

A Man for the Ages

A Story of the Builders of Democracy

By Irving Bacheller

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CHAPTER I.—Samson and Sarah Traylor, with their two children, Josiah and Betsy, travel by wagon from their home in Vergennes, Vt., to the West, the land of plenty. Their destination is the Country of the Sangamon, in Illinois.

CHAPTER II.—At Niagara Falls they meet a party of immigrants, among them a youth named John McNell, who also decides to go to the Sangamon country. All of the party suffer from fever and ague. Sarah's ministrations save the life of a youth, Harry Needles, in the last stages of fever, and he accompanies the Traylor. They reach New Salem, Illinois, and are welcomed by young "Abe" Lincoln.

CHAPTER III.—Among the Traylor's first acquaintances are Lincoln's friends, Jack Kelso and his pretty daughter, Bim, 15 years of age.

CHAPTER IV.—Samson decides to locate at New Salem, and begins building his house. Led by Jack Armstrong, cowboys attempt to break up the proceedings. Lincoln strikes Armstrong. Young Harry Needles strikes Bap McNell, of the Armstrong crowd, and McNell threatens vengeance.

CHAPTER V.—A few days later Harry, alone, is attacked by McNell and his gang, and would have been roughly used had not Bim driven off his assailants with a shotgun. John McNell, the Traylor's Niagara Falls acquaintance, is markedly attentive to Ann Rutledge. Lincoln is in love with Ann, but has never had enough courage to tell her so.

CHAPTER VI.—Traylor helps two slaves, who had run away from St. Louis, to escape. Eliphalet Biggs, owner of the slaves, following them, attempts to beat up Traylor and in a fight has his arm broken.

CHAPTER VII.

In Which Mr. Eliphalet Biggs Gets Acquainted With Bim Kelso and Her Father.

In a musty old ledger kept by James Rutledge, the owner of Rutledge's Tavern, in the year 1821, is an entry under the date of January 31st which reads as follows:

"Arrived this day Eliphalet Biggs of 21 Olive street, St. Louis, with one horse."

Young Mr. Biggs remained at Rutledge's tavern for three weeks with his arm in a sling under the eye of the good doctor. The Rutledges were Kentucky folk and there the young man had found a sympathetic hearing and tender care.

It had come him good to be hurried against a barn door and to fall trembling and enfeebled at the feet of his master. He had never met his master until he had reached Hopedale that morning. The event had been too long delayed. Encouraged by idleness and conceit and alcohol, evil passions had grown rank in the soil of his spirit. Restraint had been a thing unknown to him. He had ruled the little world in which he had lived by a sense of divine right. He was a prince of Ego-land—that province of America which had only half yielded itself to the principles of Democracy.

It must be said that he served his term as a sober human being quite gracefully, being a well born youth of some education. A few days he spent mostly in bed, while his friend, who had come on from Hopedale, took care of him. Soon he began to walk about and his friend returned to St. Louis.

His fine manners and handsome form and face captured the little village, most of whose inhabitants had come from Kentucky. A week after his arrival Ann Rutledge walked over to Jack Kelso's with him. Bim fled up the attic ladder as soon as they entered the door. Mr. Kelso was away on a fox hunt. Ann went to the ladder and called:

"Bim, I saw you fly up that ladder. Come back down. Here's a right nice young man come to see you."

"Is he good-looking?" Bim called.

"Oh, purty as a picture, black eyes and hair, and teeth like pearls, and tall and straight, and he's got a beautiful little mustache."

"That's enough!" Bim exclaimed. "I just wish there was a knot hole in this floor."

"Come on down here," Ann urged.

"I'm scared," was the answer.

"His cheeks are as red as roses and he's got a lovely ring and big watch chain—nice gold and yaller as a dandelion. You come down here."

"Stop," Bim answered. "I'll be down as soon as I can get on my best bib and tucker."

In a few minutes Bim called from the top of the ladder to Ann. The latter went and looked up at her. Both girls burst into peals of merry laughter. Bim had put on a suit of her father's old clothes and her buffalo skin whiskers and was a wild sight.

"Don't you come down looking like that," said Ann. "I'll go up there and lend you."

Ann climbed the ladder and for a time there was much laughing and chattering in the little loft. By and by Ann came down. Bim hesitated, laughing, above the ladder for a moment, and presently followed in her best blue dress, against which the golden curls of her hair fell gracefully. With red cheeks and bright eyes, she was a glowing picture. Very timidly she gave her hand to Mr. Biggs.

"It's just the right dress," he said. "It goes so well with your hair. I'm glad to see you. I have never seen a girl like you in my life. I'm going to come and see you often, if your mother will let me."

A blush spread over the girl's cheeks to the pretty dimple at the point of her chin.

