David Dunne

A Romance of the Middle West

Belle Kanaris Maniates

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"He stood as if at bay, his face pale, his eyes riveted on those floating banners" Page 218

DAVID DUNNE

A Romance of the Middle West

BY
BELLE KANARIS MANIATES

With illustrations by
JOHN DREW

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To Milly and Gardner

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

“‘*Dave’s little gal!*’”

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

Across lots to the Brumble farm came the dusty apparition of a boy, a tousle-headed, freckle-faced, gaunt-eyed little fellow, clad in a sort of combination suit fashioned from a pair of overalls and a woman's shirtwaist. In search of "Miss M'ri," he looked into the kitchen, the henhouse, the dairy, and the flower garden. Not finding her in any of these accustomed places, he stood still in perplexity.

"Miss M'ri!" rang out his youthful, vibrant treble.

There was a note of promise in the pleasant voice that came back in subterranean response.

"Here, David, in the cellar."

The lad set down the tin pail he was carrying and eagerly sped to the cellar. His fondest hopes were realized. M'ri Brumble, thirty odd years of age, blue of eye, slightly gray of hair, and sweet of heart, was lifting the cover from the ice-cream freezer.

"Well, David Dunne, you came in the nick of time," she said, looking up with kindly eyes. "It's just frozen. I'll dish you up some now, if you will run up to the pantry and fetch two saucers—biggest you can find."

Fleetly David footed the stairs and returned with two soup plates.

"These were the handiest," he explained apologetically as he handed them to her.

"Just the thing," promptly reassured M'ri, transferring a heaping ladle of yellow cream to one of the plates. "Easy to eat out of, too."

"My, but you are giving me a whole lot," he said, watching her approvingly and encouragingly. "I hope you ain't robbing yourself."

"Oh, no; I always make plenty," she replied, dishing a smaller portion for herself. "Here's enough for our dinner and some for you to carry home to your mother."

"I haven't had any since last Fourth of July," he observed in plaintive reminiscence as they went upstairs.

"Why, David Dunne, how you talk! You just come over here whenever you feel like eating ice cream, and I'll make you some. It's no trouble."

They sat down on the west, vine-clad porch to enjoy their feast in leisure and shade. M’ri had never lost her childish appreciation of the delicacy, and to David the partaking thereof was little short of ecstasy. He lingered longingly over the repast, and when the soup plate would admit of no more scraping he came back with a sigh to sordid cares.

“Mother couldn’t get the washing done no-ways to-day. She ain’t feeling well, but you can have the clothes to-morrow, sure. She sent you some sorghum,” pointing to the pail.

M’ri took the donation into the kitchen. When she brought back the pail it was filled with eggs. Not to send something in return would have been an unpardonable breach of country etiquette.

“Your mother said your hens weren’t laying,” she said.

The boy’s eyes brightened.

“Thank you, Miss M’ri; these will come in good. Our hens won’t lay nor set. Mother says they have formed a union. But I ’most forgot to tell you—when I came past Winterses, Ziny told me to ask you to come over as soon as you could.”

“I suppose Zine has got one of her low spells,” said Barnabas Brumble, who had just come up from the barn. “Most likely Bill’s bin gittin’ tight agin. He—”

“Oh, no!” interrupted his sister hastily. “Bill has quit drinking.”

“Bill’s allers a-quittin’. Trouble with Bill is, he can’t stay quit. I see him yesterday comin’ down the road zig-zaggin’ like a rail fence. Fust she knows, she’ll hev to be takin’ washin’ to support him. Sometimes I think ’t would be a good idee to let him git sent over the road onct. Mebby ’t would learn him a lesson—”

He stopped short, noticing the significant look in M’ri’s eyes and the two patches of color spreading over David’s thin cheeks. He recalled that four years ago the boy’s father had died in state prison.

“You’d better go right over to Zine’s,” he added abruptly.

“I’ll wait till after dinner. We’ll have it early.”

“Hev it now,” suggested Barnabas.

“Now!” ejaculated David. “It’s only half-past ten.”

“I could eat it now jest as well as I could at twelve,” argued the philosophical

Barnabas. “Jest as leaves as not.”

There were no iron-clad rules in this comfortable household, especially when Pennyroyal, the help, was away.

“All right,” assented M’ri with alacrity. “If I am going to do anything, I like to do it right off quick and get it over with. You stay, David, if you can eat dinner so early.”

“Yes, I can,” he assured her, recalling his scanty breakfast and the freezer of cream that was to furnish the dessert. “I’ll help you get it, Miss M’ri.”

He brought a pail of water from the well, filled the teakettle, and then pared the potatoes for her.

“When will Jud and Janey get their dinner?” he asked Barnabas.

“They kerried their dinner to-day. The scholars air goin’ to hev a picnic down to Spicely’s grove. How comes it you ain’t to school, Dave?”

“I have to help my mother with the washing,” he replied, a slow flush coming to his face. “She ain’t strong enough to do it alone.”

“What on airth kin you do about a washin’, Dave?”

“I can draw the water, turn the wringer, hang up the clothes, empty the tubs, fetch and carry the washings, and mop.”

Barnabas puffed fiercely at his pipe for a moment.

“You’re a good boy, Dave, a mighty good boy. I don’t know what your ma would do without you. I hed to leave school when I wa’n’t as old as you, and git out and hustle so the younger children could git eddicated. By the time I wuz foot-loose from farm work, I wuz too old to git any larnin’. You’d orter manage someway, though, to git eddicated.”

“Mother’s taught me to read and write and spell. When I get old enough to work for good wages I can go into town to the night school.”

In a short time M’ri had cooked a dinner that would have tempted less hearty appetites than those possessed by her brother and David.

“You ain’t what might be called a delikit feeder, Dave,” remarked Barnabas, as he replenished the boy’s plate for the third time. “You’re so lean I don’t see where you put it all.”

David might have responded that the vacuum was due to the fact that his

breakfast had consisted of a piece of bread and his last night's supper of a dish of soup, but the Dunne pride inclined to reservation on family and personal matters. He speared another small potato and paused, with fork suspended between mouth and plate.

"Mother says she thinks I am hollow inside like a stovepipe."

"Well, I dunno. Stovepipes git filled sometimes," ruminated his host.

"Leave room for the ice cream, David," cautioned M'ri, as she descended to the cellar.

The lad's eyes brightened as he beheld the golden pyramid. Another period of lingering bliss, and then with a sigh of mingled content and regret, David rose from the table.

"Want me to hook up for you, Mr. Brumble?" he asked, moved to show his gratitude for the hospitality extended.

"Why, yes, Dave; wish you would. My back is sorter lame to-day. Land o' livin'," he commented after David had gone to the barn, "but that boy swallered them potaters like they wuz so many pills!"

"Poor Mrs. Dunne!" sighed M'ri. "I am afraid it's all she can do to keep a very small pot boiling. I am glad she sent the sorghum, so I could have an excuse for sending the eggs."

"She hain't poor so long as she hez a young sprout like Dave a-growin' up. We used to call Peter Dunne 'Old Hickory,' but Dave, he's second-growth hickory. He's the kind to bend and not break. Jest you wait till he's seasoned onct."

After she had packed a pail of ice cream for David, gathered some flowers for Ziny, and made out a memorandum of supplies for Barnabas to get in town, M'ri set out on her errand of mercy.

The "hooking up" accomplished, David, laden with a tin pail in each hand and carrying in his pocket a drawing of black tea for his mother to sample, made his way through sheep-dotted pastures to Beechum's woods, and thence along the bank of the River Rood. Presently he spied a young man standing knee-deep in the stream in the patient pose peculiar to fishermen.

"Catch anything?" called David eagerly.

The man turned and came to shore. He wore rubber hip boots, dark trousers, a blue flannel shirt, and a wide-brimmed hat. His eyes, blue and straight-gazing,

rested reminiscently upon the lad.

“No,” he replied calmly. “I didn’t intend to catch anything. What is your name?”

“David Dunne.”

The man meditated.

“You must be about twelve years old.”

“How did you know?”

“I am a good guesser. What have you got in your pail?”

“Which one?”

“Both.”

“Thought you were a good guesser.”

The youth laughed.

“You’ll do, David. Let me think—where did you come from just now?”

“From Brumble’s.”

“It’s ice cream you’ve got in your pail,” he said assuredly.

“That’s just what it is!” cried the boy in astonishment, “and there’s eggs in the other pail.”

“Let’s have a look at the ice cream.”

David lifted the cover.

“It looks like butter,” declared the stranger.

“It don’t taste like butter,” was the indignant rejoinder. “Miss M’ri makes the best cream of any one in the country.”

“I knew that, my young friend, before you did. It’s a long time since I had any, though. Will you sell it to me, David? I will give you half a dollar for it.”

Half a dollar! His mother had to work all day to earn that amount. The ice cream was not his—not entirely. Miss M’ri had sent it to his mother. Still—

“’T will melt anyway before I get home,” he argued aloud and persuasively.

“Of course it will,” asserted the would-be purchaser.

David surrendered the pail, and after much protestation consented to receive the piece of money which the young man pressed upon him.

“You’ll have to help me eat it now; there’s no pleasure in eating ice cream alone.”

“We haven’t any spoons,” commented the boy dubiously.

“We will go to my house and eat it.”

“Where do you live?” asked David in surprise.

“Just around the bend of the river here.”

David’s freckles darkened. He didn’t like to be made game of by older people, for then there was no redress.

“There isn’t any house within two miles of here,” he said shortly.

“What’ll you bet? Half a dollar?”

“No,” replied David resolutely.

“Well, come and see.”

David followed his new acquaintance around the wooded bank. The river was full of surprises to-day. In midstream he saw what looked to him like a big raft supporting a small house.

“That’s my shanty boat,” explained the young man, as he shoved a rowboat from shore. “Jump in, my boy.”

“Do you live in it all the time?” asked David, watching with admiration the easy but forceful pull on the oars.

“No; I am on a little fishing and hunting expedition.”

“Can’t kill anything now,” said the boy, a derisive smile flickering over his features.

“I am not hunting to kill, my lad. I am hunting old scenes and memories of other days. I used to live about here. I ran away eight years ago when I was just your age.”

“What is your name?” asked David interestedly.

“Joe Forbes.”

“Oh,” was the eager rejoinder. “I know. You are Deacon Forbes’ wild son that ran away.”

“So that’s how I am known around here, is it? Well, I’ve come back, to settle up

my father’s estate.”

“What did you run away for?” inquired David.

“Combination of too much stepmother and a roving spirit, I guess. Here we are.”

He sprang on the platform of the shanty boat and helped David on board. The boy inspected this novel house in wonder while his host set saucers and spoons on the table.

“Would you mind,” asked David in an embarrassed manner as he wistfully eyed the coveted luxury, “if I took my dishful home?”

“What’s the matter?” asked Forbes, his eyes twinkling. “Eaten too much already?”

“No; but you see my mother likes it and she hasn’t had any since last summer. I’d rather take mine to her.”

“There’s plenty left for your mother. I’ll put this pail in a bigger one and pack ice about it. Then it won’t melt.”

“But you paid me for it,” protested David.

“That’s all right. Your mother was pretty good to me when I was a boy. She dried my mop of hair for me once so my stepmother would not know I’d been in swimming. Tell her I sent the cream to her. Say, you were right about Miss M’ri making the best cream in the country. It used to be a chronic pastime with her. That’s how I guessed what you had when you said you came from there. Whenever there was a picnic or a surprise party in the country she always furnished the ice cream. Isn’t she married yet?”

“No.”

“Doesn’t she keep company with some lucky man?”

“No,” again denied the boy emphatically.

“What’s the matter? She used to be awfully pretty and sweet.”

“She is now, but she don’t want any man.”

“Well, now, David, that isn’t quite natural, you know. Why do you think she doesn’t want one?”

“I heard say she was crossed once.”

“Crossed, David? And what might that be?” asked Forbes in a delighted feint of

perplexity.

“Disappointed in love, you know.”

“Yes; it all comes back now—the gossip of my boyhood days. She was going with a man when Barnabas’ wife died and left two children—one a baby—and Miss M’ri gave up her lover to do her duty by her brother’s family. So Barnabas never married again?”

“No; Miss M’ri keeps house and brings up Jud and Janey.”

“I remember Jud—mean little shaver. Janey must be the baby.”

“She’s eight now.”

“I remember you, David. You were a little toddler of four—all eyes. Your folks had a place right on the edge of town.”

“We left it when I was six years old and came out here,” informed David.

Forbes’ groping memory recalled the gossip that had reached him in the Far West. “Dunne went to prison,” he mused, “and the farm was mortgaged to defray the expenses of the trial.” He hastened back to a safer channel.

“Miss M’ri was foolish to spoil her life and the man’s for fancied duty,” he observed.

David bridled.

“Barnabas couldn’t go to school when he was a boy because he had to work so she and the other children could go. She’d ought to have stood by him.”

“I see you have a sense of duty, too. This county was always strong on duty. I suppose they’ve got it in for me because I ran away?”

“Mr. Brumble says it was a wise thing for you to do. Uncle Larimy says you were a brick of a boy. Miss Rhody says she had no worry about her woodpile getting low when you were here.”

“Poor Miss Rhody! Does she still live alone? And Uncle Larimy—is he uncle to the whole community? What fishing days I had with him! I must look him up and tell him all my adventures. I have planned a round of calls for to-night—Miss M’ri, Miss Rhody, Uncle Larimy—”

“Tell me about your adventures,” demanded David breathlessly.

He listened to a wondrous tale of western life, and never did narrator get into so close relation with his auditor as did this young ranchman with David Dunne.

“I must go home,” said the boy reluctantly when Joe had concluded.

“Come down to-morrow, David, and we’ll go fishing.”

“All right. Thank you, sir.”

With heart as light as air, David sped through the woods. He had found his Hero.

CHAPTER II

David struck out from the shelter of the woodland and made his way to his home, a pathetically small, rudely constructed house. The patch of land supposed to be a garden, and in proportion to the dimensions of the building, showed a few feeble efforts at vegetation. It was not positively known that the Widow Dunne had a clear title to her homestead, but one would as soon think of foreclosing a mortgage on a playhouse, or taking a nest from a bird, as to press any claim on this fallow fragment in the midst of prosperous farmlands.

Some discouraged looking fowls picked at the scant grass, a lean cow switched a lackadaisical tail, and in a pen a pig grunted his discontent.

David went into the little kitchen, where a woman was bending wearily over a washtub.

“Mother,” cried the boy in dismay, “you said you’d let the washing go till to-morrow. That’s why I didn’t come right back.”

She paused in the rubbing of a soaped garment and wrung the suds from her tired and swollen hands.

“I felt better, David, and I thought I’d get them ready for you to hang out.”

David took the garment from her.

“Sit down and eat this ice cream Miss M’ri sent—no, I mean Joe Forbes sent you. There was more, but I sold it for half a dollar; and here’s a pail of eggs and a drawing of tea she wants you to sample. She says she is no judge of black tea.”

“Joe Forbes!” exclaimed his mother interestedly. “I thought maybe he would be coming back to look after the estate. Is he going to stay?”

“I’ll tell you all about him, mother, if you will sit down.”

He began a vigorous turning of the wringer.

The patient, tired-looking eyes of the woman brightened as she dished out a saucer of the cream. The weariness in the sensitive lines of her face and the

prominence of her knuckles bore evidence of a life of sordid struggle, but, above all, the mother love illumined her features with a flash of radiance.

“You’re a good provider, David; but tell me where you have been for so long, and where did you see Joe?”

He gave her a faithful account of his dinner at the Brumble farm and his subsequent meeting with Joe, working the wringer steadily as he talked.

“There!” he exclaimed with a sigh of satisfaction, “they are ready for the line, but before I hang them out I am going to cook your dinner.”

“I am rested now, David. I will cook me an egg.”

“No, I will,” insisted the boy, going to the stove.

A few moments later, with infinite satisfaction, he watched her partake of crisp toast, fresh eggs, and savory tea.

“Did you see Jud and Janey?” she asked suddenly.

“No; they were at school.”

“David, you shall go regularly to school next fall.”

“No,” said David stoutly; “next fall I am going to work regularly for some of the farmers, and you are not going to wash any more.”

Her eyes grew moist.

“David, will you always be good—will you grow up to be as good a man as I want you to be?”

“How good do you want me to be?” he asked dubiously.

A radiant and tender smile played about her mouth.

“Not goodygood, David; but will you always be honest, and brave, and kind, as you are now?”

“I’ll try, mother.”

“And never forget those who do you a kindness, David; always show your gratitude.”

“Yes, mother.”

“And, David, watch your temper and, whatever happens, I shall have no fears for your future.”

His mother seldom talked to him in this wise. He thought about it after he lay in his little cot in the sitting room that night; then his mind wandered to Joe Forbes and his wonderful tales of the West. He fell asleep to dream of cowboys and prairies. When he awoke the sun was sending golden beams through the eastward window.

“Mother isn’t up,” he thought in surprise. He stole quietly out to the kitchen, kindled a fire with as little noise as possible, put the kettle over, set the table, and then went into the one tiny bedroom where his mother lay in her bed, still—very still.

“Mother,” he said softly.

There was no response.

“Mother,” he repeated. Then piercingly, in excitement and fear, “Mother!”

At last he knew.

He ran wildly to the outer door. Bill Winters, fortunately sober, was driving slowly by.

“Bill!”

“What’s the matter, Dave?” looking into the boy’s white face. “Your ma ain’t sick, is she?”

David’s lips quivered, but seemed almost unable to articulate.

“She’s dead,” he finally whispered.

“I’ll send Zine right over,” exclaimed Bill, slapping the reins briskly across the drooping neck of his horse.

Very soon the little house was filled to overflowing with kind and sympathetic neighbors who had come to do all that had to be done. David sat on the back doorstep until M’ri came; before the expression in his eyes she felt powerless to comfort him.

“The doctor says your mother died in her sleep,” she told him. “She didn’t suffer any.”

He made no reply. Oppressed by the dull pain for which there is no ease, he wandered from the house to the garden, and from the garden back to the house throughout the day. At sunset Barnabas drove over.

“I shall stay here to-night, Barnabas,” said M’ri, “but I want you to drive back

and get some things. I've made out a list. Janey will know where to find them."

"Sha'n't I take Dave back to stay to-night?" he suggested.

M'ri hesitated, and looked at David.

"No," he said dully, following Barnabas listlessly down the path to the road.

Barnabas, keen, shrewd, and sharp at a bargain, had a heart that ever softened to motherless children.

"Dave," he said gently, "your ma won't never hev to wash no more, and she'll never be sick nor tired agen."

It was the first leaven to his loss, and he held tight to the horny hand of his comforter. After Barnabas had driven away there came trudging down the road the little, lithe figure of an old man, who was carrying a large box. His mildly blue, inquiring eyes looked out from beneath their hedge of shaggy eyebrows. His hair and his beard were thick and bushy. Joe Forbes maintained that Uncle Larimy would look no different if his head were turned upside down.

"David," he said softly, "I've brung yer ma some posies. She liked my yaller roses, you know. I'm sorry my laylocks are gone. They come early this year."

"Thank you, Uncle Larimy."

A choking sensation warned David to say no more.

"Things go 'skew sometimes, Dave, but the sun will shine agen," reminded the old man, as he went on into the house.

Later, when sundown shadows had vanished and the first glimmer of the stars radiated from a pale sky, Joe came over. David felt no thrill at sight of his hero. The halo was gone. He only remembered with a dull ache that the half dollar had brought his mother none of the luxuries he had planned to buy for her.

"David," said the young ranchman, his deep voice softened, "my mother died when I was younger than you are, but you won't have a stepmother to make life unbearable for you."

The boy looked at him with inscrutable eyes.

"Don't you want to go back with me to the ranch, David? You can learn to ride and shoot."

David shook his head forlornly. His spirit of adventure was smothered.

"We'll talk about it again, David," he said, as he went in to consult M'ri.

“Don’t you think the only thing for the boy to do is to go back with me? I am going to buy the ranch on which I’ve been foreman, and I’ll try to do for David all that should have been done for me when I, at his age, felt homeless and alone. He’s the kind that takes things hard and quiet; life in the open will pull him up.”

“No, Joe,” replied M’ri resolutely. “He’s not ready for that kind of life yet. He needs to be with women and children a while longer. Barnabas and I are going to take him. Barnabas suggested it, and I told Mrs. Dunne one day, when her burdens were getting heavy, that we would do so if anything like this should happen.”

Joe looked at her with revering eyes.

“Miss M’ri, you are so good to other people’s children, what would you be to your own!”

The passing of M’ri’s youth had left a faint flush of prettiness like the afterglow of a sunset faded into twilight. She was of the kind that old age would never wither. In the deep blue eyes was a patient, reflective look that told of a past but unforgotten romance. She turned from his gaze, but not before he had seen the wistfulness his speech had evoked. After he had gone, she sought David.

“I am going to stay here with you, David, for two or three days. Then Barnabas and I want you to come to live with us. I had a long talk with your mother one day, and I told her if anything happened to her you should be our boy. That made her less anxious about the future, David. Will you come?”

The boy looked up with his first gleam of interest in mundane things.

“I’d like it, but would—Jud?”

“I am afraid Jud doesn’t like anything, David,” she replied with a sigh. “That’s one reason I want you—to be a big brother to Janey, for I think that is what she needs, and what Jud can never be.”

The boy remembered what his mother had counseled.

“I’ll always take care of Janey,” he earnestly assured her.

“I know you will, David.”

Two dreary days passed in the way that such days do pass, and then David rode to his new home with Barnabas and M’ri.

Jud Brumble, a refractory, ungovernable lad of fifteen, didn’t look altogether unfavorably upon the addition to the household, knowing that his amount of

work would thereby be lessened, and that he would have a new victim for his persecutions and tyrannies.

Janey, a little rosebud of a girl with dimples and flaxen curls, hung back shyly and looked at David with awed eyes. She had been frightened by what she had heard about his mother, and in a vague, disconnected way she associated him with Death. M'ri went to the child's bedside that night and explained the situation. "Poor Davey is all alone, now, and very unhappy, so we must be kind to him. I told him you were to be his little sister."

Then M'ri took David to a gabled room, at each end of which was a swinging window—"one for seeing the sun rise, and one for seeing it set," she said, as she turned back the covers from the spotless white bed. She yearned to console him, but before the mute look of grief in his big eyes she was silent.

"I wish he would cry," she said wistfully to Barnabas, "he hasn't shed a tear since his mother died."

No sooner had the sound of her footsteps ceased than David threw off his armor of self-restraint and burst into a passion of sobs, the wilder for their long repression. He didn't hear the patter of little feet on the floor, and not until two mothering arms were about his neck did he see the white-robed figure of Janey.

"Don't cry, Davey," she implored, her quivering red mouth against his cheek. "I'm sorry; but I am your little sister now, so you must love me, Davey. Aunt M'ri told me so."

CHAPTER III

The lilac-scented breeze of early morning blowing softly through the vine-latticed window and stirring its white draperies brought David to wakefulness. With the first surprise at the strangeness of his surroundings came a fluttering of memory. The fragrance of lilacs was always hereafter to bring back the awfulness of this waking moment.

He hurriedly dressed, and went down to the kitchen where M'ri was preparing breakfast.

"Good morning, David. Janey has gone to find some fresh eggs. You may help her hunt them, if you will."

Knowing the haunts of hens, he went toward the currant bushes. It was one of those soft days that link late spring and dawning summer. The coolness of the sweet-odored air, the twitter of numberless dawn birds, the entreating lowing of

distant cattle—all breathing life and strength—were like a resurrection call to David.

On the east porch, which was his retreat for a smoke or a rest between the intervals of choring and meals, Barnabas sat, securely wedged in by the washing machine, the refrigerator, the plant stand, the churn, the kerosene can, and the lawn mower. He gazed reflectively after David.

“What are you going to hev Dave do to help, M’ri?”

M’ri came to the door and considered a moment.

“First of all, Barnabas, I am going to have him eat. He is so thin and hungry looking.”

Barnabas chuckled. His sister’s happiest mission was the feeding of hungry children.

