and he looked around in reproach at Stephen Quimbey, as if suspecting a practical joke. But there was no merriment in the young mountaineer's face. He threw himself into his chair with a heavy sigh, and desisted for a time from the unaccustomed duty of clearing away the dishes after supper.

“An' 'ain't ye got the gumption ter sense what Eveliny sot the candle in the winder fur?” his brother Timothy demanded, abruptly—“ez a sign ter that thar durned Abs'lom Kittredge.”

The other two men turned their heads and looked at the speaker with a poignant intensity of interest. “I 'lowed ez much when I seen that light ez I war a-kemin' home las' night,” he continued; “it shined spang down the slope acrost the ruver an' through all the laurel; it looked plumb like a star that hed fell ter yearth in that pitch-black night. I dun-no how I s'picioned it, but ez I stood thar an' gazed I knowed somebody war a-standin' an' gazin' too on the foot-bredg a mite ahead o' me. I couldn't see him, an' he couldn't turn back an' pass me, the bredg bein' too narrer. He war jes obligated ter go on. I hearn him breathe quick; then—pit-pat, pit-pat, ez he walked straight toward that light. An' he be 'bleeged ter hev hearn me, fur arter I crost I stopped. Nuthin'. Jes' a whisper o' wind, an' jes' a swishin' from the ruver. I knowed then he hed turned off inter the laurel. An' I went on, a-whistlin' ter make him 'low ez I never s'picioned nuthin'. An' I kem inter the house an' tole dad ez he'd better be a-lookin' arter Eveliny, fur I b'lieved she war a-settin' her head ter run away an' marry Abs'lom Kittredge.”

“Waal, I ain't right up an' down sati'fied we oughter done what we done,” exclaimed Stephen, fretfully. “It don't 'pear edzacly right fur three men ter fire on one.”