After breakfast, when Janey’s rebellious curls were again being brushed into shape, M’ri told David he could go to school if he liked. To her surprise the boy flushed and looked uncomfortable. M’ri’s intuitions were quick and generally correct.

“It’s so near the end of the term, though,” she added casually, as an afterthought, “that maybe you had better wait until next fall to start in.”

“Yes, please, Miss M’ri, I’d rather,” he said quickly and gratefully.

When Janey, dinner pail in hand and books under arm, was ready to start, David asked in surprise where Jud was.

“Oh, he has gone long ago. He thinks he is too big to walk with Janey.”

David quietly took the pail and books from the little girl.

“I’ll take you to school, Janey, and come for you this afternoon.”

“We won’t need to git no watch dog to foller Janey,” said Barnabas, as the children started down the path.

“David,” called M’ri, “stop at Miss Rhody’s on your way back and find out whether my waist is finished.”

With proudly protective air, David walked beside the stiffly starched little girl, who had placed her hand trustfully in his. They had gone but a short distance when they were overtaken by Joe Forbes, mounted on a shining black horse. He reined up and looked down on them good-humoredly.

“With proudly protective air, David walked beside the stiffly starched little girl”

“Going to school, children?”

“I am. Davey’s just going to carry my things for me,” explained Janey.

“Well, I can do that and carry you into the bargain. Help her up, David.”

Janey cried out in delight at the prospect of a ride. David lifted her up, and Joe settled her comfortably in the saddle, encircling her with his arm. Then he looked down whimsically into David’s disappointed eyes.

“I know it’s a mean trick, Dave, to take your little sweetheart from you.”

“She’s not my sweetheart; she’s my sister.”

“Has she promised to be that already? Get up, Firefly.”

They were off over the smooth country road, Forbes shouting a bantering good-by and Janey waving a triumphant dinner pail, while David, trudging on his way, experienced the desolate feeling of the one who is left behind. Across fields he came to the tiny, thatched cottage of Miss Rhody Crabbe, who stood on the crumbling doorstep feeding some little turkeys.

“Come in, David. I suppose you’re after M’ri’s waist. Thar’s jest a few stitches to take, and I’ll hev it done in no time.”

He followed her into the little house, which consisted of a sitting room “with bedroom off,” and a kitchen whose floor was sand scoured; the few pieces of tinware could be used as mirrors. Miss Rhody seated herself by the open window and began to ply her needle. She did not sew swiftly and smoothly, in feminine fashion, but drew her long-threaded needle through the fabric in abrupt and forceful jerks. A light breeze fluttered in through the window, but it could not ruffle the wisp-locked hair that showed traces of a water-dipped comb and was strained back so taut that a little mound of flesh encircled each root. Her eyes were bead bright and swift moving. Everything about her, to the aggressively prominent knuckles, betokened energy and industry. She was attired in a blue calico shortened by many washings, but scrupulously clean and conscientiously starched. Her face shone with soap and serenity.

Miss Rhody’s one diversion in a busy but monotonous life was news. She was wretched if she did not receive the latest bulletins; but it was to her credit that

she never repeated anything that might work harm or mischief. David was one of her chosen confidants. He was a safe repository of secrets, a sympathetic listener, and a wise suggester.

“I’m glad M’ri’s hevin’ a blue waist. She looks so sweet in blue. I’ve made her clo’es fer years. My, how I hoped fer to make her weddin’ clo’es onct! It wuz a shame to hev sech a good match spiled. It wuz too bad she hed to hev them two chillern on her hands—”

“And now she has a third,” was what David thought he read in her eyes, and he hastened to assert: “I am going to help all I can, and I’ll soon be old enough to take care of myself.”

“Land sakes, David, you’d be wuth more’n yer keep to any one. I wonder,” she said ruminatingly, “if Martin Thorne will wait for her till Janey’s growed up.”

“Martin Thorne!” exclaimed David excitedly. “Judge Thorne? Why, was he the one—”

“He spent his Sunday evenings with her,” she asserted solemnly.

In the country code of courtships this procedure was conclusive proof, and David accepted it as such.

“He wuz jest plain Lawyer Thorne when he wuz keepin’ company with M’ri, but we all knew Mart wuz a comin’ man, and M’ri wuz jest proud of him. You could see that, and he wuz sot on her.”

Her work momentarily neglected, Rhody was making little reminiscent stabs at space with her needle as she spoke.

“’T wuz seven years ago. M’ri wuz twenty-eight and Mart ten years older. It would hev ben a match as sure as preachin’, but Eliza died and M’ri, she done her duty as she seen it. Sometimes I think folks is near-sighted about their duty. There is others as is queer-sighted. Bein’ crossed hain’t spiled M’ri though. She’s kep’ sweet through it all, but when a man don’t git his own way, he’s apt to curdle. Mart got sort of tart-tongued and cold feelin’. There wa’n’t no reason why they couldn’t a kep’ on bein’ friends, but Mart must go and make a fool vow that he’d never speak to M’ri until she sent him word she’d changed her mind, so he hez ben a-spitin’ of his face ever sence. It’s wonderful how some folks do git in their own way, but, my sakes, I must git to work so you kin take this waist home.”

This was David’s first glimpse of a romance outside of story-books, but the

name of Martin Thorne evoked disturbing memories. Six years ago he had acted as attorney to David's father in settling his financial difficulties, and later, after Peter Dunne's death, the Judge had settled the small estate. It was only through his efforts that they were enabled to have the smallest of roofs over their defenseless heads.

"Miss Rhody," he asked after a long meditation on life in general, "why didn't you ever marry?"

Miss Rhody paused again in her work, and two little spots of red crept into her cheeks.

"'Tain't from ch'ice I've lived single, David. I've ben able to take keer of myself, but I allers hed a hankerin' same as any woman, as is a woman, hez fer a man, but I never got no chanst to meet men folks. I wuz raised here, and folks allers hed it all cut out fer me to be an old maid. When a woman onct gets that name fixt on her, it's all off with her chances. No man ever comes nigh her, and she can't git out of her single rut. I never could get to go nowhars, and I wa'n't that bold kind that makes up to a man fust, afore he gives a sign."

David pondered over this wistful revelation for a few moments, seeking a means for her seemingly hopeless escape from a life of single blessedness, for David was a sympathetic young altruist, and felt it incumbent upon him to lift the burdens of his neighbors. Then he suggested encouragingly:

"Miss Rhody, did you know that there was a paper that gets you acquainted with men? That's the way they say Zine Winters got married."

"Yes, and look what she drawed!" she scoffed. "Bill! I don't know how they'd live if Zine hadn't a-gone in heavy on hens and turkeys. She hez to spend her hull time a-traipsin' after them turkeys, and thar ain't nuthin' that's given to gaddin' like turkeys that I know on, less 't is Chubbses' hired gal. No, David, it's chance enough when you git a man you've knowed allers, but a stranger! Well! I want to know what I'm gittin'. Thar, the last stitch in M'ri's waist is took, and, David, you won't tell no one what I said about Mart Thorne and her, nor about my gittin' merried?"

David gave her a reproachful look, and she laughed shamefacedly.

"I know, David, you kin keep a secret. It's like buryin' a thing to tell it to you. My, this waist'll look fine on M'ri. I jest love the feel of silk. I'd ruther hev a black silk dress than—"

"A husband," prompted David slyly.

“David Dunne, I’ll box yer ears if you ever think again of what I said. I am allers a-thinkin’ of you as if you wuz a stiddy grown man, and then fust thing I know you’re nuthin’ but a teasin’ boy. Here’s the bundle, and don’t you want a nutcake, David?”

“No, thank you, Miss Rhody. I ate a big breakfast.”

A fellow feeling had prompted David even in his hungriest days to refrain from accepting Miss Rhody’s proffers of hospitality. He knew the emptiness of her larder, for though she had been thrifty and hard-working, she had paid off a mortgage and had made good the liabilities of an erring nephew.

When David returned he found Miss M’ri in the dairy. It was churning day, and she was arranging honey-scented, rose-stamped pats of butter on moist leaves of crisp lettuce.

“David,” she asked, looking up with a winning smile, “will you tell me why you didn’t want to go to school?”

The boy’s face reddened, but his eyes looked frankly into hers.

“Yes, Miss M’ri.”

“Before you tell me, David,” she interposed, “I want you to remember that, from now on, Barnabas and I are your uncle and aunt.”

“Well, then, Aunt M’ri,” began David, a ring of tremulous eagerness in his voice, “I can read and write and spell, but I don’t know much about arithmetic and geography. I was ashamed to start in at the baby class. I thought I’d try and study out of Jud’s books this summer.”

“That’s a good idea, David. We’ll begin now. You’ll find an elementary geography in the sitting room on the shelf, and you may study the first lesson. This afternoon, when my work is done, I’ll hear you recite it.”

David took the book and went out into the old orchard. When M’ri went to call him to dinner he was sprawled out in the latticed shadow of an apple tree, completely absorbed in the book.

“You have spent two hours on your first lesson, David. You ought to have it well learned.”

He looked at her in surprise.

“I read the whole book through, Aunt M’ri.”

“Oh, David,” she expostulated, “that’s the way Barnabas takes his medicine.

Instead of the prescribed dose after each meal he takes three doses right after breakfast—so as to get it off his mind and into his system, he says. We'll just have one short lesson in geography and one in arithmetic each day. You mustn't do things in leaps. It's the steady dog trot that lasts, and counts on the long journey."

When David was on his way to bring Janey from school that afternoon he was again overtaken by Joe Forbes.

"Dave, I am going to Chicago in a few days, and I shall stop there long enough to buy a few presents to send back to some of my friends. Here's my list. Let me see, Uncle Larimy, a new-fangled fishing outfit; Barnabas, a pipe; Miss M'ri—guess, Dave."

"You're the guesser, you know," reminded David.

"It's a new kind of ice-cream freezer, of course."

"She's going to freeze ice to-night," recalled David anticipatingly.

"Freeze ice! What a paradoxical process! But what I want you to suggest is something for Miss Rhody—something very nice."

"What she wants most is something you can't get her," thought David, looking up with a tantalizing little smile. Then her second wish occurred to him.

"I know something she wants dreadfully; something she never expects to have."

"That is just what I want to get for her."

"It'll cost a lot."

Joe disposed of that consideration by a munificent wave of the hand.

"What is it?"

"A black silk dress," informed the boy delightedly.

"She shall have it. How many yards does it take, I wonder?"

"We can ask Janey's teacher when we get to school," suggested the boy.

"So we can. I contrived to find out that Janey's heart is set on a string of beads—blue beads. I suppose, to be decent, I shall have to include Jud. What will it be?"

"He wants a gun. He's a good shot, too."

They loitered on the way, discussing Joe's gifts, until they met Janey and Little Teacher coming toward them hand in hand. David quickly secured the pail and

books before Joe could appropriate them. He wasn't going to be cut out a second time in one day.

"Miss Williams," asked the young ranchman, "will your knowledge of mathematics tell me how many yards of black silk I must get to make a dress, and what kind of fixings I shall need for it?"

"You don't have to know," she replied. "Just go into any department store and tell them you want a dress pattern and the findings. They will do the rest."

"Shopping made easy. You shall have your reward now. My shanty boat is just about opposite here. Suppose the four of us go down to the river and have supper on board?"

Little Teacher, to whom life was a vista of blackboards dotted with vacations, thought this would be delightful. A passing child was made a messenger to the farm, and they continued their way woodward to the river, where the shanty boat was anchored. Little Teacher set the table, Joe prepared the meal, while David sat out on deck, beguiling Janey with wonderful stories.

"This seems beautifully domestic to a cowboy," sighed Joe, looking around the supper table, his gaze lingering on Little Teacher, who was dimpling happily. Imaginative David proceeded to weave his third romance that day, with a glad little beating of the heart, for he had feared that Joe might be planning to wait for Janey, as the Judge was doubtless waiting for M'ri.

The children went directly home after supper, Joe accompanying Little Teacher. Despite the keenness of David's sorrow the day had been a peaceful, contented one, but when the shadows began to lengthen to that most lonesome hour of lonesome days, when from home-coming cows comes the sound of tinkling bells, a wave of longing swept over him, and he stole away to the orchard. Again, a soft, sustaining little hand crept into his.

"Don't, Davey," pleaded a caressing voice, "don't make me cry."

CHAPTER IV

Outside of the time allotted for the performance of a wholesome amount of farm work and the preparation of his daily lessons, David was free for diversions which had hitherto entered sparingly into his life. After school hours and on Saturdays the Barnabas farm was the general rendezvous for all the children within a three-mile radius. The old woods by the river rang with the gay treble of childish laughter and the ecstatic barking of dogs dashing in frantic pursuit.

There was always an open sesame to the cookie jar and the apple barrel.

David suffered the common fate of all in having a dark cloud. Jud was the dark cloud, and his silver lining had not yet materialized.

In height and physical strength Jud was the superior, so he delighted in taunting and goading the younger boy. There finally came a day when instinctive self-respect upheld David in no longer resisting the call to arms. Knowing Barnabas' disapproval of fighting, and with his mother's parting admonition pricking his conscience, he went into battle reluctantly and half-heartedly, so the fight was not prolonged, and Jud's victory came easily. Barnabas, hurrying to the scene of action, called Jud off and reprimanded him for fighting a smaller boy, which hurt David far more than did the pummeling he had received.

"What wuz you fighting fer, anyway?" he demanded of David.

"Nothing," replied David laconically, "just fighting."

"Jud picks on Davey all the time," was the information furnished by the indignant Janey, who had followed her father.

"Well, I forbid either one of you to fight again. Now, Jud, see that you leave Dave alone after this."

Emboldened by his easily won conquest and David's apparent lack of prowess, Jud continued his jeering and nagging, but David set his lips in a taut line of finality and endured in silence until there came the taunt superlative.

"Your mother was a washerwoman, and your father a convict."

There surged through David a fierce animal hate. With a tight closing of his hardy young fist, he rushed to the onslaught so swiftly and so impetuously that Jud recoiled in fear and surprise. With his first tiger-like leap David had the older boy by the throat and bore him to the ground, maintaining and tightening his grip as they went down.

"I'll kill you!"

David's voice was steady and calm, but the boy on the ground underneath felt the very hairs of his head rising at the look in the dark eyes above his own.

Fortunately for both of them Barnabas was again at hand.

He jerked David to his feet.

"Fightin' again, are you, after I told you not to!"

“It was him, David, that began it. I never struck him,” whimpered Jud, edging away behind his father.

“Did you, David?” asked Barnabas bluntly, still keeping his hold on the boy, who was quivering with passion.

“Yes.”

His voice sounded odd and tired, and there was an ache of bafflement in his young eyes.

“What fer? What did he do to make you so mad?”

“He said my mother was a washerwoman and my father a convict! Let me go! I’ll kill him!”

With a returning rush of his passion, David struggled in the man’s grasp.

“Wait, Dave, I’ll tend to him. Go to the barn, Jud!” he commanded his son.

Jud quailed before this new, strange note in his father’s voice.

“David was fighting. You said neither of us was to fight. ’T ain’t fair to take it out on me.”

Fairness was one of Barnabas’ fixed and prominent qualities, but Jud was not to gain favor by it this time.

“Well, you don’t suppose I’m a-goin’ to lick Dave fer defendin’ his parents, do you? Besides, I’m not a-goin’ to lick you fer fightin’, but fer sayin’ what you did. I guess you’d hev found out that Dave could wallop you ef he is smaller and younger.”

“He can’t!” snarled Jud. “I didn’t have no show. He came at me by surprise.”

Barnabas reflected a moment. Then he said gravely:

“When it’s in the blood of two fellers to fight, why thar’s got to be a fight, that’s all. Thar won’t never be no peace until this ere question’s settled. Dave, do you still want to fight him?”

A fierce aftermath of passion gleamed in David’s eyes.

“Yes!” he cried, his nostrils quivering.

“And you’ll fight fair? Jest to punish—with no thought of killin’?”

“I’ll fight fair,” agreed the boy.

“I’ll see that you do. Come here, Jud.”

“I don’t want to fight,” protested Jud sullenly.

“He’s afraid,” said David gleefully, every muscle quivering and straining.

“I ain’t!” yelled Jud.

“Come on, then,” challenged David, a fierce joy tugging at his heart.

Jud came with deliberate precision and a swing of his left. He was heavier and harder, but David was more agile, and his whole heart was in the fight this time. They clutched and grappled and parried, and finally went down; first one was on top, then the other. It was the wage of brute force against elasticity; bluster against valor. Jud fought in fear; David, in ferocity. At last David bore his oppressor backward and downward. Jud, exhausted, ceased to struggle.

“Thar!” exclaimed Barnabas, drawing a relieved breath. “I guess you know how you stand now, and we’ll all feel better. You’ve got all that’s comin’ to you, Jud, without no more from me. You can both go to the house and wash up.”

Uncle Larimy had arrived at the finish of the fight.

“What’s the trouble, Barnabas?” he asked interestedly, as the boys walked away.

The explanation was given, but they spoke in tones so low that David could not overhear any part of the conversation from the men following him until, as they neared the house, Uncle Larimy said: “I was afeerd Dave hed his pa’s temper snoozin’ inside him. Mebby he’d orter be told fer a warnin’.”

“I don’t want to say nuthin’ about it less I hev to. I’ll wait till the next time he loses his temper.”

David ducked his head in the wash basin on the bench outside the door. After supper, when Barnabas came out on the back porch for his hour of pipe, he called his young charge to him. Since the fight, David’s face had worn a subdued but contented expression.

“Looks,” thought Barnabas, “kinder eased off, like a dog when he licks his chops arter the taste of blood has been drawed.”

“Set down, Dave. I want to talk to you. You done right to fight fer yer folks, and you’re a good fighter, which every boy orter be, but when I come up to you and Jud I see that in yer face that I didn’t know was in you. You’ve got an orful temper, Dave. It’s a good thing to hev—a mighty good thing, if you kin take keer of it, but if you let it go it’s what leads to murder. Your pa hed the same kind of

let-loose temper that got him into heaps of trouble."

"What did my father do?" he asked abruptly.

Instinctively he had shrunk from asking his mother this question, and pride had forbidden his seeking the knowledge elsewhere.

"Some day, when you are older, you will know all about it. But remember, when any one says anything like what Jud did, that yer ma wouldn't want fer you to hev thoughts of killin'. You see, you fought jest as well—probably better—when you hed cooled off a mite and hed promised to fight fair. And ef you can't wrastle your temper and down it as you did Jud, you're not a fust-class fighter."

"I'll try," said David slowly, unable, however, to feel much remorse for his outbreak.

"Jud'll let you alone arter this. You'd better go to bed now. You need a little extry sleep."

M'ri came into his room when he was trying to mend a long rent in his shirt. He flushed uncomfortably when her eye fell on the garment. She took it from him.

"I'll mend it, David. I don't wonder that your patience slipped its leash, but—never fight when you have murder in your heart."

When she had left the room, Janey's face, pink and fair as a baby rose, looked in at the door.

"It's very wicked to fight and get so mad, Davey."

"I know it," he acknowledged readily. It was useless trying to make a girl understand.

There was a silence. Janey still lingered.

"Davey," she asked in an awed whisper, "does it feel nice to be wicked?"

David shook his head non-committally.

CHAPTER V

The rather strained relations between Jud and David were eased the next day by the excitement attending the big package Barnabas brought from town. It was addressed to David, but the removal of the outer wrapping disclosed a number of parcels neatly labeled, also a note from Joe, asking him to distribute the presents.

David first selected the parcel marked "Janey" and handed it to her.

“Blue beads!” she cried ecstatically.

“Let me see, Janey,” said M’ri. “Why, they’re real turquoises and with a gold clasp! I’ll get you a string of blue beads for now, and you can put these away till you’re grown up.”

“I didn’t tell Joe what to get for you, Aunt M’ri; honest, I didn’t,” disclaimed David, with a laugh, as he handed the freezer to her.

“We’ll initiate it this very day, David.”

David handed Barnabas his pipe and gave Jud a letter which he opened wonderingly, uttering a cry of pleasure when he realized the contents.

“It’s an order on Harkness to let me pick out any rifle in his store. How did he know? Did you tell him, Dave?”

“Yes,” was the quiet reply.

“Thank you, Dave. I’ll ride right down and get it, and we’ll go to the woods this afternoon and shoot at a mark.”

“All right,” agreed David heartily.

The atmosphere was now quite cleared by the proposed expenditure of ammunition, and M’ri experienced the sensation as of one beholding a rainbow.

David then turned his undivided attention to his own big package, which contained twelve books, his name on the fly-leaf of each. Robinson Crusoe, Swiss Family Robinson, Andersen’s Fairy Tales, Arabian Nights, Life of Lincoln, Black Beauty, Oliver Twist, A Thousand Leagues under the Sea, The Pathfinder, Gulliver’s Travels, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and Young Ranchers comprised the selection. His eyes gleamed over the enticing titles.

“You shall have some book shelves for your room, David,” promised M’ri, “and you can start your library. Joe has made a good foundation for one.”

His eyes longed to read at once, but there were still the two packages, marked “Uncle Larimy” and “Miss Rhody,” to deliver.

“I can see that Uncle Larimy has a fishing rod, but what do you suppose he has sent Rhody?” wondered M’ri.

“A black silk dress. I told him she wanted one.”

“Take it right over there, David. She has waited almost a lifetime for it.”

“Let me take Uncle Larimy’s present,” suggested Jud, “and then I’ll ask him to

go shooting with us this afternoon."

David amicably agreed, and went across fields to Miss Rhody's.

"Land sakes!" she exclaimed, looking at the parcel. "M'ri ain't a-goin' to hev another dress so soon, is she?"

"No, Miss Rhody. Some one else is, though."

"Who is it, David?" she asked curiously.

"You see Joe Forbes sent some presents from Chicago, and this is what he sent you."

"A calico," was her divination, as she opened the package.

"David Dunne!" she cried in shrill, piping tones, a spot of red on each cheek. "Just look here!" and she stroked lovingly the lustrous fold of shining silk.

"And if here ain't linings, and thread, and sewing silk, and hooks and eyes! Why, David Dunne, it can't be true! How did he know—David, you blessed boy, you must have told him!"

Impulsively she threw her arms about him and hugged him until he ruefully admitted to himself that she had Jud "beat on the clutch."

"And say, David, I'm a-goin' to wear this dress. I know folks as lets their silks wear out a-hangin' up in closets. Don't get half as many cracks when it hangs on yourself. I b'lieve as them Episcopals do in lettin' yer light shine, and I never wuz one of them as b'lieved in savin' yer best to be laid out in. Oh, Lord, David, I kin jest hear myself a-rustlin' round in it!"

“Maybe you’ll get a husband now,” suggested David gravely.

“Mebby. I’d orter ketch somethin’ with this. I never see sech silk. It’s much handsomer than the one Homer Bisbee’s bride hed when she come here from the city. It’s orful the way she wastes. Would you b’lieve it, David, the fust batch of pies she made, she never pricked, and they all puffed up and bust. David, look here! What’s in this envylope? Forever and way back, ef it hain’t a five-doller bill and a letter. I hain’t got my glasses handy. Read it.”

“Dear Miss Rhody,” read the boy in his musical voice, “silk is none too good for you, and I want you to wear this and wear it out. If you don’t, I’ll never send you another. I thought you might want some more trimmings, so I send you a five for same. Sincerely yours, Joe.”

“I don’t need no trimmin’s, excep’ fifty cents for roochin’s.”

“I’ll tell you what to do, Miss Rhody. When you get your dress made we’ll go into town and you can get your picture taken in the dress and give it to Joe when he comes back.”

“That’s jest what I’ll do. I never hed my likeness took. David, you’ve got an orful quick mind. Is Joe coming home? I thought he callated to go West.”

“Not until fall. He’s going to spend the summer in his shanty boat on the river.”

“I’ll hurry up and get it made up afore he comes. Tell me what he sent all your folks.”

“Joe’s a generous boy, like his ma’s folks,” she continued, when he had enumerated their gifts. “I am glad fer him that his pa and his stepmother was so scrimpin’. David, would you b’lieve it, in that great big house of the Forbeses thar wa’n’t never a tidy on a chair, and not a picter on the wall! It was mighty lucky for Joe that his stepmother died fust, so he got all the money.”

David hastened home and sought his retreat in the orchard with one of his books. M’ri, curious to know what his selection had been, scanned the titles of the remaining eleven volumes.

“Well, who would have thought of a boy’s preferring fairy tales!”

David read until dinner time, but spent the afternoon with Uncle Larimy and Jud in the woods, where they received good instruction in rifle practice. After supper he settled comfortably down with a book, from which he was recalled by a plaintive little wail.

“I haven’t had a bit of fun to-day, Davey, and it’s Saturday, and you haven’t played with me at all!”

The book closed instantly.

“Come on out doors, Janey,” he invited.

The sound of childish laughter fell pleasantly on M’ri’s ears. She recalled what Joe Forbes had said about her own children, and an unbidden tear lingered on her lashes. This little space between twilight and lamplight was M’ri’s favorite hour. In every season but winter it was spent on the west porch, where she could watch the moon and the stars come out. Maybe, too, it was because from here she had been wont to sit in days gone by and watch for Martin’s coming. The time and place were conducive to backward flights of memory, and M’ri’s pictures of the past were most beguiling, except that last one when Martin Thorne, stern-faced, unrelenting, and vowing that he would never see her again, had left her alone—to do her duty.

When the children came in she joined them. Janey, flushed and breathless from play, was curled up on the couch beside David. He put his arm caressingly about her and began to relate one of Andersen’s fairy tales. M’ri gazed at them tenderly, and was weaving a future little romance for her two young charges when Janey said petulantly: “I don’t like fairy stories, Davey. Tell a real one.”

M’ri noted the disappointment in the boy’s eyes as he began the narrating of a more realistic story.

“David, where did you read that story?” she asked when he had finished.

“I made it up,” he confessed.

“Why, David, I didn’t know you had such a talent. You must be an author when you are a man.”

Late that night she saw a light shining from beneath the young narrator’s door.

“I ought to send him to bed,” she meditated, “but, poor lad, he has had so few pleasures and, after all, childhood is the only time for thorough enjoyment, so why should I put a feather in its path?”

David read until after midnight, and went to bed with a book under his pillow that he might begin his pastime again at dawn.

After breakfast the next morning M’ri commanded the whole family to sit down and write their thanks to Joe. David’s willing pen flew in pace with his thoughts

as he told of Miss Rhody's delight and his own revel in book land. Janey made most wretched work of her composition. She sighed and struggled with thoughts and pencil, which she gnawed at both ends. Finally she confessed that she couldn't think of anything more to say. M'ri came to inspect her literary effort, which was written in huge characters.

"Dear Joe—"

"Oh," commented M'ri doubtfully, "I don't know as you should address him so familiarly."

"I called him 'Joe' when we rode to school. He told me to," defended Janey.

"He's just like a boy," suggested David.

So M'ri, silenced, read on: "I thank you for your beyewtifull present which I cannot have."

"Oh, Janey," expostulated M'ri, laughing; "that doesn't sound very gracious."

"Well, you said I couldn't have them till I was grown up."

"I was wrong," admitted M'ri. "I didn't realize it then. We have to see a thing written sometimes to know how it sounds."

"May I wear them?" asked Janey exultingly. "May I put them on now?"

"Yes," consented M'ri.

Janey flew upstairs and came back wearing the adored turquoises, which made her eyes most beautifully blue.

"Now I can write," she affirmed, taking up her pencil with the impetus of an incentive. Under the inspiration of the beads around her neck, she wrote:

> "Dear Joe:
>
> "I am wareing the beyewtifull beeds you sent me around my neck. Aunt M'ri says they are terkwoyses. I never had such nice beeds and I thank you. I wish I cood ride with you agen. Good bye. From your frend,
>
> "Janey."

CHAPTER VI

The next day being town day, David "hooked up" Old Hundred and drove to the house. After the butter crock, egg pails, and kerosene and gasoline cans had been piled in, Barnabas squeezed into the space beside David. M'ri came out with a

memorandum of supplies for them to get in town. To David she handed a big bunch of spicy, pink June roses.

“What shall I do with them?” he asked wonderingly.

“Give them to some one who looks as if he needed flowers,” she replied.

“I will,” declared the boy interestedly. “I will watch them all and see how they look at the roses.”

At last M’ri had a kindred spirit in her household. Jud would have sneered, and Janey would not have understood. To Barnabas all flowers looked alike.

It had come to be a custom for Barnabas to take David to town with him at least once a week. The trip was necessarily a slow one, for from almost every farmhouse he received a petition to “do a little errand in town.” As the good nature and accommodating tendency of Barnabas were well known, they were accordingly imposed upon. He received commissions of every character, from the purchase of a corn sheller to the matching of a blue ribbon. He also stopped to pick up a child or two en route to school or to give a lift to a weary pedestrian whom he overtook.

While Barnabas made his usual rounds of the groceries, meatmarket, drug store, mill, feed store, general store, and a hotel where he was well known, David was free to go where he liked. Usually he accompanied Barnabas, but to-day he walked slowly up the principal business street, watching for “one who needed flowers.” Many glances were bestowed upon the roses, some admiring, some careless, and then—his heart almost stopped beating at the significance—Judge Thorne came by. He, too, glanced at the roses. His gaze lingered, and a look came into his eyes that stimulated David’s passion for romance.

“He’s remembering,” he thought joyfully.

He didn’t hesitate even an instant. He stopped in front of the Judge and extended the flowers.

“Would you like these roses, Judge Thorne?” he asked courteously.

Then for the first time the Judge’s attention was diverted from the flowers.

“Your face is familiar, my lad, but—”

“My name is David Dunne.”

“Yes, to be sure, but it must be four years or more since I last saw you. How’s your mother getting along?”

The boy’s face paled.

“She died three weeks ago,” he answered.

“Oh, my lad,” he exclaimed in shocked tones, “I didn’t know! I only returned last night from a long journey. But with whom are you living?”

“With Aunt M’ri and Uncle Barnabas.”

“Oh!”

The impressive silence following this exclamation was broken by the Judge.

“Why do you offer me these flowers, David?”

“Aunt M’ri picked them and told me to give them to some one who looked as if they needed flowers.”

The Judge eyed him with the keen scrutiny of the trained lawyer, but the boy’s face was non-committal.

“Come up into my office with me, David,” commanded the Judge, turning quickly into a near-by stairway. David followed up the stairs and into a suite of well-appointed offices.

A clerk looked up in surprise at the sight of the dignified judge carrying a bouquet of old-fashioned roses and accompanied by a country lad.

“Good morning, Mathews. I am engaged, if any one comes.”

He preceded David into a room on whose outer door was the deterrent word, “Private.”

While the Judge got a pitcher of water to hold the flowers David crossed the room. On a table near the window was a rack of books which he eagerly inspected. To his delight he saw a volume of Andersen’s Fairy Tales. Instantly the book was opened, and he was devouring a story.

“David,” spoke the Judge from the other end of the room, “didn’t these roses grow on a bush by the west porch?”

There was no answer.

The Judge, remarking the boy’s absorption, came to see what he was reading.

“Andersen’s Fairy Tales! My favorite book. I didn’t know that boys liked fairy stories.”

David looked up quickly.

“I didn’t know that lawyers did, either.”

“Well, I do, David. They are my most delightful diversion.”

“Girls don’t like fairy stories,” mused David. “Anyway, Janey doesn’t. I have to tell true stories to please her.”

“Oh, you are a yarner, are you?”

“Yes,” admitted David modestly. “Aunt M’ri thinks I will be a writer when I grow up, but I think I should like to be a lawyer.”

“David,” asked the Judge abruptly, “did Miss Brumble tell you to give me those roses?”

With a wild flashing of eyes the Dunne temper awoke, and the boy’s under jaw shot forward.

“No!” he answered fiercely. “She didn’t know that I know—”

He paused in mid-channel of such deep waters.

“That you know what?” demanded the Judge in his cross-examining tone.

David was doubtful of the consequences of his temerity, but he stood his ground.

“I can’t tell you what, because I promised not to. Some one was just thinking out loud, and I overheard.”

There was silence for a moment.

“David, I remember your father telling me, years ago, that he had a little son with a big imagination which his mother fed by telling stories every night at bedtime.”

“Will you tell me,” asked David earnestly, “about my father? What was it he did? Uncle Barnabas told me something about his trouble last Saturday.”

“How did he come to mention your father to you?”

David reddened.

“Jud twitted me about my mother taking in washing and about my father being a convict, and I knocked him down. I told him I would kill him. Uncle Barnabas pulled me off.”

“And then?”

“Then he let us fight it out.”

“And you licked?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the boy, with proud modesty.

“You naturally would, with that under jaw, but it’s the animal in us that makes us want to kill, and the man in us should rise above the animal. I think I am the person to tell you about your father. He had every reason to make good, but he was unfortunate in his choice of associates and he acquired some of their habits. He had a violent temper, and one night when he was—”

“Drunk,” supplied David gravely.

“He became angry with one of his friends and tried to kill him. Your father was given a comparatively short sentence, which he had almost served when he died. You must guard against your temper and cultivate patience and endurance—qualities your mother possessed.”

It suddenly and overwhelmingly flashed across David what need his mother must have had for such traits, and he turned away to force back his tears. The Judge saw the heaving of the slender, square, young shoulders, and the gray eyes that were wont to look so coldly upon the world and its people grew soft and surprisingly moist.

“It’s past now, David, and can’t be helped, but you are going to aim to be the kind of man your mother would want you to be. You must learn to put up with Jud’s tyranny because his father and his aunt are your benefactors. I have been away the greater part of the time since your father’s death, or I should have kept track of you and your mother. Every time you come to town I want you to come up here and report to me. Will you?”

“Thank you, sir. And I will bring you some more flowers.”

CHAPTER VII

“Whar wuz you, Dave, all the time we wuz in town?” asked Barnabas, as they drove homeward.

“In Judge Thorne’s office.”

“Judge Thorne’s office! What fer?”

“He asked me there, Uncle Barnabas. He was my father’s lawyer once, you know.”

“So he wuz. I hed fergot.”

“He warned me against my temper, as you did, and he told me—all about my father.”

“I am glad he did, Dave. He wuz the one to tell you.”

“He says that every time I come to Lafferton I must come up and report to him.”

“Wal, Dave, it does beat all how folks take to you. Thar wuz Joe wanted you, and now Mart Thorne’s interested. Mebby they could do better by you than we could. Joe’s rich, and the Jedge is well fixed and almighty smart.”

“No,” replied David stoutly. “I’d rather stay with you, Uncle Barnabas. There’s something you’ve got much more of than they have.”

“What’s that, Dave?” asked Barnabas curiously.

“Horse sense.”

Barnabas looked pleased.

“Wal, Dave, I callate to do my best fer you, and thar’s one thing I want *you* to git some horse sense about right off.”

“All right, Uncle Barnabas. What is it?”

“Feedin’ on them fairy stories all day. They hain’t hullsome diet fer a boy.”

“The Judge reads them,” protested David. “He has that same book of fairy stories that Joe gave me.”

“When you’ve done all the Jedge has, and git to whar you kin afford to be idle, you kin read any stuff you want ter.”

“Can’t I read them at all?” asked David in alarm.

“Of course you kin. I meant, I didn’t want you stickin’ to ’em like a pup to a root. You’re goin’ down to the fields to begin work with me this arternoon, and you won’t feel much like readin’ to-night. I wuz lookin’ over them books of your’n last night. Thar’s one you’d best start in on right away, and give the fairies a rest.”

“Which one?”

“Life of Lincoln. That’ll show you what work will do.”

“I’ll read it aloud to you, Uncle Barnabas.”

When they reached the bridge that spanned the river Old Hundred dropped the little hurrying gait which he assumed in town, and settled down to his normal,

comfortable, country jog.

“Uncle Barnabas,” said David thoughtfully, “what is your religion?”

Barnabas meditated.

“Wal, Dave, I don’t know as I hev what you might call religion exackly. I b’lieve in payin’ a hundred cents on the dollar, and a-helpin’ the man that’s down, and—wal, I s’pose I come as nigh bein’ a Unitarian as anything.”

The distribution of the purchases now began. Sometimes the good housewife, herself, came out to receive the parcels and to hear the latest news from town. Oftener, the children of the household were the messengers, for Barnabas’ pockets were always well filled with candy on town days. At one place Barnabas stopped at a barn by the roadside and surreptitiously deposited a suspicious looking package. When he was in front of the next farmhouse a man came out with anxious mien.

“All right, Fred!” hailed Barnabas with a knowing wink. “I was afeerd you’d not be on the watchout. I left it in the manger.”

They did not reach the farm until the dinner hour, and the conversation was maintained by M’ri and Barnabas on marketing matters. David spent the afternoon in being initiated in field work. At supper, M’ri asked him suddenly:

“To whom did you give the flowers, David?”

“I’ve made a story to it, Aunt M’ri, and I’m going to tell it to Janey. Then you can hear.”

M’ri smiled, and questioned him no further.

When the day was done and the “still hour” had come, Janey and David, hand in hand, came around the house and sat down at her feet. It was seldom that any one intruded at this hour, but she knew that David had come to tell his story.

“Begin, Davey,” urged Janey impatiently.

“One day, when a boy was going to town, his aunt gave him a big bouquet of pink roses. She told him to give them to some one who looked as if they needed flowers. So when the boy got to town he walked up Main Street and looked at every one he met. He hoped to see a little sick child or a tired woman who had no flowers of her own; but every one seemed to be in a hurry, and very few stopped to look at flowers or anything else. Those that did look turned away as if they did not see them, and some seemed to be thinking, ‘What beautiful

flowers!’ and then forgot them.

“At last he met a tall, stern man dressed in fine clothes. He looked very proud, but as if he were tired of everything. When he saw the flowers he didn’t turn away, but kept his eyes on them as if they made him sad and lonesome in thinking of good times that were over. So the boy asked him if he would not like the flowers. The man looked surprised and asked the boy what his name was. When he heard it, he remembered that he had been attorney for the boy’s father. He took him up into an office marked private, and he gave the boy some good advice, and talked to him about his mother, which made the boy feel bad. But the man comforted him and told him that every time he came to town he was to report to him.”

M’ri had sat motionless during the recital of this story. At its close she did not speak.

“That wasn’t much of a story. Let’s go play,” suggested Janey, relieving the tension.

They were off like a flash. David heard his name faintly called. M’ri’s voice sounded far off, and as if there were tears in it, but he lacked the courage to return.

CHAPTER VIII

Two important events calendared the next week. The school year ended and Pennyroyal, the “hired help,” who had been paying her annual visit to her sister, came back to the farm. There are two kinds of housekeepers, the “make-cleans” and the “keep-cleans.” Pennyroyal was a graduate of both classes. Her ruling passions in life were scrubbing and “redding” up. On the day of her return, after making onslaught on house and porches, she attacked the pump, and planned a sand-scouring siege for the morrow on the barn. In appearance she was a true exponent of soap and water, and always had the look of being freshly laundered.

At first Pennyroyal looked with ill favor on the addition that had been made to the household in her absence, but when David submitted to the shampooing of his tousled mass of hair, and offered no protest when she scrubbed his neck, she became reconciled to his presence.

On a “town day” David, carrying a huge bunch of pinks, paid his second visit to the Judge.

“Did she tell you,” asked the tall man, gazing very hard at the landscape without

the open window, “to give these flowers to some one who needed them?”

There was a perilous little pause. Then there flashed from the boy to the man a gaze of comprehension.

“She picked them for you,” was the response, simply spoken.

The Judge carefully selected a blossom for his buttonhole, and then proceeded to draw David out. Under the skillful, schooled questioning, David grew communicative.

“She’s always on the west porch after supper.” He added naïvely: “That’s the time when Uncle Barnabas smokes on the east porch, Jud goes off with the boys, and I play with Janey in the lane.”

“Thank you, David,” acknowledged the Judge gratefully. “You are quite a bureau of information, and,” in a consciously casual tone, “will you take a note to your aunt? I think I will ride out to the farm to-night.”

David’s young heart fluttered, and he went back to the farm invested with a proud feeling of having assisted the fates. The air was filled with mystery and an undercurrent of excitement that day. After David had delivered the auspicious note, a private conference behind closed doors had been held between M’ri and Barnabas in the “company parlor.” David’s shrewd young eyes noted the weakening of the lines of finality about M’ri’s mouth when she emerged from the interview. Throughout the long afternoon she performed the usual tasks in nervous haste, the color coming and going in her delicately contoured face.

When she appeared at the supper table she was adorned in white, brightened by touches of blue at belt and collar. David’s young eyes surveyed her appraisingly and approvingly, and later he effected a thorough effacing of the family. He obtained from Barnabas permission for Jud to go to town with the Gardner boys. His next diplomatic move was to persuade Pennyroyal to go with himself and Janey to Uncle Larimy’s hermit home. When she wavered, he commented on the eclipse of Uncle Larimy’s windows the last time he saw them. That turned the tide of Pennyroyal’s resistance. Equipped with soft linen, a cake of strong soap, and a bottle of ammonia, she strode down the lane, accompanied by the children.

The walk proved a trying ordeal for Pennyroyal. She started out at her accustomed brisk gait, but David loitered and sauntered, Janey of course setting her pace by his. Pennyroyal, feeling it incumbent upon herself to keep watch of her young companions, retraced her steps so often that she covered the distance several times.

At Uncle Larimy's she found such a fertile field for her line of work that David was quite ready to return when she pronounced her labors finished. She was really tired, and quite willing to walk home slowly in the moonlight.

It was very quiet. Here and there a bird, startled from its hiding place, sought refuge in the higher branches. A pensive quail piped an answer to the trilling call from the meadows. A tree toad uttered his lonely, guttural exclamation. The air, freshening with a coming covey of clouds, swayed the tops of the trees with mournful sound.

David, full of dreams, let his fancy have full play, and he made a little story of his own about the meeting of the lovers. He pictured the Judge riding down the dust-white road as the sunset shadows grew long. He knew the exact spot—the last bit of woodland—from where Martin, across level-lying fields, could obtain his first glimpse of the old farmhouse and porch. His moving-picture conceit next placed M'ri, dressed in white, with touches of blue, on the west porch. He had decided that in the Long Ago Days she had been wont to wear blue, which he imagined to be the Judge's favorite color. Then he caused the unimpressionable Judge to tie his horse to the hitching post at the side of the road and walk between the hedges of sweet peas that bordered the path. Their pink and white sweetness was the trumpet call sounding over the grave of the love of his youth. (David had read such a passage in a book at Miss Rhody's and thought it very fine and applicable.) His active fancy took Martin Thorne around the house to the west porch. The white figure arose, and in the purple-misted twilight he saw the touches of blue, and his heart lighted.

"Marie!"

The old name, the name he had given her in his love-making days, came to his lips. (David couldn't make M'ri fit in with the settings of his story, so he re-christened her.) She came forward with outstretched hand and a gentle manner, but at the look in his eyes as he uttered the old name, with the caressing accent on the first syllable, she understood. A deep sunrise color flooded her face and neck.

"Martin!" she whispered as she came to him.

David threw back his head and shut his eyes in ecstatic bliss. He was rudely roused from his romantic weaving by the sound of Barnabas' chuckle as they came to the east porch.

"You must a washed every one of Larimy's winders!"

“Yes,” replied Janey, “and she mopped his floors, washed and clean-papered the shelves, and wanted to scrub the old gray horse.”

“Pennyroyal,” exclaimed Barnabas gravely, “I wonder you ain’t waterlogged!”

“Pennyroyal’d rather be clean than be President,” averred David.

“Where’s M’ri?” demanded Pennyroyal, ignoring these thrusts.

“On the west porch, entertaining company,” remarked Barnabas.

“Who?”

Pennyroyal never used a superfluous word. Joe Forbes said she talked like telegrams.

Barnabas removed his pipe from his mouth, and paused to give his words greater dramatic force.

“Mart Thorne!”

The effect was satisfactory.

Pennyroyal stood as if petrified for a moment. Than she expressed her feelings.

“Hallelujah!”

Her tone made the exclamation as impressive as a benediction.

M’ri visited the bedside of each of her charges that night. Jud and Janey were in the land of dreams, but David was awake, expecting her coming. There was a new tenderness in her good-night kiss.

“Aunt M’ri,” asked the boy, looking up with his deep, searching eyes and a suspicion of a smile about his lips, “did you and Judge Thorne talk over my education? He said that he was going to speak to you about it.”

Her eyes sparkled.

“David, the Judge is coming to dinner Sunday. We will talk it over with you then.”

“Aunt M’ri,” a little note of wistfulness chasing the bantering look from his eyes, “you aren’t going to leave us now?”

“Not for a year, David,” she said, a soft flush coming to her face.

“He’s waited seven,” thought David, “so one more won’t make so much difference. Anyway, we need a year to get used to it.”

After all, David was only a boy. His flights of romantic fancy vanished in remembrance of the blissful certainty that there would be ice cream for dinner on Sunday next and on many Sundays thereafter.

CHAPTER IX

The little trickle of uneven days was broken one morning by a message which was brought by the “hired man from Randall’s.”

“We’ve got visitors from the city tew our house,” he announced. “They want you to send Janey over tew play with their little gal.”

Befitting the honor of the occasion, Janey was attired in her blue-sprigged muslin and allowed to wear the turquoises. David drove her to Maplewood, the pretentious home of the Randalls, intending to call for her later. When they came to the entrance of the grounds at the end of a long avenue of maples a very tiny girl, immaculate in white, with hair of gold and eyes darkly blue, came out from among the trees. She regarded David with deep, grave eyes as he stepped from the wagon to open the gate.

“You’ve come to play with me,” she stated in a tone of assurance.

“I’ve brought Janey to play with you,” he rejoined, indicating his little companion. “If you’ll get in the wagon, I’ll drive you up to the house.”

She held up her slender little arms to him, and David felt as if he were lifting a doll.

“My name in Carey Winthrop. What is yours?” she demanded of Janey as they all rode up the shaded, graveled road.

“Janey Brumble,” replied the visitor, gaining ease from the ingenuousness of the little girl and from the knowledge that she was older than her hostess.

“And he’s your brother?” indicating David.

“He’s my adopted brother,” said Janey; “he’s David Dunne.”

“I wish I had a ’dopted brother,” sighed the little girl, eying David wistfully.

David drove up to the side entrance of the large, white-columned, porticoed house, on the spacious veranda of which sat a fair-haired young woman with luminous eyes and smiling mouth. The smile deepened as she saw the curiously disfigured horse ambling up to the stone step.

“Whoa, Old Hundred!” commanded David, whereupon the smile became a

rippling laugh. David got out, lifted the little girl to the ground very carefully, and gave a helping hand to the nimble, independent Janey.

“Mother,” cried Carey delightedly, “this is Janey and her ’dopted brother David.”

David touched his cap gravely in acknowledgment of the introduction. He had never heard his name pronounced as this little girl spoke it, with the soft “a.” It sounded very sweet to him.

“I’ll drive back for you before sundown, Janey,” said David, preparing to climb into the wagon.

“No,” objected Carey, regarding him with apprehension, “I want you to stay and play with me. Tell him to stay, mother.”

There was a regal carriage to the little head and an imperious note—the note of an only child—in her voice.

“Maybe David has other things to do than to play with little girls,” said her mother, “but, David, if you can stay, I wish you would.”

“I should like to stay,” replied David earnestly, “but they expect me back, and Old Hundred is needed in the field.”

“Luke can drive your horse back, and we will see that you and Janey ride home.”

So Carey, with a hand to each of her new playmates, led them across the driveway to the rolling stretch of shaded lawn. The lady watched David as he submitted to be driven as a horse by the little girls and then constituted himself driver to his little team of ponies as he called them. Later, when they raced to the meadow, she saw him hold Janey back that Carey might win. Presently the lady was joined by her husband.

“Where is Carey?” he asked.

“She is having great sport with a pretty little girl and a guardian angel of a boy. Here they come!”

They were trooping across the lawn, the little girls adorned with blossom wreaths which David had woven for them.

“May we go down to the woods—the big woods?” asked Carey.

“It’s too far for you to walk, dear,” remonstrated her mother.

“David says he’ll draw me in my little cart.”

“Who is it that was afraid to go into the big woods, and thought it was a forest

filled with wild beasts and scary things?" demanded Mr. Winthrop.

The earnest eyes fixed on his were not at all abashed.

"With him, with David," she said simply, "I would have no afraidments."

"Afraidments?" he repeated perplexedly. "I am not sure I understand."

"Don't tease, Arthur; it's a very good word," interposed Mrs. Winthrop quickly. "It seems to have a different meaning from fear."

"Come up here, David," bade Mr. Winthrop, "and let me see what there is in you to inspire one with no 'afraidments'."

The boy came up on the steps, and did not falter under the keen but good-humored gaze.

"Do you like to play with little girls, David?"

"I like to play with these little girls," admitted David.

"And what do you like to do besides that?"

"I like to shoot."

"Oh, a hunter?"

"No; I like to shoot at a mark."

"And what else?"

"I like to read, and fish, and swim, and—"

"Eat ice cream!" finished Janey roguishly, showing her dimples.

The man caught her up in his arms.

"You are a darling, and I wish my little girl had such rosy cheeks. David, can you show me where there is good fishing?"

"Uncle Larimy can show you the best places. He knows where the bass live, and how to coax them to bite."

"And will you take me to this wonderful person to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir."

Carey now came out of the hall with her cart, and David drew her across the lawn, Janey dancing by his side. Down through the meadows wound a wheel-tracked road leading to a patch of dense woods which, to a little girl with a big imagination, could easily become a wild forest infested with all sorts of

nameless terrors—terrors that make one draw the bedclothes snugly over the head at night. She gave a little frightened cry as they came into the cool, olive depths.

“I am afraid, David. Take me!”

He lifted her to his shoulder, and her soft cheek nestled against his face.

“Now you are not afraid,” he said persuasively.

“No; but I would be if you put me down.”

They went farther into the oak depths, until they came to a fallen tree where they rested. Janey, investigating the forestry, finally discovered a bush with slender red twigs.

“Oh,” she cried, “now David will show you what beautiful things he can make for us.”

“I have no pins,” demurred David.

“I have,” triumphantly producing a paper of the needful from her pocket. “I always carry them now.”

David broke up the long twigs into short pieces, from which he skillfully fashioned little chairs and tables, discoursing the while to Carey on the beauty and safety of the woods. Finally Carey acquired courage to hunt for wild flowers, though her hand remained close in David’s clasp.

When they returned to the house Carey gave a glowing account of the expedition.

“Sit down on the steps and rest, children,” proposed Mrs. Winthrop, “while Lucy prepares a little picnic dinner for you.”

“What will we do now, David?” appealed Carey, when they were seated on the porch.

“You mustn’t do anything but sit still,” admonished her mother. “You’ve done more now than you are used to doing in one day.”

“Davey will tell us a story,” suggested Janey.

“Yes, please, David,” urged Carey, coming to him and resting her eyes on his inquiringly, while her little hand confidently sought his knee. Instinctively and naturally his fingers closed upon it.

Embarrassed as he was at having a strange audience, he could not resist the

child’s appeal.

“She’ll like the kind that you don’t,” he said musingly to Janey, “the kind about fairies and princes.”

“Yes,” rejoined Carey.

So he fashioned a tale, partly from recollections of Andersen but mostly from his own fancy. As his imagination kindled, he forgot where he was. Inspired by the spellbound interest of the dainty little girl with the worshiping eyes, he achieved his masterpiece.

“Upon my word,” exclaimed Mr. Winthrop, “you are a veritable Scheherazade! You didn’t make up that story yourself?”

“Only part of it,” admitted David modestly.

When he and Janey started for home David politely delivered M’ri’s message of invitation for Carey to come to the farm on the morrow to play.

“It is going to be lovely here,” said the little girl happily. “And we are going to come every summer.”

Janey kissed her impulsively. “Good-by, Carey.”

“Good-by, Janey. Good-by, David.”

“Good-by,” he returned cheerily. Looking back, he saw her lips trembling. His gaze turned in perplexity to Mrs. Winthrop, whose eyes were dancing. “She expects you to bid her good-by the way Janey did,” she explained.

“Oh!” said David, reddening, as two baby lips of scarlet were lifted naturally and expectantly to his.

As they drove away, the light feet of the horse making but little sound on the smooth road, Mrs. Winthrop’s clear treble was wafted after them.

“One can scarcely believe that his father was a convict and his mother a washerwoman.”

A lump came into the boy’s throat. Janey was very quiet on the way home. When they were alone she said to him, with troubled eyes:

“Davey, is Carey going to be your sweetheart?”

His laugh was reassuring.

“Why, Janey, I am just twice her age.”

“She is like a little doll, isn’t she, David?”

“No; like a little princess.”

The next morning Little Teacher came to show them her present from Joe.

“I am sure he chose a camera so I could take your pictures to send to him,” she declared.

“Miss Rhody wants her picture taken in the black silk Joe gave her. If you will take it, she won’t have to spend the money he sent her,” said the thoughtful David.

Little Teacher was very enthusiastic over this proposition, and offered to accompany him at once to secure the picture. Miss Rhody was greatly excited over the event. Ever since the dress had been finished she had been a devotee at the shrine of two hooks in her closet from which was suspended the long-coveted garment, waiting for an occasion that would warrant its débût. She nervously dressed for the “likeness,” for which she assumed her primmest pose. A week later David sent Joe a picture of Miss Rhody standing stiff and straight on her back porch and arrayed, with all the glory of the lilies of the field, in her new silk.

CHAPTER X

When the hot, close-cropped fields took on their first suggestion of autumn and a fuller note was heard in the requiem of the songbirds, when the twilights were of purple and the morning skies delicately mackereled in gray, David entered the little, red, country schoolhouse. M’ri’s tutelage and his sedulous application to Jud’s schoolbooks saved him from the ignominy of being classified with the younger children.

When he sat down to the ink-stained, pen-scratched desk that was to be his own, when he made compact piles of his new books and placed in the little groove in front of the inkwell his pen, pencils, and ruler, he turned to Little Teacher such a glowing face of ecstasy that she was quite inspired, and her sympathies and energies were at once enlisted in the cause of David’s education.

It was the beginning of a new world for him. He studied with a concentration that made him oblivious to all that occurred about him, and he had to be reminded of calls to recitations by an individual summons. He fairly overwhelmed Little Teacher by his voracity for learning and a perseverance that vanquished all obstacles. He soon outstripped his class, and finally his young

instructress was forced to bring forth her own textbooks to satisfy his avidity. He devoured them all speedily, and she then applied to the Judge for fuel from his library to feed her young furnace.

“He takes to learning as naturally as bees to blossoms,” she reported.

“He must ease off,” warned Barnabas. “Young hickory needs plenty of room for full growth.”

“No,” disagreed the Judge, “young hickory is as strong as wrought iron. He’s going to have a clear, keen mind to argue law cases.”

“I think not,” said M’ri. “You forget another quality of young hickory. No other wood burns with such brilliancy. David is going to be an author.”

“I am afraid,” wrote Joe, “that Dave won’t be a first-class ranchman. He must be plum locoed with dreams.”

This prognostication reached David’s ears.

“Without dreams,” he argued to Barnabas, “one would be like the pigs.”

“Wal, now, Dave, mebby pigs dream. They sartain sleep a hull lot.”

David laughed appreciatively.

“Dave,” pursued Barnabas, “they’re all figgerin’ on your futur, and they’re a-figgerin’ wrong. Joe thinks you’ll take to ranchin’. You may—fer a spell. M’ri thinks you may write books. You may do even that—fer a spell. The Jedge counts on yer takin’ to the law like a duck does to water. You may, but law larnin’, cow punchin’, and story writin’ ’ll jest be steppin’ stuns to what I know you air goin’ ter be, and what I know is in you ter be.”

“What in the world is that, Uncle Barnabas?” asked David in surprise. “A farmer?”

“Farmer, nuthin’!” scoffed Barnabas. “Yer hain’t much on farmin’, Dave, though I will say yer furrers is allers straight, like everythin’ else you do. Yer straight yerself. No! young hickory can bend without breakin’, and thar’s jest one thing I want fer you to be.”

“What?” persisted the boy.

Barnabas whispered something.

The blood of the young country boy went like wine through his veins; his heart leaped with a big and mighty purpose.

“Now, remember, Dave,” cautioned Barnabas, “what all work and no play done to Jack. You git yer lessons perfect, and recite them, and read a leetle of an evenin’; the rest of the time I want yer to get out and cerkilate.”

November with its call to quiet woods came on, and David was eager to “cerkilate.” He became animated with the spirit of sport. Red-letter Saturdays were spent with Uncle Larimy, and the far-away echo of the hunter’s bullet and the scudding through the woods of startled game became new, sweet music to his ears. Rifle in hand, with dog shuffling at his heels or plunging ahead in search of game, the world was his. Life was very full and happy, save for the one inevitable sprig of bitter—Jud! The big bully of a boy had learned that David was his equal physically and his superior mentally, but the fear of David and of David’s good standing kept him from venturing out in the open; so from cover he sought by all the arts known to craftiness to harass the younger boy, whose patience this test tried most sorely.

One day when Little Teacher had given him a verbose definition of the word “pestiferous,” David looked at her comprehendingly. “Like Jud,” he murmured.

Many a time his young arms ached to give Jud another thrashing, but his mother’s parting injunction restrained him.

“If only,” he sighed, “Jud belonged to some one else!”

He vainly sought to find the hair line that divided his sense of gratitude and his protection of self-respect.

Winter followed, and the farm work droned. It was a comfortable, cozy time, with breakfast served in the kitchen on a table spread with a gay, red cloth. Pennyroyal baked griddle-sized cakes, delivering them one at a time direct from the stove to the consumer. The early hour of lamplight made long evenings, which were beguiled by lesson books and story-books, by an occasional skating carnival on the river, a coasting party at Long Hill, or a “surprise” on some hospitable neighbor.

One morning he came into school with face and eyes aglow with something more than the mere delight of living. It meant mischief, pure and simple, but Little Teacher was not always discerning. She gave him a welcoming smile of sheer sympathy with his mood. She didn’t smile, later, when the schoolroom was distracted by the sound of raucous laughter, feminine screams, and a fluttering of skirts as the girls scrambled to standing posture in their chairs. Astonished, she looked for the cause. The cause came her way, and the pupils had a fresh example of the miracles wrought by a mouse, for Little Teacher, usually the

personification of dignity and repose, screamed lustily and scudded chairward with as much rapidity as that displayed by the scurrying mouse as it chased for the corner and disappeared through a knothole.

As soon as the noiseful glee had subsided, Little Teacher sought to recover her prided self-possession. In a voice resonant with sternness, she commanded silence, gazing wrathfully by chance at little Tim Wiggins.

"'T was David done it," he said in deprecating self-defense, imagining himself accused.

"David Dunne," demanded Little Teacher, "did you bring that mouse to school?"

"He brung it and let it out on purpose," informed Tim eagerly.

Little Teacher never encouraged talebearing, but she was so discomfited by the exposure of the ruling weakness peculiar to her sex that she decided to discipline her favorite pupil upon his acknowledgment of guilt.

"You may bring your books and sit on the platform," she ordered indignantly.

David did not in the least mind his assignment to so prominent a position, but he did mind Little Teacher's attitude toward him throughout the day. He sought to propitiate her by coming to her assistance in many little tasks, but she persistently ignored his overtures. He then ventured to seek enlightenment regarding his studies, but she coldly informed him he could remain after school to ask his questions.

David began to feel troubled, and looked out of the window for an inspiration. He found one in the form of big, brawny, Jim Block—"Teacher's Jim," as the school children all called him.

"There goes Teacher's Jim," sang David, *soto voce*.

The shot told. For the second time that day Little Teacher showed outward and visible signs of an inward disturbance. With a blush she turned quickly to the window and watched with expressive eyes the stalwart figure striding over the rough-frozen road.

In an instant, however, she had recalled herself to earth, and David's dancing eyes renewed her hostility toward him. Toward the end of the day she began to feel somewhat appeased by his docility and evident repentance. Her manner had perceptibly changed by the time the closing exercise began. This was the writing of words on the blackboard for the pupils to use in sentences. She pointed to the first word, "income."

“Who can make a sentence and use that word correctly?” she asked.

“Do call on Tim,” whispered David. “He so loves to be the first to tell anything.”

She smiled her appreciation of Tim’s prominent characteristic, and looked at the youngster, who was wringing his hand in an agony of eagerness. She gave him the floor, and he jumped to his feet in triumph, yelling:

“In come a mouse!”

This was too much for David’s composure, and he gave way to an infectious fit of laughter, in which the pupils joined.

Little Teacher found the allusion personal and uncomfortable. She at once assumed her former distant mien, demanding David’s presence after school closed.

“You have no gratitude, David,” she stated emphatically.

The boy winced, and his eyes darkened with concern, as he remembered his mother’s parting injunction.

Little Teacher softened slightly.

“You are sorry, aren’t you, David?” she asked gently.

He looked at her meditatively.

“No, Teacher,” he answered quietly.

She flushed angrily.

“David Dunne, you may go home, and you needn’t come back to school again until you tell me you are sorry.”

David took his books and walked serenely from the room. He went home by the way of Jim Block’s farm.

“Hullo, Dave!” called Big Jim, who was in the barnyard.

“Hello, Jim! I came to tell you some good news. You said if you were only sure there was something Teacher was afraid of, you wouldn’t feel so scared of her.”

“Well,” prompted Jim eagerly.

“I thought I’d find out for you, so I took a mouse to school and let it loose.”

“Gee!”

David then related the occurrences of the morning, not omitting the look in Little

Teacher’s eyes when she beheld Jim from the window.

“I’ll hook up this very night and go to see her,” confided Jim.

“Be sure you do, Jim. If you find your courage slipping, just remember that you owe it to me, because she won’t let me come back to school unless she knows why I wasn’t sorry.”

“I give you my word, Dave,” said Jim earnestly.

The next morning Little Teacher stopped at the Brumble farm.

“I came this way to walk to school with you and Janey,” she said sweetly and significantly to David.

When they reached the road, and Janey had gone back to get her sled, Little Teacher looked up and caught the amused twinkle in David’s eye. A wave of conscious red overspread her cheeks.

“Must I say I am sorry now?” he asked.

“David Dunne, there are things you understand which you never learned from books.”

CHAPTER XI

Late spring brought preparations for M’ri’s wedding. Rhody Crabbe’s needle and fingers flew in rapturous speed, and there was likewise engaged a seamstress from Lafferton. Rhody had begged for the making of the wedding gown, and when it was finished David went to fetch it home.

“It’s almost done, David, and you tell M’ri the last stitch was a loveknot. It’s most a year sence you wuz here afore, a-waitin’ fer her blue waist tew be finished. Remember, don’t you, David?”

He remembered, and as she stitched he sat silently reviewing that year, the comforts received, the pleasures pursued, and, best of all, the many things he had learned, but the recollection that a year ago his mother had been living brought a rush of sad memories and blotted out happier thoughts.

“I wish yer ma could hev seen Mart and M’ri merried. She was orful disapp’inted when they broke off.”

There was no reply. Rhody’s sharp little eyes, in upward glance, spied the trickling tear; she looked quickly away and stitched in furious haste.

“But, my!” she continued, as if there had been no pause, “how glad she would be

to know ’t was you as fetched it around.”

David looked up, diverted and inquiring.

“Yes; I learnt it from M’ri. She told me about the flowers you give him. I thought it was jest sweet in you, David. You done good work thar.”

“Miss Rhody,” said David earnestly, “maybe some day I can get you a sweetheart.”

“’T ain’t no use, David,” she sighed. “No one wants a plain critter like me.”

“Lots of them don’t marry for looks,” argued David sagely. “Besides, you look fine in your black silk, and your hair crimped. Joe thinks your picture is great. He’s got it on a shelf over his fireplace at the ranch.”

“Most likely some cowboy’ll see it and lose his heart,” laughed Miss Rhody, “but thar, the weddin’ dress is all done. You go home and quit thinkin’ about gittin’ me a man. I ain’t ha’nted by the thought of endin’ single.”

Great preparations for the wedding progressed at the Brumble farm. For a week Pennyroyal whipped up eggs and sugar, and David ransacked the woods for evergreens and berries with which to decorate the big barn, where the dance after the wedding was to take place.

The old farmhouse was filled to overflowing on the night of the wedding. After the ceremony, Miss Rhody, resplendent in the black silk and waving hair loosed from the crimping pins that had confined it for two days and nights, came up to David.

“My, David, I’ve got the funniest all over feelin’ from seein’ Mart and M’ri merried! I was orful afeerd I’d cry.”

“Sit down, Miss Rhody,” said David, gallantly bringing her a chair.

“Didn’t M’ri look perfeckly beyewtiful?” she continued, after accomplishing the pirouette that prevented creases. “And Mart, he looked that proud, and solemn too. It made me think of that gal when she spoke ‘Curfew shall not ring tewnight’ at the schoolhouse. Every one looks fine. I hain’t seen Barnabas so fussed up sence Libby Sukes’ funyral. It makes him look real spry. And whoever got Larimer Sasser to perk up and put on a starched shirt!”

“I think,” confided David, “that Penny got after him. She had him in a corner when he came, and she tied his necktie so tight I was afraid she would choke him.”

“Look at old Miss Pankey, David. She, as rich as they make ’em, and a-wearin’ that old silk! It looks as ef it hed bin hung up fer you and Jud to shoot at. Ain’t she a-glarin’ and a-sniffin’ at me, though? Say, David, you write Joe that if M’ri did look the purtiest of any one that my dress cost more’n any one’s here, and showed it, too. I hope thar’ll be a lot of occasions to wear it to this summer. M’ri is a-goin’ to give a reception when she gits back from her tower, and that’ll be one thing to wear it at. Ain’t Jud got a mean look? He’s as crooked as a dog’s hind leg. But, say, David, that’s a fine suit you’re a-wearin’. You look handsome. Thar ain’t a stingy hair on Barnabas’ head. He’s doin’ jest as good by you as he is by Jud. Don’t little Janey look like an angel in white, and them lovely beads Joe give her? I can’t think of nothin’ else but that little Eva you read me about. I shouldn’t wonder a bit, David, if I come to yer and Janey’s weddin’ yet!” she said, as Janey came dancing up to them.

A slow flush mounted to his forehead, but Janey laughed merrily.

“I’ve promised Joe I’d wait for him,” she said roguishly.

“She’s only foolin’ and so wuz he,” quickly spoke Miss Rhody, seeing the hurt look in David’s eyes. “Barnabas,” she asked, stopping him as he passed, “you air a-goin’ to miss M’ri turrible. You could never manige if it wa’n’t fer Penny. Won’t she hev the time of her life cleanin’ up after this weddin’? She’ll enjoy it more’n she did gettin’ ready fer it.”

“I hope Penny won’t go to gittin’ merried—not till Janey’s growed up.”

“David’s a great help to you, too, Barnabas.”

“Dave! I don’t know how I ever got along afore he came. He’s so willin’ and so honest. He’s as good as gold. Only fault he’s got is a quick temper. He’s doin’ purty fair with it, though. If only Jud—”

He stopped, with a sigh, and Rhody hastened to change the subject.

“You’re a-lookin’ spry to-night, Barnabas. I hain’t seen you look so spruce in a long time.”

“You look mighty tasty yerself, Rhody.”

This interchange of compliments was interrupted by the announcement of supper.

“I never set down to sech a repast,” thought Miss Rhody. “I’m glad I didn’t feed much to-day. I don’t know whether to take chickin twice, or to try all them meltin’, flaky lookin’ pies. And jest see them layer cakes!”

After supper adjournment was made to the barn, where the fiddles were already swinging madly. Every one caught the spirit, and even Miss Rhody finally succumbed to Barnabas' insistence. Pennyroyal captured Uncle Larimy, and when Janey whirled away in the arms of a schoolmate, David, who had never learned to dance, stood isolated. He felt lonely and depressed, and recalled the expression in which Joe Forbes had explained life after he had acquired a stepmother. "I was always on the edge of the fireside," he had said.

"Dave," expostulated Uncle Barnabas, as soon as he could get his breath after the last dance, "you'd better eddicate yer heels as well as yer head. It's unnateral fer a colt and a boy not to kick up their heels. You don't never want to be a looker-on at nuthin' excep' from ch'ice. You'd orter be a stand-in on everything that's a-goin' instead of a stand-by. The stand-bys never git nowhar."

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

David Dunne at eighteen was graduated from the high school in Lafferton after five colorless years in which study and farm work alternated. Throughout this period he had continued to incur the rancor of Jud, whose youthful scrapes had gradually developed into brawls and carousals. The Judge periodically extricated him from serious entanglements, and Barnabas continued optimistic in his expectations of a time when Jud should "settle." On one occasion Jud sneeringly accused David of "working the old man for a share in the farm," and taunted him with the fact that he was big enough and strong enough to hustle for himself without living on charity. David started on a tramp through the woods to face the old issue and decide his fate. He had then one more year before he could finish school and carry out a long-cherished dream of college.

He was at a loss to know just where to turn at the present time for a home where he could work for his board and attend school. The Judge and M'ri had gone abroad; Joe was on his ranch; the farmers needed no additional help.

He had been walking swiftly in unison with his thoughts, and when he came out of the woods into the open he was only a mile downstream from town. Upon the river bank stood Uncle Larimy, skillfully swirling his line.

"Wanter try yer luck, Dave?"

"I have no luck just now, Uncle Larimy," replied the boy sadly.

Uncle Larimy shot him a quick, sidelong glance.

“Then move on, Dave, and chase arter it. Thar’s allers luck somewhar. Jest like fishin’. You can’t set in one spot and wait for luck tew come to you like old Zeke Foss does. You must keep a-castin’.”

“I don’t know where to cast, Uncle Larimy.”

Uncle Larimy pondered. He knew that Jud was home, and he divined David’s trend of thought.

“You can’t stick to a plank allers, Dave, ef you wanter amount tew anything. Strike out bold, and swim without any life presarvers. You might jest as well be a sleepy old cat in a corner as to go smoothsailin’ through life.”

“I feel that I have got to strike out, and at once, Uncle Larimy, but I don’t just know where to strike.”

“Wal, Dave, it’s what we’ve all got to find out fer ourselves. It’s a leap in the dark like, and ef you don’t land nowhere, take another leap, and keep a-goin’ somewhar.”

David wended his way homeward, pondering over Uncle Larimy’s philosophy. When he went with Barnabas to do the milking that night he broached the subject of leaving the farm.

“I know how Jud feels about my being here, Uncle Barnabas.”

“What did he say to you?” asked the old man anxiously.

“Nothing. I overheard a part of your conversation. He is right. And if I stay here, he will run away to sea. He told the fellows in Lafferton he would.”

“You are going to stay, Dave.”

“You won’t like to think you drove your son away. If he gets into trouble, both you and I will feel we are to blame.”

“Dave, I see why the Jedge hez got it all cut out fer you to be a lawyer. You’ve got the argyin’ habit strong. But you can’t argue me into what I see is wrong. This is the place fer you to be, and Jud ’ll hev to come outen his spell.”

“Then let me go away until he does. You must give him every chance.”

“Where’ll you go?” asked Barnabas curiously.

“I don’t know, yet,” said the boy, “but I’ll think out a plan to-night.”

It was Jud, after all, who cut the Gordian knot, and made one of his welcome disappearances, which lasted until David was ready to start in college. His

savings, that he had accumulated by field work in the summers and a very successful poultry business for six years, netted him four hundred dollars.

“One hundred dollars for each year,” he thought exultantly. “That will be ample with the work I shall find to do.”

Then he made known to his friends his long-cherished scheme of working his way through college. The Judge laughed.

“Your four hundred dollars, David, will barely get you through the first year. After that, I shall gladly pay your expenses, for as soon as you are admitted to the bar you are to come into my office, of course.”

David demurred.

“I shall work my way through college,” he said firmly.

He next told Barnabas of his intention and the Judge’s offer which he had declined.

“I’m glad you refused, Dave. You’ll only be in his office till you’re ripe fer what I kin make you. I’ve larnt that the law is a good foundation as a sure steppin’ stone tew it, so you kin hev a taste of it. But the Jedge ain’t a-goin’ to pay yer expenses.”

“I don’t mean that he shall,” replied David. “I want to pay my own way.”

“I’m a-goin’ to send you tew college and send you right. No starvin’ and garret plan fer you. I’ve let Joe and the Jedge do fer you as much as they’re a-goin’ to, but you’re mine from now on. It’s what I’d do fer my own son if he cared fer books, and you’re as near to me ez ef you were my son.”

“It’s too much, Uncle Barnabas.”

“And, David,” he continued, unheeding the interruption, “I hope you’ll really be my son some day.”

A look of such exquisite happiness came into the young eyes that Barnabas put out his hand silently. In the firm hand-clasp they both understood.

“I am not going to let you help me through college, though, Uncle Barnabas. It has always been my dream to earn my own education. When you pay for anything yourself, it seems so much more your own than when it’s a gift.”

“Let him, Barnabas,” again counseled Uncle Larimy. “Folks must feed diff’rent. Thar’s the sweet-fed which must allers hev sugar, but salt’s the savor for Dave. He’s the kind that flourishes best in the shade.”

Janey wrote to Joe of David’s plan, and there promptly came a check for one thousand dollars, which David as promptly returned.

CHAPTER II

A few days before the time set for his departure David set out on a round of farewell visits to the country folk. It was one of those cold, cheerless days that intervene between the first haze of autumn and the golden glow of October. He had never before realized how lonely the shiver of wind through the poplars could sound. Two innovations had been made that day in the country. The rural delivery carrier, in his little house on wheels, had made his first delivery, and a track for the new electric-car line was laid through the sheep meadow. This inroad of progress upon the sanctity of their seclusion seemed sacrilegious to David, who longed to have lived in the olden time of log houses, with their picturesque open fires and candle lights. Following some vague inward call, he went out of his way to ride past the tiny house he had once called home, and which in all his ramblings he had steadfastly avoided. He had heard that the place had passed into the hands of a widow with an only son, and that they had purchased surrounding land for cultivation. He had been glad to hear this, and had liked to fancy the son caring for his mother as he himself would have cared

for his mother had she lived.

As he neared the little nutshell of a house his heart beat fast at the sight of a woman pinning clothes to the line. Her fingers, stiff and swollen, moved slowly. The same instinct that had guided him down this road made him dismount and tie his horse. The old woman came slowly down the little path to meet him.

“I am David Dunne,” he said gently, “and I used to live here. I wanted to come to see my old home once more.”

He thought that the dim eyes gazing into his were the saddest he had ever beheld.

“Yes,” she replied, with the slow, German accent, “I know of you. Come in.”

He followed her into the little sitting room, which was as barren of furnishings as it had been in the olden days.

“Sit down,” she invited.

He took a chair opposite a cheap picture of a youth in uniform. A flag of coarse material was pinned above this portrait, and underneath was a roughly carved bracket on which was a glass filled with goldenrod.

“You lived here with your mother,” she said musingly, “and she was taken. I lived here with my son, and—he was taken.”

“Oh!” said David. “I did not know—was he—”

His eyes sought the picture on the wall.

“Yes,” she replied, answering his unspoken question, as she lifted her eyes to her little shrine, “he enlisted and went to the Philippines. He died there of fever more than a year ago.”

David was silent. His brown, boyish hand shaded his eyes. It had been his fault that he had not heard of this old woman and the loss of her son. He had shrunk from all knowledge and mention of this little home and its inmates. The country folk had recognized and respected his reticence, which to people near the soil seems natural. This had been the only issue in his life that he had dodged, and he was bitterly repenting his negligence. In memory of his mother, he should have helped the lonely old woman.

“You were left a poor, helpless boy,” she continued, “and I am left a poor, helpless old woman. The very young and the very old meet in their helplessness, yet there is hope for the one—nothing for the other.”

“Yes, memories,” he suggested softly, “and the pride you feel in his having died as he did.”

“There is that,” she acknowledged with a sigh, “and if only I could live on here in this little place where we have been so happy! But I must leave it.”

“Why?” asked David quickly.

“After my Carl died, things began to happen. When once they do that, there is no stopping. The bank at the Corners failed, and I lost my savings. The turkeys wandered away, the cow died, and now there’s the mortgage. It’s due to-morrow, and then—the man that holds it will wait no longer. So it is the poorhouse, which I have always dreaded.”

David’s head lifted, and his eyes shone radiantly as he looked into the tired, hopeless eyes.

“Your mortgage will be paid to-morrow, and—Don’t you draw a pension for your son?”

She looked at him in a dazed way.

“No, there is no pension—I—”

“Judge Thorne will get you one,” he said optimistically, as he rose, ready for action, “and how much is the mortgage?”

“Three hundred dollars,” she said despairingly.

“Almost as much as the place is worth. Who holds the mortgage?”

“Deacon Prickley.”

“You see,” said David, trying to speak casually, “I have three hundred dollars lying idle for which I have no use. I’ll ride to town now and have the Judge see that the place is clear to you, and he will get you a pension, twelve dollars a month.”

The worn, seamed face lifted to his was transfigured by its look of beatitude.

“You mustn’t,” she implored. “I didn’t know about the pension. That will keep me, and I can find another little place somewhere. But the money you offer—no! I have heard how you have been saving to go through school.”

He smiled.

“Uncle Barnabas and the Judge are anxious to pay my expenses at college, and—you *must* let me. I would like to think, don’t you see, that you are living

here in my old home. It will seem to me as if I were doing it for *my* mother—as I would want some boy to do for her if she were left—and it's my country's service he died in. I would rather buy this little place for you, and know that you are living here, than to buy anything else in the world."

The old face was quite beautiful now.

"Then I will let you," she said tremulously. "You see, I am a hard-working woman and quite strong, but folks won't believe that, because I am old; so they won't hire me to do their work, and they say I should go to the poorhouse. But to old folks there's nothing like having your own things and your own ways. They get to be a part of you. I was thinking when you rode up that it would kill me not to see the frost on the old poplar, and not to cover up my geraniums on the chill nights."

Something stirred in David's heart like pain. He stooped and kissed her gently. Then he rode away, rejoicing that he had worked to this end. Four hours later he rode back to the little home.

"The Judge has paid over the money to Old Skinflint Prickley," he said blithely, "and the place is all yours. The deacon had compounded the interest, which is against the laws of the state, so here are a few dollars to help tide you over until the Judge gets the pension for you."

"David," she said solemnly, "an old woman's prayers may help you, and some day, when you are a great man, you will do great deeds, but none of them will be as great as that which you have done to-day."

David rode home with the echo of this benediction in his ears. He had asked the Judge to keep the transaction secret, but of course the Judge told Barnabas, who in turn informed Uncle Larimy.

"I told the boy when his ma died," said Uncle Larimy, "that things go 'skew sometimes, but that the sun would shine. The sun will allers be a-shinin' fer him when he does such deeds as this."

CHAPTER III

The fare to his college town, his books, and his tuition so depleted David's capital of one hundred dollars that he hastened to deposit the balance for an emergency. Then he set about to earn his "keep," as he had done in the country, but there were many students bent on a similar quest and he soon found that the demand for labor was exceeded by the supply.

Before the end of the first week he was able to write home that he had found a nice, quiet lodging in exchange for the care of a furnace in winter and the trimming of a lawn in other seasons, and that he had secured a position as waiter to pay for his meals; also that there was miscellaneous employment to pay for his washing and incidentals.

He didn't go into details and explain that the "nice quiet lodging" was a third-floor rear whose gables gave David's six feet of length but little leeway. It was quiet because the third floor was not heated, and its occupants therefore stayed away as much as possible. His services as waiter were required only at dinner time, in exchange for which he received that meal. His breakfast and luncheon he procured as best he could; sometimes he dispensed with them entirely. Crackers, milk, and fruit, as the cheapest articles of diet, appeared oftenest on his ménu. Sometimes he went fishing and surreptitiously smuggled the cream of the catch up to his little abode, for Mrs. Tupps' "rules to roomers," as affixed to the walls, were explicit: "No cooking or washing allowed in rooms." But Mrs. Tupps, like her fires, was nearly always out, for she was a member of the Woman's Relief Corps, Ladies' Aid, Ladies' Guild, Woman's League, Suffragette Society, Pioneer Society, and Eastern Star. At the meetings of these various societies she was constant in attendance, so in her absence her roomers "made hay," as David termed it, cooking their provender and illicitly performing laundry work in the bathtub. Still, there must always be "on guard" duty, for Mrs. Tupps was a stealthy stalker. One saw her not, but now and then there was a faint rustle on the stair. David's eyes and ears, trained to keenness, were patient and vigilant, so he was generally chosen as sentinel, and he acquired new caution, adroitness, and a quietness of movement.

There had been three or four close calls. Once, she had knocked at his door as he was in the act of boiling eggs over the gas jet. In the twinkling of an eye the saucepan was thrust under the bed, and David, sweet and serene of expression, opened the door to the inquisitive-eyed Tupps.

"I came to borrow a pen," she said shamelessly, her eyes penetrating the cracks and crevices of the little room.

David politely regretted that he used an indelible pencil and possessed no pens.

In the act of removing all records and remains of feasts, David became an adept. Neat, unsuspicious looking parcels were made and conveyed, after retiring hours, to a near-by vacant lot, where once had been visible an excavation for a cellar, but this had been filled to street level with tin cans, paper bags, butter

bowls, cracker cases, egg shells, and pie plates from the House of Tupps.

His miscellaneous employment, mentioned in his letter, was any sort of work he could find to do.

David became popular with professors by reason of his record in classes and the application and concentration he brought to his studies. His prowess in all sports, his fairness, and the spirit of *camaraderie* he always maintained with his associates, made him a general favorite. He wore fairly good clothes, was well groomed, and always in good spirits, so of his privations and poverty only one or two of those closest to him were even suspicious. He was entirely reticent on the subject, though open and free in all other discourse, and permitted no encroachment on personal matters. One or two chance offenders intuitively perceived a slight but impassable barrier.

“Dunne has grown a little gaunt-eyed since he first came here,” said one of his chosen friends to a classmate one evening. “He’s outdoors enough to counteract overstudy. But do you suppose he has enough to eat? So many of these fellows live on next to nothing.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised if he were on rations. You know he always makes some excuse when we invite him to a spread. He’s too proud to accept favors and not reciprocate, I believe.”

David overheard these remarks, and a very long walk was required to restore his serenity. During this walk he planned to get some extra work that would insure him compensation requisite to provide a modest spread so that he might allay their suspicions. Upon his return to his lodgings he found an enormous box which had come by express from Lafferton. It contained Pennyroyal’s best culinary efforts; also four dozen eggs, a two-pound pat of butter, coffee, and a can of cream.

He propitiated Mrs. Tupps by the proffer of a dozen of the eggs and told her of his desire to entertain his friends. It would be impossible to do this in his room, for when he lay in bed he could touch every piece of furniture with but little effort.

David had become his landlady’s confidant and refuge in time of trouble, and she was willing to allow him the privilege of the dining room.

“I am going away to-night for a couple of days, but I would rather you wouldn’t mention it to the others. You may have the use of the dining room and the dishes.”

David’s friends were surprised to receive an off-hand invitation from him to “drop in for a little country spread.” They were still more surprised when they beheld the long table with its sumptuous array of edibles,—raised biscuits, golden butter, cold chicken, pickles, jelly, sugared doughnuts, pork cake, gold and silver cake, crullers, mince pie, apple pie, cottage cheese, cider, and coffee.

“It looks like a county fair exhibit, Dunne,” said a city-bred chap.

Six healthy young appetites did justice to this repast and insured David’s acceptance of five invitations to dine. It took Mrs. Tupps and David fully a week to consume the remnants of this collation. The eggs he bestowed upon an anemic-faced lodger who had been prescribed a milk and egg diet, but with eggs at fifty cents a dozen he had not filled his prescription.

“David’s friends were surprised to receive an off-hand invitation from him to ‘drop in for a little country spread’”

At the end of the college year David went back to the farm, and a snug sense of comfort and a home-longing filled him at the sight of the old farmhouse, its lawn stretching into gardens, its gardens into orchards, orchards into meadows, and meadows into woodlands. Through the long, hot summer he tilled the fields, and invested the proceeds in clothes and books for the ensuing year.

There followed three similar years of a hand-to-mouth existence, the privations of which he endured in silence. There were little occasional oases, such as boxes from Pennyroyal, or extra revenue now and then from tutoring, but there were many, many days when his healthy young appetite clamored in vain for appeasement. On such days came the temptation to borrow from Barnabas the money to finish his course in comfort, but the young conqueror never yielded to this enticement. He grew stronger and sturdier in spirit after each conflict, but lost something from his young buoyancy and elasticity which he could never regain. His struggles added a touch of grimness to his old sense of humor, but when he was admitted to the bar he was a man in courage, strength, and endurance.

CHAPTER IV

It seemed to David, when he was at the farm again, that in his absence time had stood still, except with Janey. She was a slender slip of a girl, gentle voiced and

soft hearted. Her eyes were infinitely blue and lovely, and there was a glad little ring in her voice when she greeted “Davey.”

M’ri gave a cry of surprised pleasure when she saw her former charge. He was tall, lithe, supple, and hard-muscled. His face was not very expressive in repose, but showed a quiet strength when lighted by the keenness of his serious, brown eyes and the sweetness of his smile. His color was a deep-sea tan.

“It seems so good to be alive, Aunt M’ri. I thought I was weaned away from farm life until I bit into one of those snow apples from the old tree by the south corner of the orchard. Then I knew I was home.”

Pennyroyal shed her first visible tear.

“I am glad you are home again, David,” she sniffed. “You were always such a clean boy.”

“I missed you more’n any one did, David,” acknowledged Miss Rhody. “Ef I hed been a Catholic I should a felt as ef the confessional hed been took from me. I ain’t hed no one to talk secret like to excep’ when Joe comes onct a year. He ain’t been fer a couple of years, either, but he sent me anuther black dress the other day—silk, like the last one. To think of little Joe Forbes a-growin’ up and keepin’ me in silk dresses!”

“I’ll buy your next one for you,” declared David emphatically.

The next day after his return from college David started his legal labors under the watchful eye of the Judge. He made a leap-frog progress in acquiring an accurate knowledge of legal lore. He worked and waited patiently for the Judge’s recognition of his readiness to try his first case, and at last the eventful time came.

“No; there isn’t the slightest prospect of his winning it,” the Judge told his wife that night.

“The prosecution has strong evidence, and we have nothing—barely a witness of any account.”

“Then the poor man will be convicted and David will gain no glory,” lamented M’ri. “It means so much to a young lawyer to win his first case.”

The Judge smiled.

“Neither of them needs any sympathy. Miggs ought to have been sent over the road long ago. David’s got to have experience before he gains glory.”

“How did you come to take such a case?” asked M’ri, for the Judge was quite exclusive in his acceptance of clients.

“It was David’s doings,” said the Judge, with a frown that had a smile lurking behind it.

“Why did he wish you to take the case?” persisted M’ri.

“As near as I can make out,” replied the Judge, with a slight softening of his grim features, “it was because Miggs’ wife takes in washing when Miggs is celebrating.”

M’ri walked quickly to the window, murmuring some unintelligible sound of endearment.

On the day of the summing-up at the trial the court room was crowded. There were the habitual court hangers on, David’s country friends *en masse*, a large filling in at the back of the representatives of the highways and byways, associates of the popular wrongdoer, and the legal lore of the town, with the good-humored patronage usually bestowed by the profession on the newcomer to their ranks.

As the Judge had said, his client was conceded to be slated for conviction. If he had made the argument himself he would have made it in his usual cool, well-poised manner. But David, although he knew Miggs to be a veteran of the toughs, felt sure of his innocence in this case, and he was determined to battle for him, not for the sake of justice alone, but for the sake of the tired-looking washerwoman he had seen bending over the tubs. This was an occupation she had to resort to only in her husband’s times of indulgence, for he was a wage earner in his days of soberness.

When David arose to speak it seemed to the people assembled that the coil of evidence, as reviewed by the prosecutor in his argument, was drawn too closely for any power to extricate the victim.

At the first words of the young lawyer, uttered in a voice of winning mellowness, the public forgot the facts in the case. Swayed by the charm of David’s personality, a current of new-born sympathy for the prisoner ran through the court room.

David came up close to the jury and, as he addressed them, he seemed to be oblivious of the presence of any one else in the room. It was as though he were telling them, his friends, something he alone knew, and that he was sure of their belief in his statements.

“For all the world,” thought M’ri, listening, “as he used to tell stories when he was a boy. He’d fairly make you believe they were true.”

To be sure the jury were all his friends; they had known him when he was little “barefoot Dave Dunne.” Still, they were captivated by this new oratory, warm, vivid, and inspiring, delivered to the accompaniment of dulcet and seductive tones that transported them into an enchanted world. Their senses were stirred in the same way they would be if a flag were unfurled.

“Sounds kind o’ like orgin music,” whispered Miss Rhody.

Yet underneath the eloquence was a logical simplicity, a keen sifting of facts, the exposure of flaws in the circumstantial evidence. There was a force back of what he said like the force back of the projectile. About the form of the hardened sinner, Miggs, David drew a circle of innocence that no one ventured to cross. Simply, convincingly, and concisely he summed up, with a forceful appeal to their intelligence, their honor, and their justice.

The reply by the assistant to the prosecutor was perfunctory and ineffective. The charge of the judge was neutral. The jury left the room, and were out eight and one-quarter minutes. As they filed in, the foreman sent a triumphant telepathic message to David before he quietly drawled out:

“Not guilty, yer Honor.”

The first movement was from Mrs. Miggs. And she came straight to David, not to the jury.

“David,” said the Judge, who had cleared his throat desperately and wiped his glasses carefully, at the look in the eyes of the young lawyer when they had rested on the defendant’s wife, “hereafter our office will be the refuge for all the riffraff in the country.”

This was his only comment, but the Judge did not hesitate to turn over any case to him thereafter.

When David had added a few more victories to his first one, Jud made one of his periodical diversions by an offense against the law which was far more serious in nature than his previous misdeeds had been. M’ri came out to the farm to discuss the matter.

“Barnabas, Martin thinks you had better let the law take its course this time. He says it’s the only procedure left untried to reform Jud. He is sure he can get a light sentence for him—two years.”

“M’ri,” said Barnabas, in a voice vibrating with reproach, “do you want Jud to go to prison?”

M’ri paled.

“I want to do what is best for him, Barnabas. Martin thinks it will be a salutary lesson.”

“I wonder, M’ri,” said Barnabas slowly, “if the Judge had a son of his own, he would try to reform him by putting him behind bars.”

“Oh, Barnabas!” protested M’ri, with a burst of tears.

“He’s still my boy, if he is wild, M’ri.”

“But, Barnabas, Martin’s patience is exhausted. He has got him out of trouble so many times—and, oh, Barnabas, he says he won’t under any circumstances take the case! He is ashamed to face the court and jury with such a palpably guilty client. I have pleaded with him, but I can’t influence him. You know how set he can be!”

“Wal, there are other lawyers,” said Barnabas grimly.

“*He kept his word. Jud was cleared*”

David had remained silent and constrained during this conversation, the lines of his young face setting like steel. Suddenly he left the house and paced up and down in the orchard, to wrestle once more with the old problem of his boyhood days. It was different now. Then it had been a question of how much he must stand from Jud for the sake of the benefits bestowed by the offender’s father. Now it meant a sacrifice of principle. He had made his boyish boast that he would defend only those who were wrongfully accused. To take this case would be to bring his wagon down from the star. Then suddenly he found himself disposed to arraign himself for selfishly clinging to his ideals.

He went back into the house, where M’ri was still tearfully arguing and protesting. He came up to Barnabas.

“I will clear Jud, if you will trust the case to me, Uncle Barnabas.”

Barnabas grasped his hand.

“Bless you, Dave, my boy,” he said. “I wanted you to, but Jud has been—wal, I didn’t like to ask you.”

“David,” said M’ri, when they were alone, “Martin said you wouldn’t take a case where you were convinced of the guilt of the client.”

“I shall take this case,” was David’s quiet reply.

“Really, David, Martin thinks it will be best for Jud—”

“I don’t want to do what is best for Jud, Aunt M’ri, I want to do what is best for Uncle Barnabas. It’s the first chance I ever had to do anything for him.”

When Judge Thorne found that David was determined to defend Jud, he gave him some advice:

“You must get counter evidence, if you can, David. If you have any lingering idea that you can appeal to the jury on account of Barnabas being Jud’s father, root out that idea. There’s no chance of rural juries tempering justice with mercy. With them it’s an eye for an eye, every time.”

David had an infinitely harder task in clearing Jud than he had had in defending Miggs. The evidence was clear, the witnesses sure and wary, and the prisoner universally detested save by his evil-minded companions, but these obstacles brought out in full force all David’s indomitable will and alertness. He tipped up and entrapped the prosecution’s witnesses with lightning dexterity. One of them chanced to be a man whom David had befriended, and he aided him by replying shrewdly in Jud’s favor.

But it was Jud himself who proved to be David’s trump card. He was keen, crafty, and quick to seize his lawyer’s most subtle suggestions. His memory was accurate, and with David’s steering he avoided all traps set for him on cross examination. When David stood before the jury for the most stubborn fight he had yet made, his mother’s last piece of advice—all she had to bequeath to him—permeated every effort. He put into his argument all the compelling force within him. There were no ornate sentences this time, but he concentrated his powers of logic and persuasiveness upon his task. The jury was out two hours, during which time Barnabas and Jud sat side by side, pale and anxious, but upheld by David’s confident assurance of victory.

He kept his word. Jud was cleared.

“You’re a smart lawyer, Dave,” commented Uncle Larimy.

David looked at him whimsically.

“I had a smart client, Uncle Larimy.”

“That’s what you did, Dave, but he’s gettin’ too dernd smart. You’d a done some of us a favor if you’d let him git sent up.”

CHAPTER V

“Dave,” said Barnabas on one memorable day, “the Jedge hez hed his innings trying to make you a lawyer. Now it’s my turn.”

“All right, Uncle Barnabas, I am ready.”

“Hain’t you hed enough of law, Dave? You’ve given it a good trial, and showed what you could do. It’ll be a big help to you to know the law, and it’ll allers be sumthin’ to fall back on when things get slack, but ain’t you pinin’ fer somethin’ a leetle spryer?”

“Yes, I am,” was the frank admission. “I like the excitement attending a case, and the fight to win, but it’s drudgery between times—like soldiering in time of peace.”

“Wal, Dave, I’ve got a job fer you wuth hevin’, and one that starts toward what you air a-goin’ to be.”

David’s breath came quickly.

“What is it?”

“Thar’s no reason at all why you can’t go to legislatur’ and make new laws instead of settin’ in the Jedge’s office and larnin’ to dodge old ones. I’m a-runnin’ politics in these parts, and I’m a-goin’ to git you nominated. After that, you’ll go the hull gamut—so ’t will be up the ladder and over the wall fer you, Dave.”

So, David, to the astonishment of the Judge, put his foot on the first round of the political ladder as candidate for the legislature. At the same time Janey returned from the school in the East, where she had been “finished,” and David’s heart beat an inspiring tattoo every time he looked at her, but he was nominated by a speech-loving, speech-demanding district, and he had so many occasions for oratory that only snatches of her companionship were possible throughout the summer.

Joe came on to join in the excitement attending the campaign. It had been some time since his last visit, and he scarcely recognized David when he met him at the Lafferton station.

“Well, Dave,” said the ranchman, “if you are as strong and sure as you look, you won’t need my help in the campaign.”

“I always need you, Joe. But you haven’t changed in the least, unless you look more serious than ever, perhaps.”

“It’s the outdoor life does that. Take a field-bred lad, he always shies a bit at people.”

“Your horse does, too, I notice. He arrived safely a week ago, and I put him up at the livery here in Lafferton. I was afraid he would demoralize all the horses at the farm.”

“Good! I’ll ride out this evening. I have a little business to attend to here in town, and I want to see the Judge and his wife, of course.”

When the western sky line gleamed in crimson glory Joe came riding at a long lope up the lane. He sat his spirited horse easily, one leg thrown over the horn of his saddle. As he neared the house, a thrashing machine started up. The desert-bred horse shied, and performed maneuvers terrifying to Janey, but Joe in the saddle was ever a part of the horse. Quietly and impassively he guided the frightened animal until the machine was passed. Then he slid from the horse and came up to Janey and David, who were awaiting his coming.

“This can never be little Janey!” he exclaimed, holding her hand reverently.

“I haven’t changed as much as Davey has,” she replied, dimpling.

“Oh, yes, you have! You are a woman. David is still a boy, in spite of his six feet.”

“You don’t know about Davey!” she said breathlessly. “He has won all kinds of law cases, and he is going to the legislature.”

Joe laughed.

“I repeat, he is still a boy.”

On the morrow David started forth on a round of speech making, canvassing the entire district. He returned at the wane of October’s golden glow for the round-up, as Joe termed the finish of the campaign. The flaunting crimson of the maples, the more sedate tinge of the oaks, the vivid yellow of the birches, the squashes piled up on the farmhouse porches, and the fields filled with pyramidal stacks of cornstalks brought a vague sense of loneliness as he rode out from Lafferton to the farm. He left his horse at the barn and came up to the house

through the old orchard as the long, slanting rays of sunlight were making afternoon shadows of all who crossed their path.

He found Janey sitting beneath their favorite tree. An open book lay beside her. She was gazing abstractedly into space, with a new look in her star-like eyes.

David's big, untouched heart gave a quick leap. He took up the book and with an exultant little laugh discovered that it was a book of poems! Janey, who could never abide fairy stories, reading poetry! Surprised and embarrassed, after a shy greeting she hurried toward the house, her cheeks flaming. Something very beautiful and breath-taking came into David's thoughts at that moment.

He was roused from his beatific state by the approach of Barnabas, so he was obliged to concentrate his attention on giving a résumé of his tour. Then the Judge telephoned for him to come to his office, and he was unable to finish his business there until dusk. The night was clear and frost touched. He left his horse in the lane and walked up to the house. As he came on to the porch he looked in through the window. The bright fire on the hearth, the soft glow of the shaded lamp, and the fair-haired girl seated by a table, needlework in hand, gave him a hunger for a hearth of his own.

Suddenly the scene shifted. Joe came in from the next room. Janey rose to her feet, a look of love lighting her face as she went to the arms outstretched to receive her.

CHAPTER VI

David went back to Lafferton. The little maid informed him that the Judge and his wife were out for the evening; but there was always a room in readiness for him, so he sat alone by the window, staring into the lighted street, trying to comprehend that Janey was not for him.

It was late the next morning when he came downstairs.

"I am glad, David, you decided to stay here last night," said M'ri, whose eyes were full of a yearning solicitude.

She sat down at the table with him while he drank his coffee.

"David."

She spoke in a desperate tone, that caused him to glance keenly at her.

"If you have anything to tell," he said quietly, "it's a good plan to tell it at once."

"Since you have been away Joe and Janey have been together constantly. It

seems to have been a case of mutual love. David, they are engaged."

"So," he said gravely, "I am to lose my little sister. Joe is a man in a thousand."

"But, David, I had set my heart on Janey's marrying you, from that very first day when you went to school together and you carried her books. Do you remember?"

"Yes," he replied whimsically, "but even then Joe met us and took her away from me. But I must drive out and congratulate them."

M'ri gazed after him in perplexity as he left the house.

"I wonder," she mused, "if I ever quite understood David!"

Miss Rhody called to David as he was passing her house and bade him come in.

"You've hed a hard trip," she said, with a keen glance into his tired, boyish eyes.

"Very hard, Miss Rhody."

"You have heard about Janey—and Joe?"

"Aunt M'ri just told me," he said, wincing ever so slightly.

"They was all sot on your being her sweetheart, except me and her—and Joe."

"Why not you, Miss Rhody?"

"You ain't never been in love with Janey—not the way you'll love some day. When I was sick last fall Almiry Green come over to read to me and she brung a book of poems. I never keered much for po'try, and Almiry, she didn't nuther, but she hed jest ketched Widower Pankey, and so she thought it was proper to be readin' po'try. She read somethin' about fust love bein' a primrose, and a-fallin' to make way fer the real rose, and I thought to myself: 'That's David. His feelin' fer Janey is jest a primrose.'"

David's eyes were inscrutable, but she continued:

"I knowed she hed allers fancied Joe sence she was a little tot and he give her them beads. When Joe's name was spoke she was allers shy-like. She wuz never shy-like with you."

"No," admitted David wearily, "but I must go on to the farm now, Miss Rhody. I will come in again soon."

When he came into the sitting room of the farmhouse, where he found Joe and Janey, the rare smile that comes with the sweetness of renunciation was on his

lips. After he had congratulated them, he asked for Barnabas.

“He just started for the woods,” said Joe. “I think he is on his way to Uncle Larimy’s.”

David hastened to overtake him, and soon caught sight of the bent figure walking slowly over the stubbled field.

“Uncle Barnabas!” he called.

Barnabas turned and waited.

“Did you see Janey and Joe?” he asked, looking keenly into the shadowed eyes.

“Yes; Aunt M’ri had told me.”

“When?”

“This morning. Joe’s a man after your own heart, Uncle Barnabas.”

“It’s you I wanted fer her,” said the old man bluntly. “I never dreamt of its bein’ enybody else. It’s an orful disapp’intment to me, Dave. I’d ruther see you her man than to see you what I told you long ago I meant fer you to be.”

“And I, too, Uncle Barnabas,” said David, with slow earnestness, “would rather be your son than to be governor of this state!”

“You did care, then, David,” said the old man sadly. “It don’t seem to be much of a surprise to you.”

“Uncle Barnabas, I will tell you something which I want no one else to know. I came back last evening and drove out here. I looked in the window, and saw her as she sat at work. It came into my heart to go in then and ask her to marry me, instead of waiting until after election as I had planned. Then Joe came in and she—went to him. I returned to Lafferton. It was daylight before I had it out with myself.”

“Dave! I thought I knew you better than any of them. It’s been a purty hard test, but you won’t let it spile your life?”

“No, I won’t, Uncle Barnabas. I owe it to you, if not to myself, to go straight ahead as you have mapped it out for me.”

“Bless you, Dave! You’re the right stuff!”

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

In January David took his seat in the House of Representatives, of which he was the youngest member. It was not intended by that august body that he should take any rôle but the one tacitly conceded to him of making silver-tongued oratory on the days when the public would crowd the galleries to hear an all-important measure, the “Griggs Bill,” discussed. The committee were to give him the facts and the general line of argument, and he was to dress it up in his fantastic way. They were entirely willing that he should have the applause from the public as well as the credit of the victory; all they cared for was the certainty of the passage of the bill.

David’s cool, lawyer-like mind saw through all these manipulations and machinations even if he were only a political tenderfoot. As other minor measures came up he voted for or against them as his better judgment dictated, but all his leisure hours were devoted to the investigation and study of the one big bill which was to be rushed through at the end of the session. He pored over the status of the law, found out the policies and opinions of other states on the subject, and listened attentively to all arguments, but he never took part in the discussions and he was very guarded in giving an expression of his views, an attitude which pleased the promoters of the bill until it began to occur to them that his caution came from penetration into their designs and, perhaps, from intent to thwart them.

“He has ketched on,” mournfully stated an old-timer from the third district. “I’m allers mistrustful of these young critters. They are sure to balk on the home stretch.”

“Well, one good thing,” grinned a city member, “it breaks their record, and they don’t get another entry.”

David had made a few short speeches on some of the bills, and those who had read in the papers of the wonderful powers of oratory of the young member from the eleventh flocked to hear him. They were disappointed. His speeches were brief, forceful, and logical, but entirely barren of rhetorical effect. The promoters of the Griggs Bill began to wonder, but concluded he was saving all his figures of speech to sugarcoat their obnoxious measure. It occurred to them, too, that if by chance he should oppose them his bare-handed way of dealing with subterfuges and his clear presentation of facts would work harm. They counted, however, on being able to convince him that his future status in the life political depended upon his coöperation with them in pushing this bill through.

Finally he was approached, and then the bomb was thrown. He quietly and emphatically told them he should fight the bill, single handed if necessary. Recriminations, arguments, threats, and inducements—all were of no avail.

“Let him hang himself if he wants to,” growled one of the committee. “He hasn’t influence enough to knock us out. We’ve got the majority.”

The measure was one that would radically affect the future interests of the state, and was being watched and studied by the people, who had not, as yet, however, realized its significance or its far-reaching power. The intent of the promoters of the Griggs Bill was to leave the people unenlightened until it should have become a law.

“Dunne won’t do us any harm,” argued the father of the bill on the eventful day. “He’s been saving all his skyrockets for this celebration. He’ll get lots of applause from the women folks,” looking up at the solidly packed gallery, “and his speech will be copied in all the papers, and that’ll be the reward he’s looking for.”

When David arose to speak against the Griggs Bill he didn’t look the youngster he had been pictured. His tall, lithe, compelling figure was drawn to its full height. His eyes darkened to intensity with the gravity of the task before him; the stern lines of his mouth bespoke a master of the situation and compelled confidence in his knowledge and ability.

The speech delivered in his masterful voice was not so much in opposition to the bill as it was an exposure of it. He bared it ruthlessly and thoroughly, but he didn’t use his youthful hypnotic periods of persuasive eloquence that had been wont to sway juries and to creep into campaign speeches. His wits had been sharpened in the last few months, and his keen-edged thrusts, hurled rapier-like, brought a wince to even the most hardened of veteran members. It was a complete enlightenment in plain words to a plain people—a concise and convincing protest.

When he finished there was a tempest of arguments from the other side, but there was not a point he had not foreseen, and as attack only brought out the iniquities of the measure, they let the bill come to ballot. The measure was defeated, and for days the papers were headlined with David Dunne’s name, and accounts of how the veterans had been routed by the “tenderfoot from the eleventh.”

After his dip into political excitement legal duties became a little irksome to David, especially after the wedding of Joe and Janey had taken place. In the fall occurred the death of the United States senator from the western district of the

state. A special session of the legislature was to be convened for the purpose of pushing through an important measure, and the election of a successor to fill the vacancy would take place at the same time. The usual “certain rich man,” anxious for a career, aspired, and, as he was backed by the state machine as well as by the covert influence of two or three of the congressmen, his election seemed assured.

There was an opposing candidate, the choice of the people, however, who was gathering strength daily.

“We’ve got to head off this man Dunne some way,” said the manager of the “certain rich man.” “He can’t beat us, but with him out of the way it would be easy sailing, and all opposition would come over to us on the second ballot.”

“Isn’t there a way to win him over?” asked a congressman who was present.

The introducer of the memorable measure of the last session shook his head negatively.

“He can’t be persuaded, threatened, or bought.”

“Then let’s get him out of the way.”

“Kidnap him?”

“Decoy him gently from your path. The consul of a little seaport in South America has resigned, and at a word from me to Senator Hollis, who would pass it on to the President, this appointment could be given to your young bucker, and he’d be out of your way for at least three years.”

“That would be too good to be true, but he wouldn’t bite at such bait. His aspirations are all in a state line. He’s got the usual career mapped out,—state senator, secretary of state, governor—possibly President.”

“You can never tell,” replied the congressman sagaciously. “A presidential appointment, the alluring word ‘consul,’ a foreign residence, all sound very enticing and important to a young country man. The Dunne type likes to be the big frog in the puddle. This stripling you are all so afraid of hasn’t cut all his wisdom teeth yet. It’s worth a try. I’ll tackle him.”

The morning after this conversation, as David walked down to the Judge’s office he felt very lonely—a part of no plan. It was a mood that made him ripe for the purpose of the congressman whom he found awaiting him.

“I’ve been wanting to meet you for a long time, Mr. Dunne,” said the

congressman obsequiously, after the Judge had introduced him. “We’ve heard a great deal about you down in Washington since your defeat of the Griggs Bill, and we are looking for great things from you. Of course, we have to keep our eye on what is going on back here.”

The Judge looked his surprise at this speech, and was still more mystified at receiving a knowing wink from David.

After some preliminary talk the congressman finally made known his errand, and tendered David the offer of a consulship in South America.

At this juncture the Judge was summoned to the telephone in another room. When he returned the congressman had taken his departure.

“Behold,” grinned David, “the future consul of—I really can’t pronounce it. I am going to look it up now in your atlas.”

“Where is Gilbert?” asked the Judge.

“Gone to wire Hilliard before I can change my mind. You see, it’s a scheme to get me out of the road and I—well I happen to be willing to get out of the road just now. I am not in a fighting mood.”

“Consular service,” remarked the Judge oracularly, “is generally considered a sort of clearing house for undesirable politicians. The consuls to those little ports are, as a rule, very poor.”

“Then a good consul like your junior partner will loom up among so many poor ones.”

Barnabas was inwardly disturbed by this move from David, but he philosophically argued that “the boy was young and ’t wouldn’t harm him to salt down awhile.”

“Dave,” he counseled in farewell, “I hope you’ll come to love some good gal. Every man orter hev a hearth of his own. This stretchin’ yer feet afore other folks’ firesides is unnateral and lonesome. Thar’s no place so snug and safe fer a man as his own home, with a good wife to keep it. But I want you tew make me a promise, Dave. When I see the time’s ripe fer pickin’ in politics, will you come back?”

“I will, Uncle Barnabas,” promised David solemnly.

The heartiest approval came from Joe.

“That’s right, Dave, see all you can of the world instead of settling down in a

pasture lot at Lafferton.”

CHAPTER II

Gilbert, complacent and affable, returned to Washington accompanied by David. A month later the newly made consul sailed from New York for South America. He landed at a South American seaport that had a fine harbor snugly guarded by jutting cliffs skirting the base of a hill barren and severe in aspect.

As he walked down the narrow, foreign streets thronged with a strange people, and saw the structures with their meaningless signs, he began to feel a wave of homesickness. Then, looking up, he felt that little inner thrill that comes from seeing one’s flag in a foreign land.

“And that is why I am here,” he thought, “to keep that flag flying.”

He resolutely started out on the first day to keep the flag flying in the manner befitting the kind of a consul he meant to be. He maintained a strict watch over the commercial conditions, and his reports of consular news were promptly rendered in concise and instructive form. His native tact and inherent courtesy won him favor with the government, his hospitality and kindly intent conciliated the natives, and he was soon also accorded social privileges. He began to enjoy life. His duties were interesting, and his leisure was devoted to the pursuit of novel pleasures.

Fletcher Wilder, the son of the president of an American mining company, was down there ostensibly to look after his father’s interests, but in reality to take out pleasure parties in his trim little yacht, and David soon came to be the most welcome guest that set foot on its deck.

At the end of a year, when his duties had become a matter of routine and his life had lost the charm of novelty, David’s ambitions started from their slumbers, though not this time in a political way. Wilder had cruised away, and the young consul was conscious of a sense of aloneness. He spent his evenings on his spacious veranda, from where he could see the moonlight making a rippling road of silver across the black water. The sensuous beauty of the tropical nights brought him back to his early Land of Dreams, and the pastime that he had been forced to relinquish for action now appealed to him with overwhelming force and fascination. But the dreams were a man’s dreams, not the fleeting fancies of a boy. They continued to possess and absorb him until one night, when he was looking above the mountains at one lone star that shone brighter than the rest, he was moved for the first time to give material shape and form to his conceptions.

The impulse led to execution.

“I must get it out of my system,” he explained half apologetically to himself as he began the writing of a novel. To this task, as to everything else he had undertaken, he brought the entire concentration of his mind and energy, until the book soon began to seem real to him—more real than anything he had done. As he was copying the last page for the last time, Fletcher sailed into the harbor for a week of farewell before returning to New York.

“What have you been doing for amusement these last six months, Dunne?” he asked as he dropped into David’s house.

“You’d never guess,” said David, “what your absence drove me to. I’ve written a book—a novel.”

“Let me take it back to the hotel with me to-night. I haven’t been sleeping well lately, and it may—”

“If it serves as a soporific,” said David gravely, as he handed him the bulky package, “my labor will not have been in vain.”

The next morning Wilder came again into David’s office.

“I fear you didn’t sleep well, after all,” observed David, looking at his visitor’s heavy-lidded eyes.

“No, darn you, Dunne. I took up your manuscript and I never laid it down until the first streaks of dawn. Then when I went to bed I lay awake thinking it all over. Why, Dunne, it’s the best book I ever read!”

“I wish,” David replied with a whimsical smile, “that you were a publisher.”

“Speaking of publishers, that’s why I didn’t bring the manuscript back. I sail in a week, and I want you to let me take it to a publisher I know in New York. He will give it a prompt reading.”

“If it wouldn’t bother you too much, I wish you would. You see, it would take so long for it to come back here and be sent out again each time it is rejected.”

“Rejected!” scoffed Wilder. “You wait and see! Aren’t you going to dedicate it?”

David hesitated, his eyes stealing dreamily out across the bay to the horizon line.

“I wonder,” he said meditatively, “if the person to whom it is dedicated—every word of it—wouldn’t know without the inscription.”

“No,” objected Fletcher, “you should have it appear out of compliment.”

He smiled as he wrote on a piece of paper: “To T. L. P.”

“The initials of your sweetheart?” quizzed Fletcher.

“No; when I was a little chap I used to spin yarns. These are the initials of one who was my most absorbed listener.”

Wilder raised anchor and sailed back to the states. At the expiration of two months he wrote David that his book had been accepted. In time ten bound copies of his novel, his allotment from the publishers, brought him a thrill of indescribable pleasure. The next mail brought papers with glowing reviews and letters of commendation and congratulations. Next came a good-sized check, and the information that his book was a “best seller.”

The night that this information was received he went up to the top of the hill that jutted over the harbor and listened to the song of the waves. Two years in this land of liquid light—a land of burning days and silent, sapphired nights, a land of palms and olives—two years of quiet, dreamy bliss, an idle and unsubstantial time! How evanescent it seemed, by the light of the days at home, when something had always pressed him to action.

“Two years of drifting,” he thought. “It is time I, too, raised anchor and sailed home.”

The next mail brought a letter that made his heart beat faster than it had yet been able to do in this exotic, lazy land. It was a recall from Barnabas.

> “Dear Dave:
>
> “Nothing but a lazy life in a foreign land would have drove a man like you to write a book. The Jedge and M’ri are pleased, but I know you are cut out for something different. I want you to come home in time to run for legislature again. There’s goin’ to be something doin’. It is time for another senator, and who do you suppose is plugging for it, and opening hogsheads of money? Wilksley. I want for you to come back and head him off. If you’ve got one speck of your old spirit, and you care anything about your state, you’ll do it. I am still running politics for this county at the old stand. Your book has started folks to talking about you agen, so come home while the picking is good. You’ve dreamt long enough. It is time to get up. Don’t write no more books till you git too old to work.
>
> “Yours if you come,
>
> “B. B.”

The letter brought to David's eyes something that no one in this balmy land had ever seen there. With the look of a fighter belted for battle he went to the telegraph office and cabled Barnabas, "Coming."

CHAPTER III

On his return to Lafferton David was met at the train by the Judge, M'ri, and Barnabas.

"Your trunks air goin' out to the farm, Dave, ain't they?" asked Barnabas wistfully.

"Of course," replied David, with an emphasis that brought a look of pleasure to the old man.

"Your telegram took a great load offen my mind," he said, as they drove out to the farm. "Miss Rhody told me all along I need hev no fears fer you, that you weren't no dawdler."

"Good for Miss Rhody!" laughed David. "She shall have her reward. I brought her silk enough for two dresses at least."

"David," said M'ri suddenly at the dinner table, "do tell me for whose name those initials in the dedication to your book stand. Is it any one I know?"

"I hardly know the person myself," was the smiling and evasive reply.

"A woman, David?"

"She figured largely in my fairy stories."

"A nickname he had for Janey," she thought with a sigh.

"Uncle Barnabas," said David the next day, "before we settle down to things political tell me if you regret my South American experience."

"Now that you're back and gittin' into harness, I'll overlook anything. You'd earnt a breathing spell, and you look a hull lot older. Your book's kep' your name in the papers, tew, which helps."

"I will show you something that proves the book did more than that," said David, drawing his bank book from his pocket and passing it to the old man, who read it unbelievingly.

"Why, Dave, you're rich!" he exclaimed.

"No; not rich. I shall always have to work for my living. So tell me the

situation.”

This fully occupied the time it took to drive to town, for Cold Molasses, successor to Old Hundred, kept the pace his name indicated. The day was spent in meeting old friends, and then David settled down to business with his old-time energy. Once more he was nominated for the legislature and took up the work of campaigning for Stephen Hume, opponent to Wilksley. Hume was an ardent, honest, clean-handed politician without money, but he had for manager one Ethan Knowles, a cool-headed, tireless veteran of campaign battles, with David acting as assistant and speech maker.

David was elected, went to the capital, and was honored with the office of speaker by unanimous vote. He had his plans carefully drawn for the election of Hume, who came down on the regular train and established headquarters at one of the hotels, surrounded by a quiet and determined body of men.

Wilksley’s supporters, a rollicking lot, had come by special train and were quartered at a club, dispensing champagne and greenbacks promiscuously and freely. There was also a third candidate, whose backers were non-committal, giving no intimation as to where their strength would go in case their candidate did not come in as a dark horse.

When the night of the senatorial contest came the floor, galleries, and lobby of the House were crowded. The Judge, M’ri, and Joe were there, Janey remaining home with her father, who refused to join the party.

“Thar’ll be bigger doin’s fer me to see Dave officiate at,” he prophesied.

The quietly humorous young man wielding the gavel found it difficult to maintain quiet in the midst of such excitement, but he finally evolved order from chaos.

Wilksley was the first candidate nominated, a gentleman from the fourteenth delivering a bombastic oration in pompous periods, accompanied by lofty gestures. He was followed by an understudy, who made an ineffective effort to support his predecessor.

“A ricochet shot,” commented Joe. “Wait till Dave hits the bullseye.”

The supporting representatives of the dark horse made short, forceful speeches. Then followed a brief intermission, while David called a substitute *pro tem* to the speaker’s desk. He stepped to the platform to make the nominating speech for Hume, the speech for which every one was waiting. There was a hush of expectancy, and M’ri felt little shivers of excitement creeping down her spine as

she looked up at David, dauntless, earnest, and compelling, as he towered above them all.

In its simplicity, its ring of truth, and its weight of conviction, his speech was a masterpiece.

“A young Patrick Henry!” murmured the Judge.

M’ri made no comment, for in that flight of a second that intervened between David’s speech and the roar of tumultuous applause, she had heard a voice, a young, exquisite voice, murmur with a little indrawn breath, “Oh, David!”

M’ri turned in surprise, and looked into the confused but smiling face of a lovely young girl, who said frankly and impulsively: “I don’t know who Mr. Hume may be, but I do hope he wins.”

M’ri smiled in sympathy, trying to place the resemblance. Then her gaze wandered to the man beside the young girl.

“You are Carey Winthrop!” she exclaimed.

The man turned, and leaned forward.

“Mrs. Thorne, this is indeed a pleasure,” he said, extending his hand.

Joe then swung his chair around into their vision.

“Oh, Joe!” cried the young girl ecstatically. “And where is Janey?”

The balloting was in progress, and there was opportunity for mutual recalling of old times. Then suddenly the sibilant sounds dropped to silence as the result was announced. Wilksley had the most votes, the dark horse the least; Hume enjoyed a happy medium, with fifteen more to his count than forecast by the man behind the button, as Joe designated Knowles.

In the rush of action from the delegates, reporters, clerks, and messengers, the place resembled a beehive. Then came another ballot taking. Hume had gained ten votes from the Wilksley men and fifteen from the dark horse, but still lacked the requisite number.

From the little retreat where Hume’s manager was ensconced, with his hand on the throttle, David emerged. He looked confident and determined.

The third ballot resulted in giving Hume the entire added strength of the dark horse, and enough votes to elect. A committee was thereupon appointed to bring the three candidates to the House. When they entered and were escorted to the platform they each made a speech, and then formed a reception line. David stood

apart, talking to one of the members. He was beginning to feel the reaction from the long strain he had been under and wished to slip away from the crowd. Suddenly he heard some one say:

“Mr. Speaker, may I congratulate you?”

CHAPTER IV

He turned quickly, his heart thrilling at the charm in the voice, low, yet resonant, and sweet with a lurking suggestion of sadness.

A girl, slender and delicately made, stood before him, a girl with an exquisite grace and a nameless charm—the something that lurks in the fragrance of the violet. Her eyes were not the quiet, solemn eyes of the little princess of his fairy tales, but the deep, fathomless eyes of a maiden.

A reminiscent smile stole over his face.

“The little princess!” he murmured, taking her hand.

The words brought a flush of color to her fair face.

“The prince is a politician now,” she replied.

“The prince has to be a politician to fight for his kingdom. Have you been here all the evening?”

“Yes; father and I sat with your party. But you were altogether too absorbed to glance our way.”

“Are you visiting in the city? Will you be here long?”

“For to-night only. I’ve been West with father, and we only stopped off to see what a senatorial fight was like; also, to hear you speak. To-morrow we return East, and then mother and I shall go abroad. Father,” calling to Mr. Winthrop, “I am renewing my acquaintance with Mr. Dunne.”

“I wish to do the same,” he said, extending his hand cordially. “I expect to be able to tell people some day that I used to fish in a country stream with the governor of this state when he was a boy.”

After a few moments of general conversation they all left the statehouse together.

“Carey,” said Mr. Winthrop, “I am going with the Judge to the club, so I will put you in David’s hands. I believe you have no afraidments with him.”

“That has come to be a household phrase with us,” she laughed; “but you forget, father, that Mr. Dunne has official duties.”

“If you only knew,” David assured her earnestly, “how thankful I am for a release from them. My task is ended, and I don’t wish to celebrate in the usual and political way.”

“There is a big military ball at the hotel,” informed Joe. “Mrs. Thorne and I thought we would like to go and look on.”

“A fine idea, Joe. Maybe you would like to go?” he said to Carey, trying to make his tone urgent.

She laughed at his dismayed expression.

“No; you may walk to the Bradens’ with me. We couldn’t get in at the hotels, and father met Major Braden on the street. He is instructor or something of the militia of this state, and has gone to the ball with his wife. They supposed that this contest would last far into the night, so they planned to be home before we were.”

“We will get a carriage as soon as we are out of the grounds.” 201

“Have you come to carriages?” she asked, laughingly. “You used to say if you couldn’t ride horseback, or walk, you would stand still.”

“And you agreed with me that carriages were only for the slow, the stupid, and the infirm,” he recalled. “It’s a glorious night. Would you rather walk, really?”

“Really.”

At the entrance to the grounds they parted from the others and went up one of the many avenues radiating from the square.

The air was full of snowflakes, moving so softly and so slowly they scarcely seemed to fall. The electric lights of the city shone cheerfully through the white mist, and the sound of distant mirthmakers fell pleasantly on the ear.

“Snow is the only picture part of winter,” said Carey. “Do you remember the story of the Snow Princess?”

“You must have a wonderful memory!” he exclaimed. “You were only six years old when I told you that story.” 202

“I have a very vivid memory,” she replied. “Sometimes it almost frightens me.”

“Do you know,” he said, “that I think people that have dreams and fancies do look backward farther than matter-of-fact people, who let things out of sight go out of mind?”

“You were full of dreams then, but I don’t believe you are now. Of course, politicians have no time or inclination for dreams.”

“No; they usually have a dread of dreams. Would you rather have found me still a dreamer?” he asked, looking down into her dark eyes, which drooped beneath the intensity of his gaze.

Then her delicate face, misty with sweetness, turned toward him again.

“No; dreams are for children and for old people, whose memories, like their eyes, are for things far off. This is your time to do things, not to dream them. And you have done things. I heard Major Braden telling father about you at dinner—your success in law, your getting some bill killed in the legislature, and your having been to South America. Father says you have had a wonderful career for a young man. I used to think when I was a little girl that when you were a grown-up prince you would kill dragons and bring home golden fleeces.”

He smiled with a sudden deep throb of pleasure. Her voice stirred him with a sense of magic.

“This is the Braden home,” she said, stopping before a big house that seemed to be all pillars and porches. “You’ll come in for a little while, won’t you?”

“I’ll come in, if I may, and help you to recall some more of Maplewood days.”

A trim little maid opened the door and led the way into a long library where in the fireplace a pine backlog, crisscrossed by sturdy forelogs of birch and maple, awaited the touch of a match. It was given, and the room was filled with a flaring light that made the soft lamplight seem pale and feeble.

“This is a genuine Brumble fire,” he exclaimed, as they sat down before the ruddy glow. “It carries me back to farm life.”

“How many phases of life you have seen,” mused Carey. “Country, college, city, tropical, and now this political life. Which one have you really enjoyed the most?”

“My life in the Land of Dreams—that beautiful Isle of Everywhere,” he replied.

Her eyes grew radiant with understanding.

“You are not so very much changed since your days of dreaming,” she said, smiling. “To be sure, you have lost your freckles and you don’t kick at the ground when you walk, and—”

“And,” he reminded, as she paused.

“You are no longer twice my age.”

“Did Janey tell you?”

“Yes; the last summer I was at Maplewood—the summer you were graduated. You say you don’t dream any more, but it wasn’t so very long ago that you did, else how could you have written that wonderful book?”

“Then you read it?” he asked eagerly.

“Of course I read it.”

“All of it?”

“Could any one begin it and not finish it? I’ve read some parts of it many times.”

“Did you,” he asked slowly, holding her eyes in spite of her desire to lower them, “read the dedication?”

And by their subtle confession he knew that this was one of the parts she had read “many times.”

“Yes,” she replied, trying to speak lightly, but breathing quickly, “and I wondered who T. L. P. might be.”

“And so you didn’t know,” in slow, disappointed tones, “that they stood for the name I gave you when I first met you—the name by which I always think of you? It was with your perfect understanding of my old fancies in mind that I wrote the book. And so I dedicated it to you, thinking if you read it you would know even without the inscription. Some one suggested—”

“It was Fletcher,” she began.

“Oh, you know Wilder?”

“Yes, I’ve known him always. He has told me of your days in South America together and how he told you to dedicate it. And he wondered who T. L. P. might be.”

“And you never guessed?”

Her face, bent over the firelight, looked small and white; her beautiful eyes were fixed and grave. Then suddenly she lifted them to his with the artlessness of a child.

“I did know,” she confessed. “At least, I hoped—I claimed it as my book, anyway, but I thought your memory of those summers at the farm might not have been as keen as mine.”

“It is keen,” he replied. “I have always thought of you as a little princess who only lived in my dreams, but, hereafter, you are not only in my past dreams, but I hope, in my future.”

“When we come back—”

“Will you be gone long?” he asked wistfully. “Is your father—”

“Father can’t go, but he may join us.”

After a moment’s hesitation she continued, with a slight blush:

“Fletcher is going with us.”

“Oh,” he said, wondering at his tinge of disappointment.

“Carey,” he said wistfully, as he was leaving, “don’t you think when a man dedicates a book to a girl, and they both have a joint claim on a territory known as the Land of Dreams, that she might call him, as she did when they were boy and girl, by his first name?”

“Yes, David,” she replied with a light little laugh.

The music of the soft “a” rang entrancingly in his ears as he walked back to the hotel.

CHAPTER V

There was but one important measure to deal with in this session of the legislature, but David’s penetration into a thorough understanding of each bill, and the patience and sagacity he displayed in settling all disputes, won the approbation of even doubtful and divided factions. He flashed a new fire of life into the ebbing enthusiasm of his followers, whom he had led to victory on the Griggs Bill. At the close of the session, early in May, he was presented with a set of embossed resolutions commending his fulfillment of his duties.

That same night, in his room at the hotel, as he was packing his belongings, he was waited upon by a delegation composed alike of horny-handed tillers of the soil and distinguished statesmen.

“We come, David,” said the spokesman, who had been chairman of the county convention, “to say that you are our choice for the next governor of this state, and in saying this we know we are echoing the sentiment of the Republican party. In fact, we are looking to you as the only man who can bring that party to victory.”

He said many more things, flattering and echoed by his followers. It made the blood tingle in David's veins to know that these men of plain, honest, country stock, like himself, believed in him and in his honor. In kaleidoscopic quickness there passed in review his life,—the days when he and his mother had struggled with a wretched poverty that the neighbors had only half suspected, the first turning point in his life, when he was taken unto the hearth and home of strong-hearted people, his years at college, the plodding days in pursuit of the law, his hotly waged fight in the legislature, and his short literary career, and he felt a surging of boyish pride at the knowledge that he was now approaching his goal.

The next morning David went to Lafferton in order to discuss the road to the ruling of the people.

"Whom would you suggest for manager of my campaign, Uncle Barnabas?" he asked.

"Knowles came to me and offered his services. Couldn't have a slicker man, Dave."

"None better in the state. I shouldn't have ventured to ask him."

Janey was home for the summer, and on the first evening of his return she and David sat together on the porch.

"Oh, Davey," she said with a little sob, "Jud has come home again, and they say he isn't just wild any more, but thoroughly bad."

The tears in her eyes and the tremor in her tone stirred all his old protective instinct for her.

"Poor Jud! I'll see if I can't awaken some ambition in him for a different life."

"You've been very patient, Davey, but do try again. Every one is down on him now but father and you and me. Aunt M'ri has let the Judge prejudice her; Joe hasn't a particle of patience with him, and he can't understand how I can have any, but you do, Davey. You understand everything."

They sat in silence, watching the stars pierce vividly through the blackness of the sky, and presently his thoughts strayed from Jud and from his fair young sister. In fancy he saw the queenly carriage of an imperious little head, the mystery lurking in a pair of purple eyes, and heard the cadence in an exquisite voice.

The next morning he began the fight, and there was an incessant cannonade from start to finish against the upstart boy nominee, who proved to be an adversary of unremitting activity, the tact and experience of Knowles making a fortified

intrenchment for him. All of David's friends rallied strongly to his support. Hume came from Washington, Joe from the ranch, and Wilder from the East, his father having a branch concern in the state.

Through the long, hot summer the warfare waged, and by mid-autumn it seemed a neck and neck contest—a contest so susceptible that the merest breath might turn the tide at any moment. The week before the election found David still resolute, grim, and determined. Instead of being discouraged by adverse attacks he had gained new vigor from each downthrow. All forces rendezvoused at the largest city in the state for the final engagement.

Three days before election he received a note in a handwriting that had become familiar to him during the past year. With a rush of surprise and pleasure he noted the city postmark. The note was very brief, merely mentioning the hotel at which they were stopping and asking him to call if he could spare a few moments from his campaign work.

In an incredibly short time after the receipt of this note he was at the hotel, awaiting an answer to his card. He was shown to the sitting room of the suite, and Carey opened the door to admit him. This was not the little princess of his dreams, nor the charming young girl who had talked so ingenuously with him before the Braden fireside. This was a woman, stately yet gracious, vigorous yet exquisite.

"I am glad we came home in time to see you elected," she said. "It is a great honor, David, to be the governor of your state."

There was a shade of deference in her manner to him which he realized was due to the awe with which she regarded the dignity of his elective office. This amused while it appealed to him.

"We are on our way to California to spend the winter," she replied, in answer to his eager question, "and father proposed stopping here until after election."

"You come in and out of my life like a comet," he complained wistfully.

Mrs. Winthrop came in, smiling and charming as ever. She was very cordial to David, and interested in his campaign, but it seemed to him that she was a little too gracious, as if she wished to impress him with the fact that it was a concession to meet him on an equal social footing. For Mrs. Winthrop was inclined to be of the world, worldly.

"You have arrived at an auspicious time," he assured her. "To-night the Democrats will have the biggest parade ever scheduled for this city. Joe calls it

the round-up."

"Oh, is Joe here?" asked Carey eagerly.

"Yes; and another friend of yours, Fletcher Wilder."

"I knew that he was here," she said, with an odd little smile.

"We had expected to see him in New York, and were surprised to learn he was out here," said Mrs. Winthrop.

"He came to help me in my campaign," informed David.

"Fletcher interested in politics! How strange!"

"His interest is purely personal. We were together in South America, you know."

"I am glad that you have a friend in him," said Mrs. Winthrop affably. "The parade will pass here, and Fletcher is coming up, of course. Why not come up, too, if you can spare the time?"

"This is not my night," laughed David. "It's purely and simply a Democratic night. I shall be pleased to come."

"Bring Joe, too," reminded Carey.

When Mr. Winthrop came in David had no doubt as to the welcome he received from the head of the family.

"A man's measure of a man," thought David, "is easily taken, and by natural laws, but oh, for an understanding of the scales by which women weigh! And yet it is they who hold the balance."

"Fletcher and David and Joe are coming to-night to watch the parade from here," said Carey.

"You shall all dine with us," said Mr. Winthrop.

"Thank you," replied David, "but—"

"Oh, but you must," insisted Mrs. Winthrop, who always warmly seconded any proffer of hospitality made by her husband. "Fletcher will dine with us, of course. We can have a little dinner served here in our rooms. Write a note to Mr. Forbes, Carey."

The marked difference in type of her three guests as they entered the sitting room that night struck Mrs. Winthrop forcibly. Joe, lean and brown, with laughing eyes, was the typical frontiersman; Fletcher, quiet and substantial

looking, with his air of culture and ease and his modulated voice, was the type of a city man; David—"What a man he is!" she was forced to admit as he stood, head uplifted in the white glare under the chandelier, the brilliant light shining upon his dark hair, and his eyes glowing like stars. His lithe figure, perfect in poise and balance, of virile strength that was toil-proof, wore the look of the outdoor life. His smile banished everything that was ordinary from his face and transmuted it into a glowing personality. His eyes, serious with that insight of the observer who knows what is going on without and within, were clear and steady.

The table was laid for six in the sitting room, the flowers and candles giving it a homelike look.

As Mrs. Winthrop listened to the conversation between her husband and David she was forced to admit that the young candidate for governor was a man of mark.

"I never knew a man without good birth to have such perfect breeding," she thought. "He really appears as well as Fletcher, and, well, of course, he has more temperament. If he could have been born on a different plane," thinking of her long line of Virginia ancestors.

She had ceded a great deal to her husband's and Carey's democracy, and reserved many an unfavorable criticism of their friends and their friends' ways with a tactfulness that had blinded their eyes to her true feelings. Yet David knew instinctively her standpoint; she partly suspected that he knew, and the knowledge did not disturb her; she intuitively gauged his pride, and welcomed it, for a suitor of the Fletcher Wilder station of life was more to her liking.

Carey led David away from her father's political discourse, and encouraged him to give reminiscences of old days. Joe told a few inimitable western stories, and before the cozy little meal was finished Mrs. Winthrop, though against her will, was feeling the compelling force of David's winning sweetness. The sound of a distant band hurried them from the table to the balcony.

"They've certainly got a fair showing of floating banners and transformations," said Joe.

As the procession came nearer the face of the hardy ranchman flushed crimson and his eyes flashed dangerously. He made a quick motion as if to obstruct David's vision, but the young candidate had already seen. He stood as if at bay, his face pale, his eyes riveted on those floating banners which bore in flaming letters the inscriptions:

“The father of David Dunne died in state prison!”

“His mother was a washerwoman!”

CHAPTER VI

The others were stricken into shocked silence which they were too stunned for the moment to break. It was Fletcher who recovered first, but then Fletcher was the only one present who did not know that the words had struck home.

“We mustn’t wait another moment, David,” he said emphatically, “to get out sweeping denials and—”

“We can’t,” said David wearily. “It is true.”

“Oh,” responded Fletcher lamely.

There was another silence. Something in David’s voice and manner had made the silence still more constrained.

“I’ll go down and smash their banners!” muttered Joe, who had not dared to look in David’s direction.

Mr. Winthrop restrained him.

“The matter will take care of itself,” he counseled.

It is mercifully granted that the intensity of present suffering is not realized. Only in looking back comes the pang, and the wonder at the seemingly passive endurance.

Again David’s memory was bridging the past to unveil that vivid picture of the patient-eyed woman bending over the tub, and the pity for her was hurting him more than the cruel banner which was flaunting the fact before a jeering, applauding crowd.

Mrs. Winthrop gave him a covert glance. She had great pride in her lineage, and her well-laid plans for her daughter’s future did not include David Dunne in their scope, but she was ever responsive to distress.

Before the look in his eyes every sensation save that of sympathy left her, and she went to him as she would have gone to a child of her own that had been hurt.

“David,” she said tenderly, laying her hand on his arm, “any woman in the world might be glad to take in washing to bring up a boy to be such a man as you are!”

Deeply moved and surprised, he looked into her brimming eyes and met there

the look he had sometimes seen in the eyes of his mother, of M'ri, and once in the eyes of Janey. Moved by an irresistible impulse, he stooped and kissed her.

The situation was relieved of its tenseness.

"I think, Joe," said David, speaking collectedly, "we had better go to headquarters. Knowles will be looking for me."

"Sure," assented Joe, eager to get into action.

"Carey," said David in a low voice, as he was leaving.

As she turned to him, an impetuous rush of new life leaped torrent-like in his heart. Her eyes met his slowly, and for a moment he felt a pleasure acute with the exquisiteness of pain. Such sensations are usually transient, and in another moment he had himself well in hand.

"I want to say good night," he said quietly, "and—"

"Will you come here to-morrow at eleven?" she asked hurriedly. "There is something I want to say to you."

"I know that you are sorry for me."

"That isn't what I mean to say."

A wistful but imperious message was flashed to him from her eyes.

"I will come," he replied gravely.

When he reached headquarters he found the committee dismayed and distracted. Like Wilder, they counseled a sweeping denial, but David was firm.

"It is true," he reiterated.

"It will cost us the vote of a certain element," predicted the chairman, "and we haven't one to spare."

David listened to a series of similar sentiments until Knowles—a new Knowles—came in. The usual blank placidity of his face was rippled by radiant exultation.

"David," he announced, "before that parade started to-night I had made out another conservative estimate, and thought I could pull you through by a slight majority. Now, it's different. While you may lose some votes from the 'near-silk stocking' class, yet for every vote so lost hundreds will rally to you. That all men are created equal is still a truth held to be self-evident. The spark of the spirit that prompted the Declaration of Independence is always ready to be fanned to a

flame, and the Democrats have furnished us the fans in their flying pennants."

David found no balm in this argument. All the wounds in his heart were aching, and he could not bring his thoughts to majorities. He passed a night of nerve-racking strain. The jeopardy of election did not concern him. That night at the dinner party he had realized that he had a formidable rival in Fletcher, who had a place firmly fixed in the Winthrop household. Still, against odds, he had determined to woo and win Carey.

He had thought to tell her of his father's imprisonment under softening influences. To have it flashed ruthlessly upon her in such a way, and at such a time, made him shrink from asking her to link her fate with his, and he decided to put her resolutely out of his life.

Unwillingly, he went to keep his appointment with her the next morning. He also dreaded an encounter with Mrs. Winthrop. He felt that the reaction from her moment of womanly pity would strand her still farther on the rocks of her worldliness. He was detained on his way to the hotel so that it was nearly twelve when he arrived. It was a relief to find Carey alone. There was an appealing look in her eyes; but David felt that he could bear no expression of sympathy, and he trusted she would obey the subtle message flashed from his own.

With keen insight she read his unspoken appeal, but a high courage dwelt in the spirit of the little Puritan of colonial ancestry, and she summoned its full strength.

"David," she asked, "did you think I was ignorant of your early life until I read those banners last night?"

"I thought," he said, flushing and taken by surprise, "that you might have long ago heard something, but to have it recalled in so sensational a way when you were entertaining me at dinner—"

"*It was a relief to find Carey alone*"

"David, the first day I met you, when I was six years old, Mrs. Randall told us of your father. I didn't know just what a prison was, but I supposed it something very grand, and it widened the halo of romance that my childish eyes had cast about you. The morning after you had nominated Mr. Hume I saw your aunt at

the hotel, and she told me, for she said some day I might hear it from strangers and not understand. When I saw those banners it was not so much sympathy for you that distressed me; I was thinking of your mother, and regretting that she could not be alive to hear you speak, and see what her bravery had done for you."

David had to summon all his control and his recollection of her Virginia ancestors to refrain from telling her what was in his heart. Mrs. Winthrop helped him by her entrance at this crucial point.

"Good morning, David," she said suavely. "Carey, Fletcher is waiting for you at the elevator. Your father stopped him. I told him you would be out directly."

"I had an engagement to drive with him," explained Carey. "I thought you would come earlier."

"I am due at a committee meeting," he said, in a courteous but aloof manner.

"We start in the morning, you know," she reminded him. "Won't you dine here with us to-night?"

"I am sorry," he refused. "It will be impossible."

"Arthur is going to a club for luncheon," said Mrs. Winthrop, when Carey had gone into the adjoining room, "and I shall be alone unless you will take pity on my loneliness. I won't detain you a moment after luncheon."

"Thank you," he replied abstractedly.

She smiled at the reluctance in his eyes.

"David is going to stay to luncheon with me," she announced to Carey as she came into the sitting room.

David winced at the huge bunch of violets fastened to her muff. He remembered with a pang that Fletcher had left him that morning to go to a florist's. After she had gone Mrs. Winthrop turned suddenly toward him, as he was gazing wistfully at the closed door.

"David," she asked directly, "why did you refuse our invitation to dine to-night?"

"Why—you see—Mrs. Winthrop—with so many engagements—there is a factory meeting at five—"

"David, you are floundering! That is not like the frankly spoken boy we used to know at Maplewood. I kept you to luncheon to tell you some news that even

Carey doesn’t know yet. Mrs. Randall has written insisting that we spend a week at Maplewood before we go West. As we are in no special haste, I shall accept her hospitality.”

David made no reply, and she continued:

“You are going home the day before election?”

“Yes, Mrs. Winthrop,” he replied.

“We will go down with you, and I hope you will be neighborly while we are in the country.”

The bewildered look in his eyes deepened, and then a heartrending solution of her graciousness came to him. Fletcher and Carey were doubtless engaged, and this fact made Mrs. Winthrop feel secure in extending hospitality to him.

“Thank you, Mrs. Winthrop,” he said, a little bitterly. “You are very kind.”

“David,” she asked, giving him a searching look. “What is the matter? I thought you would be pleased at the thought of our spending a week among you all.”

He made a quick, desperate decision.

“Mrs. Winthrop,” he asked earnestly, “may I speak to you quite openly and honestly?”

“David Dunne, you couldn’t speak any other way,” she asserted, with a gay little laugh.

“I love Carey!”

CHAPTER VII

This information seemingly conveyed no startling intelligence.

“Well,” replied Mrs. Winthrop, evidently awaiting a further statement.

“I haven’t tried to win her love, nor have I told her that I love her, because I knew that in your plans for her future you had never included me. I know what you think about family, and I don’t want to make ill return for the courtesy and kindness you and Mr. Winthrop have always shown me.”

“David, you have one rare trait—gratitude. I did have plans for Carey—plans built on the basis of ‘family’; but I have learned from you that there are other things, like the trait I mentioned, for instance, that count more than lineage. Before we went abroad I knew Carey was interested in you, with the first flutter

of a young girl's fancy, and I was secretly antagonistic to that feeling. But last night, David, I came to feel differently. I envied your mother when I read those banners. If I had a son like you, I'd feel honored to take in washing or anything else for him."

At the look of ineffable sadness in his eyes her tears came.

"David," she said gently, after a pause, "if you can win Carey's love, I shall gladly give my consent."

He thanked her incoherently, and was seized with an uncontrollable longing to get away—to be alone with this great, unbelievable happiness. In realization of his mood, she left him under pretext of ordering the luncheon. On her return she found him exuberant, in a flow of spirits and pleasantry.

"Mrs. Winthrop," he said earnestly, as he was taking his departure, "I am not going to tell Carey just yet that I love her."

"As you wish, David. I shall not mention our conversation."

She smiled as the door closed upon him.

"Tell her! I wonder if he doesn't know that every time he looks at her, or speaks her name, he tells her. But I suppose he has some foolish mannish pride about waiting until he is governor."

When David, in a voice vibrant with new-found gladness, finished an eloquent address to a United Band of Workmen, he found Mr. Winthrop waiting for him.

"I was sent to bring you to the hotel to dine with us, David. My wife told me of your conversation."

Noting the look of apprehension in David's eyes, he continued:

"Every time a suitor for Carey has crossed our threshold I've turned cold at the thought of relinquishing my guardianship. With you it is different; I can only quote Carey's childish remark—'with David I would have no afraidments.'"

A touch upon his shoulder prevented David's reply. He turned to find Joe and Fletcher.

"Knowles has been looking for you everywhere. He wants you to come to headquarters at once."

"Is it important?" asked David hesitatingly.

"Important! Knowles! Say, David, have you forgotten that you are running for

governor?”

Winthrop laughed appreciatively.

“Go back to Knowles, David, and come to us when you can. We have no iron-clad rules as to hours. Go with him, Joe, to be sure he doesn’t forget where he is going. Come with me, Fletcher.”

“It’s too late to call now,” remonstrated Joe, when David had finally made his escape from headquarters.

David muttered that time was made for slaves, and increased his pace. When they reached the hotel Joe refused to go to the Winthrop’s apartment.

David found Carey alone in the sitting room.

“David,” she asked, after one glance into his eyes, “what has changed you? Good news from Mr. Knowles?”

“No, Carey,” he replied, his eyes growing luminous. “It was something your mother said to me this morning.”

“Oh, I am glad. What was it she said?”

“She told me,” he evaded, “that you were going to visit the Randalls.”

“And that is what makes you look so—cheered?” she persisted.

“No, Carey. May I tell you at two o’clock in the afternoon, the day after election?”

She laughed delightedly.

“That sounds like our childhood days. You used to put notes in the old apple tree—do you remember?—asking Janey and me to meet you two hours before sundown at the end of the picket fence.”

Further confidential conversation was prevented by the entrance of the others. Joe had been captured, and Mrs. Winthrop had ordered a supper served in the rooms.

“Carey,” asked her mother softly, when they were alone that night, “did David tell you what a cozy little luncheon we had?”

“He told me, mother, that you said something to him that made him very happy, but he would not tell me what it was.”

Something in her mother’s gaze made Carey lift her violets as a shield to her

face.

“She knows!” thought Mrs. Winthrop. “But does she care?”

CHAPTER VIII

At two o’clock on the day after David Dunne had been elected governor by an overwhelming majority, he reined up at the open gate at the end of the maple drive. His heart beat faster at the sight of the regal little figure awaiting him. Her coat, furs, and hat were all of white.

He helped her into the carriage and seated himself beside her.

“Have you been waiting long, and are you dressed quite warmly?” he asked anxiously.

“Yes, indeed; I thought you might keep me waiting at the gate, so I put on my furs.”

The drive went on through the grounds to a sloping pasture, where it became a rough roadway. The day was perfect. The sharp edges of November were tempered by a bright sun, and the crisp air was possessed of a profound quiet. When the pastoral stretches ended in the woods, David stopped suddenly.

“It must have been just about here,” he said, reminiscently, as he hitched the horse to a tree and held out his hand to Carey. They walked on into the depths of the woods until they came to a fallen tree.

“Let us sit here,” he suggested.

She obeyed in silence.

An early frost had snatched the glory from the trees, whose few brown and sere leaves hung disconsolately on the branches. High above them was an occasional skirmishing line of wild ducks. The deep stillness was broken only by the scattering of nuts the scurrying squirrels were harvesting, by the cry of startled wood birds, or by the wistful note of a solitary, distant quail.

“Do you remember that other—that first day we came here?” he asked.

She glanced up at him quickly.

“Is this really the place where we came and you told me stories?”

“You were only six years old,” he reminded her. “It doesn’t seem possible that you should remember.”

“It was the first time I had ever been in any kind of woods,” she explained, “and it was the first time I had ever played with a grown-up boy. For a long time afterward, when I teased mother for a story, she would tell me of ‘The Day Carey Met David.’”

“And do you remember nothing more about that day?”

“Oh, yes; you made us some little chairs out of red sticks, and you drew me here in a cart.”

“Can’t you remember when you first laid eyes on me?”

“No—yes, I remember. You drove a funny old horse, and I saw you coming when I was waiting at the gate.”

“Yes, you were at the gate,” he echoed, with a caressing note in his voice. “You were dressed in white, as you are to-day, and that was my first glimpse of the little princess. And because she was the only one I had ever known, I thought of her for years as a princess of my imagination who had no real existence.”

“But afterwards,” she asked wistfully, “you didn’t think of me as an imaginary person, did you?”

“Yes; you were hardly a reality until—”

“Until the convention?” she asked disappointedly.

“No; before that. It was in South America, when I began to write my book, that you came to life and being in my thoughts. The tropical land, the brilliant sunshine, the purple nights, the white stars, the orchids, the balconies looking down upon fountained courts, all invoked you. You answered, and crept into my book, and while we—you and I—were writing it, it came to me suddenly and overwhelmingly that the little princess was a living, breathing person, a woman who mayhap would read my book some day and feel that it belonged to her. It was so truly hers that I did not think it necessary to write the dedication page. And she did read the book and she did know—didn’t she?”

He looked down into her face, which had grown paler but infinitely more lovely.

“David, I didn’t dare know. I wanted to think it was so.”

“Carey,” his voice came deep and strong, his eyes beseeching, “we were prince and princess in that enchanted land of childish dreams. Will you make the dream a reality?”

“When, David,” she asked him, “did you know that you loved, not the little princess, but me, Carey?”

“You make the right distinction in asking me when I *knew* I loved you. I loved you always, but I didn’t know that I loved you, or how much I loved you, until that night we sat before the fire at the Bradens’.”

“And, David, tell me what mother said that day after the parade?”

“She told me I had her consent to ask you—this!”

“And why, David, did you wait until to-day?”

“The knowledge that you were coming back here to Maplewood brought the wish to make a reality of another dream—to meet you at the place where I first saw you—to bring you here, where you clung to me for the protection that is henceforth always yours. And now, Carey, it is my turn to ask you a question. When did you first love me?”

“‘Carey, will you make the dream a reality?’”

“That first day I met you—here in the woods. My dream and my prince were always realities to me.”

CHAPTER IX

The governor was indulging in the unwonted luxury of solitude in his private sanctum of the executive offices. The long line of politicians, office seekers, committees, and reporters had passed, and he was supposed to have departed also, but after his exit he had made a detour and returned to his private office.

Then he sat down to face the knottiest problem that had as yet confronted him in connection with his official duties. An important act of the legislature awaited his signature or veto. Various pressing matters called for immediate action, but they were mere trifles compared to the issue pending upon an article he had read in a bi-weekly paper from one of the country districts. The article stated that a petition was being circulated to present to the governor, praying the pardon and release of Jud Brumble. Then had begun the great conflict in the mind of David Dunne, the “governor who could do no wrong.” It was not a conflict between right and wrong that was being waged, for Jud had been one to the prison born.

David reviewed the series of offenses Jud had perpetrated, punishment for which had ever been evaded or shifted to accomplices. He recalled the solemn promise the offender had made him long ago when, through David's efforts, he had been acquitted—a promise swiftly broken and followed by more daring transgressions, which had culminated in one enormous crime. He had been given the full penalty—fifteen years—a sentence in which a long-suffering community had rejoiced.

Jud had made himself useful at times to a certain gang of ward heelers and petty politicians, who were the instigators of this petition, which they knew better than to present themselves. Had they done so, David's course would have been plain and easy; but the petition was to be conveyed directly and personally to the governor, so the article read, by the prisoner's father, Barnabas Brumble.

By this method of procedure the petitioners showed their cunning as well as their knowledge of David Dunne. They knew that his sense of gratitude was as strong as his sense of accurate justice, and that to Barnabas he attributed his first start in life; that he had, in fact, literally blazed the political trail that had led him from a country lawyer to the governorship of his state.

There were other ties, other reasons, of which these signers knew not, that moved David to heed a petition for release should it be presented.

Again he seemed to see his mother's imploring eyes and to hear her impressive voice. Again he felt around his neck the comforting, chubby arms of the criminal's little sister. Her youthful guilelessness and her inherent goodness had never recognized evil in her wayward brother, and she would look confidently to "Davey" for service, as she had done in the old days of country schools and meadow lanes.

On the other hand, he, David Dunne, had taken a solemn oath to do his duty, and his duty to the people, in the name of justice, was clear. He owed it to them to show no leniency to Jud Brumble.

So he hovered between base ingratitude to the man who had made him, and who had never before asked a favor, and non-fulfillment of duty to his people. It was a wage of head and heart. There had never been moral compromises in his code. There had ever been a right and a wrong—plain roads, with no middle course or diverging paths, but now in his extremity he sought some means of evading the direct issue. He looked for the convenient loophole of technicality—an irregularity in the trial—but his legal knowledge forbade this consideration after again going over the testimony and evidence of the trial. The attorney for the

defense had been compelled to admit that his client had had a square deal. If only the petition might be brought in the usual way, and presented to the pardon board, it would not be allowed to reach the governor, as there was nothing in the case to warrant consideration, but that was evidently not to be the procedure. Barnabas would come to him and ask for Jud's release, assuming naturally that his request would be willingly granted.

If he pardoned Jud, all the popularity of the young governor would not screen him from the public censure. One common sentiment of outrage had been awakened by the crime, and the criminal had been universally repudiated, but it was not from public censure or public criticism that this young man with the strong under jaw shrank, but from the knowledge that he would be betraying a trust. Gratitude and duty pointed in different directions this time.

With throbbing brain and racked nerves he made his evening call upon Carey, who had come to be a clearing house for his troubles and who was visiting the Bradens. She looked at him to-night with her eyes full of the adoration a young girl gives to a man who has forged his way to fame.

He responded to her greeting abstractedly, and then said abruptly:

"Carey, I am troubled to-night!"

"I knew it before you came, David. I read the evening papers."

"What!" he exclaimed in despair. "It's true, then! I have not seen the papers to-night."

She brought him the two evening papers of opposite politics. In glowing headlines the Democratic paper told in exaggerated form the story of his early life, his humble home, his days of struggle, his start in politics, and his success, due to the father of the hardened criminal. Would the governor do his duty and see that law and order were maintained, or would he sacrifice the people to his personal obligations? David smiled grimly as he reflected that either course would be equally censured by this same paper.

He took up the other journal, the organ of his party, which stated the facts very much as the other paper had done, and added that Barnabas Brumble was en route to the capital city for the purpose of asking a pardon for his son. The editor, in another column, briefly and firmly expressed his faith in the belief that David Dunne would be stanch in his views of what was right and for the public welfare.

There was one consolation; neither paper had profaned by public mention the love of his boyhood days.

“What shall I do! What should I do!” he asked himself in desperation.

“I know what you will do,” said Carey, quickly reading the unspoken words.

“What?”

“You will do, as you always do—what you believe to be right. David, tell me the story of those days.”

So from the background of his recollections he brought forward vividly a picture of his early life, a story she had heard only from others. He told her, too, of his boyish fancy for Janey.

There was silence when he had finished. Carey looked into the flickering light of the open fire with steady, musing eyes. It did not hurt her in the least that he had had a love of long ago. It made him but the more interesting, and appealed to her as a pretty and fitting romance in his life.

“It seems so hard, either way, David,” she said looking up at him in a sympathetic way. “To follow the dictates of duty is so cold and cruel a way, yet if you follow the dictates of your heart your conscience will accuse you. But you will, when you have to act, David, do what you believe to be right, and abide by the consequences. Either way, dear, is going to bring you unhappiness.”

“Which do you believe the right way, Carey?” he asked, looking searchingly into her mystic eyes.

“David,” she replied helplessly, “I don’t know! The more I think about it, the more complicated the decision seems.”

They discussed the matter at length, and he went home comforted by the thought that there was one who understood him, and who would abide in faith by whatever decision he made.

The next day, at the breakfast table, on the street, in his office, in the curious, questioning faces of all he encountered, he read the inquiry he was constantly asking himself and to which he had no answer ready. When he finally reached his office he summoned his private secretary.

“Major, don’t let in any more people than is absolutely necessary to-day. I will see no reporters. You can tell them that no petition or request for the pardon of Jud Bramble has been received, if they ask, and oh, Major!”

The secretary turned expectantly.

“If Barnabas Brumble comes, of course he is to be admitted at once.”

Later in the morning the messenger to the governor stood at the window of the business office, idly looking out.

“Dollars to doughnuts,” he exclaimed suddenly and confidently, “that this is Barnabas Brumble coming up the front walk!”

The secretary hastened to the window. A grizzled old man in butternut-colored, tightly buttoned overcoat, and carrying a telescope bag, was ascending the steps.

“I don’t know why you think so,” said the secretary resentfully to the boy. “Barnabas Brumble isn’t the only farmer in the world. Sometimes,” he added, pursuing a train of thought beyond the boy’s knowledge, “it seems as if no one but farmers came into this capitol nowadays.”

A few moments later one of the guards ushered into the executive office the old man carrying the telescope. The secretary caught the infection of the boy’s belief.

“What can I do for you?” he asked courteously.

“I want to see the guvner,” replied the old man in a curt tone.

“Your name?” asked the secretary.

“Barnabas Brumble,” was the terse response.

He had not read the newspapers for a week past, and so he could hardly know the importance attached to his name in the ears of those assembled. The click of the typewriters ceased, the executive clerk looked quickly up from his papers, the messenger assumed a triumphant pose, and the janitor peered curiously in from an outer room.

“Come this way, Mr. Brumble,” said the secretary deferentially, as he passed to the end of the room and knocked at a closed door.

David Dunne knew, when he heard the knock, to whom he would open the door, and he was glad the strain of suspense was ended. But when he looked into the familiar face a host of old memories crowded in upon his recollection, and obliterated the significance of the call.

“Uncle Barnabas!” he said, extending a cordial hand to the visitor, while his stern, strong face softened under his slow, sweet smile. Then he turned to his secretary.

“Admit no one else, Major.”

David took the telescope from his guest and set it on the table, wondering if it

contained the “documents in evidence.”

“Take off your coat, Uncle Barnabas. They keep it pretty warm in here!”

“I callate they do—in more ways than one,” chuckled Barnabas, removing his coat. “I hed to start purty early this mornin’, when it was cool-like. Wal, Dave, times has changed! To think of little Dave Dunne bein’ guvner! I never seemed to take it in till I come up them front steps.”

The governor laughed.

“Sometimes I don’t seem to take it in myself, but *you* ought to, Uncle Barnabas. You put me here!”

As he spoke he unlocked a little cabinet and produced a bottle and a couple of glasses.

“Wal, I do declar, ef you don’t hev things as handy as a pocket in a shirt! Good stuff, Dave! More warmin’ than my old coat, I reckon, but say, Dave, what do you s’pose I hev got in that air telescope?”

David winced. In olden times the old man ever came straight to the point, as he was doing now.

“Why, what is it, Uncle Barnabas?”

“Open it!” directed the old man laconically.

With the feeling that he was opening his coffin, David unstrapped the telescope and lifted the cover. A little exclamation of pleasure escaped him. The telescope held big red apples, and it held nothing more. David quickly bit into one.

“I know from just which particular tree these come,” he said, “from that humped, old one in the corner of the orchard nearest the house.”

“Yes,” allowed Barnabas, “that’s jest the one—the one under which you and her allers set and purtended you were studyin’ your lessons.”

David’s eyes grew luminous in reminiscence.

“I haven’t forgotten the tree—or her—or the old days, Uncle Barnabas.”

“I knowed you hadn’t, Dave!”

Again David’s heart sank at the confidence in the tone which betokened the faith reposed, but he would give the old man a good time anyway before he took his destiny by the throat.

“Wouldn’t you like to go through the capitol?” he asked.

“I be goin’. The feller that brung me up here sed he’d show me through.”

“I’ll show you through,” said David decisively, and together they went through the places of interest in the building, the governor as proud as a newly domiciled man showing off his possessions. At last they came to the room where in glass cases reposed the old, unfurled battle flags. The old man stopped before one case and looked long and reverently within.

“Which was your regiment, Uncle Barnabas?”

“Forty-seventh Infantry. I kerried that air flag at the Battle of the Wilderness.”

David called to a guard and obtained a key to the case. Opening it, he bade the old man take out the flag.

With trembling hands Barnabas took out the flag he had followed when his country went to war. He gazed at it in silence, and then restored it carefully to its place. As they walked away, he brushed his coat sleeve hastily across his dimmed eyes.

David consulted his watch.

“It’s luncheon time, Uncle Barnabas. We’ll go over to my hotel. The executive mansion is undergoing repairs.”

“I want more’n a lunch, Dave! I ain’t et nuthin’ sence four o’clock this mornin’.”

“I’ll see that you get enough to eat,” laughed David.

In the lobby of the hotel a reporter came quickly up to them.

“How are you, governor?” he asked, with his eyes fastened falcon-like on Barnabas.

David returned the salutation and presented his companion.

“Mr. Brumble from Lafferton?” asked the reporter, with an insinuating emphasis on the name of the town.

“Yes,” replied the old man in surprise. “I don’t seem to reckleck seein’ you before.”

“I never met you, but I have heard of you. May I ask what your business in the city is, Mr. Brumble?”

The old man gave him a keen glance from beneath his shaggy brows.

“Wal, I don’t know as thar’s any law agin your askin’! I came to see the guvner.”

David, with a laugh of pure delight at the discomfiture of the reporter, led the way to the dining room.

“You’re as foxy as ever, Uncle Barnabas. You routed that newspaper man in good shape.”

“So that’s what he was! I didn’t know but he was one of them three-card-monty sharks. Wal, I s’pose it’s his trade to ask questions.”

Barnabas’ loquacity always ceased entirely at meal times, so his silence throughout the luncheon was not surprising to David.

“Wal, Dave,” he said as he finished, “ef this is your lunch I’d hate to hev to eat what you’d call dinner. I never et so much before at one settin’!”

“We’ll go over to the club now and have a smoke,” suggested David. “Then you can go back to my office with me and see what I have to undergo every afternoon.”

At the club they met several of David’s friends—not politicians—who met Barnabas with courtesy and composure. When they returned to David’s private office Barnabas was ensconced comfortably in an armchair while David listened with patience to the long line of importuners, each receiving due consideration. The last interview was not especially interesting and Barnabas’ attention was diverted. His eyes fell on a newspaper, which he picked up carelessly. It was the issue of the night before, and his own name was conspicuous in big type. He read the article through and returned the paper to its place without being observed by David, whose back was turned to him.

“Wal, Dave,” he said, when the last of the line had left the room, “I used ter think I’d ruther do enything than be a skule teacher, but I swan ef you don’t hev it wuss yet!”

David made no response. The excitement of his boyish pleasure in showing Uncle Barnabas about had died away as he listened to the troubles and demands of his callers, and now the recollection of the old man’s errand confronted him in full force.

Barnabas looked at him keenly.

“Dave,” he said slowly, “’t ain’t no snap you hev got! I never knowed till to-day jest what it meant to you. I’m proud of you, Dave! I wish—I wish you hed been my son!”

The governor arose impetuously and crossed the room.

“I would have been, Uncle Barnabas, if she had not cared for Joe!”

“I know it, Dave, but you hev a sweet little gal who will make you happy.”

The governor’s face lighted in a look of exquisite happiness.

“I have, Uncle Barnabas. We will go to see her this evening.”

“I’d like to see her, sartain. Hain’t seen her sence the night you was elected. And, Dave,” with a sheepish grin, “I’m a-goin’ to git spliced myself.”

“What? No! May I guess, Uncle Barnabas—Miss Rhody?”

“Dave, you air a knowin’ one. Yes, it’s her! Whenever we set down to our full table I got to thinkin’ of that poor little woman a-settin’ down alone, and I’ve never yet knowed a woman livin’ alone to feed right. They allers eat bean soup or prunes, and call it a meal.”

“I am more glad than I can tell you, Uncle Barnabas, and I shall insist on giving the bride away. But what will Penny think about some one stepping in?”

“Wal, Dave, I’ll allow I wuz skeered to tell Penny, and it tuk a hull lot of bracin’ to do it, and what do you suppose she sed? She sez, ‘I’ve bin wantin’ tew quit these six years, and now, thank the Lord, I’ve got the chance.’”

“Why, what in the world did she want to leave for?”

“I guess you’ll be surprised when I tell you. To marry Larimy Sasser!”

“Uncle Larimy! She’ll scour him out of house and home,” laughed David.

“We’ll hev both weddin’s to the same time. Joe and Janey are a-comin’, and we’ll hev a grand time. I hain’t much on the write, Dave, and I’ve allers meant to see you here in this great place. Some of the boys sez to me: ‘Mebby Dave’s got stuck on himself and his job by this time, and you’ll hev to send in yer keerd by a nigger fust afore you kin see him,’ but I sez, ‘No! Not David Dunne! He ain’t that kind and never will be.’ So when I go back I kin tell them how you showed me all over the place, and tuk me to eat at a hotel and to that air stylish place where I wuz treated like a king by yer friends. I’ve never found you wantin’, Dave, and I never expect to!”

“Uncle Barnabas,” began David, “I—”

His voice suddenly failed him.

“See here, Dave! I didn’t know nuthin’ about that,” pointing to the newspaper,

“until a few minutes ago. I sed tew hum that I wuz a-comin’ to see how Dave run things, and ef them disreptible associates of Jud’s air a-gittin’ up some fool paper, I don’t know it! Ef they do send it in, don’t you dare sign it! Why, I wouldn’t hev that boy outen prison fer nuthin’. He’s different from what he used to be, Dave. He got so low he would hev to reach up ter touch bottom. He’s ez low ez they git, and he’s dangerous. I didn’t know an easy minute fer the last two years afore he wuz sent up, so keep him behind them bars fer fear he’ll dew somethin’ wuss when he gits out. Don’t you dare sign no petition, Dave!”

Tears of relief sprang into the strong eyes of the governor.

“Why, Dave,” said the old man in shocked tones, “you didn’t go fer to think fer a minute I’d ask you to let him out cause he wuz my son? Even ef I hed a wanted him out, and Lord knows I don’t, I’d not ask you to do somethin’ wrong, no more’n I’d bring dishoner to that old flag I held this mornin’!”

David grasped his hand.

“Uncle Barnabas!”

His voice broke with emotion. Then he murmured: “We’ll go to see *her*, now.”

As they passed out into the corridor a reporter hastened up to them.

“Governor,” he asked, with impudent directness, “are you going to pardon Jud Bramble?”

Before David could reply, Barnabas stepped forward:

“Young feller, thar hain’t no pardon ben asked fer Jud Brumble, and what’s more, thar hain’t a-goin’ to be none asked—not by me. I come down here to pay my respecks to the guvner, and to bring him a few apples, and you kin say so ef you wanter!”

When Carey came into the library where her two callers awaited her, one glance into the divine light of David’s deepening, glowing eyes told her what she wanted to know.

With a soft little cry she went to Barnabas, who was holding out his hand in welcome. Impulsively her lips were pressed against his withered cheek, and he took her in his arms as he might have taken Janey.

“Why, Carey!” he said delightedly, “Dave’s little gal!”

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