"You'll see her scamping up the ladder like a squirrel," said Mrs. Kelso.

"Perhaps we could hide the ladder," he suggested, with a smile. "Do you play on the flute?" Bim asked.

"No," said Mr. Biggs. "I was afraid," Bim exclaimed. "My Uncle Henry does." She looked into Mr. Biggs' eyes.

Mr. Biggs laughed. "That smile of yours is very becoming," he said. At this point Mr. Kelso returned with his gun on his shoulder and was introduced to Mr. Biggs.

"I welcome you to the hazards of my fireside," said Kelso. "So you're



"I Have Never Seen a Girl Like You in My Life."

from St. Louis and stopped for repairs in this land of the ladder climbers. Sit down and I'll put a log on the fire."

"Thank you, I must go," said Biggs. "Can I not stay you with flacons?" Kelso asked.

"The doctor has forbidden me all drink but milk and water."

"A wise man is Doctor Allen," Kelso exclaimed. "Cervantes was right in saying that too much wine will neither keep a secret nor fulfill a promise."

"Will you make me a promise?" Bim asked of Mr. Biggs, as he was leaving the door with Ann.

"Anything you will ask," he answered.

"Please don't ever look at the new moon through a knot hole," she said in a half whisper.

The young man laughed. "Why not?"

"If you do, you'll never get married."

"Don't be alarmed by my daughter's fancies," Kelso advised. "They are often rather astonishing."

So Mr. Eliphalet Biggs met the pretty daughter of Jack Kelso. On his way back to the tavern he told Ann that he had fallen in love with the sweetest and prettiest girl in all the world—Bim Kelso. That very evening Ann went over to Kelso's cabin to take the news to Bim and her mother and to tell them that her father reckoned he belonged to a very rich and a very grand family. Mr. Kelso had gone to Offut's store and the three had the cabin to themselves.

"I think he's just a wonderful man," Bim exclaimed. "But I'm sorry his name is so much like Biggs and pig—I'm plum sure I'm going to love him."

"I thought you were in love with Harry Needles," Bim's mother said to her.

"I am, but he keeps me so busy. I have to dress him up every day and put a mustache on him and think up ever so many nice things for him to say, and when he comes he doesn't say them. He's terribly young."

"You told me that he said once you were beautiful."

"But he has never said it twice, and when he did say it, I didn't believe my ears, he spoke so low. Acted kind o' like he was scared of it. I don't want to wait forever to be really and truly loved, do I?"

Mrs. Kelso laughed. "It's funny to hear a baby talking like that," she said. "We don't know this young man. He's probably only fooling anyway."

Bim went often to the little tavern after that. Of those meetings little is known, save that, with all the pretty wits of the cavalier, unknown to Harry Needles, the handsome youth flattered and delighted the girl. This went on day by day for a fortnight. The evening before Biggs was to leave for his home, Bim went over to eat supper with Ann at the tavern.

It happened that Jack Kelso had found Abe sitting alone with Bim Blackstone in Offut's store that afternoon.

"Mr. Kelso, did you ever hear who Eb Zane said about the general subject of sons-in-law?" Abe asked.

"Never—but I reckon it would be wise and possibly apropos," said Kelso.

"He said that a son-in-law was curious kind o' property. Abe began."

"Ye know," says Eb, "if ye have a horse that's tricky an' dangerous an' will less than nothing, ye can give him away or kill him, but if ye have a son-in-law that's worthless, nobody else will have him an' it's ug'n' the law to kill him. Pust ye know ye've got a critter on yer hands that kicks an' won't work an' has to be fed an' liquored three times a day an' is worth a million dollars less than nothing."

There was a moment of silence.

"When a man is figurin' his assets, it's better to add ten dollars than to subtract a million," said Abe. "That's about as simple as adding up the weight o' three small boys."

"What a well o' wisdom you are, Abe!" said Kelso. "Do you know anything about this young Missourian who is abiding up to Bim?"

"I only know that he was a drinking man up to the time he landed here and that he threatened Traylor with his whip and got thrown against the side of a barn—plenty hard. He's a kind o' American king, and I don't like kings. They're nice to look at, but generally those that have married 'em have had one h—l of a time."

Kelso rose and went home to supper. Soon after the supper dishes had been laid away in the Kelso cabin, young Mr. Biggs rapped on its door and pulled the latchstring and entered and sat down with Mr. and Mrs. Kelso at the fireside.

"I have come to ask for your daughter's hand," he said, as soon as they were seated. "I know it will seem sudden, but she happens to be the girl I want. I've had her picture in my heart always. I love your daughter. I can give her a handsome home and everything she could desire."

Kelso answered promptly: "We are glad to welcome you here, but we cannot entertain such a proposal, flattering as it is. Our daughter is too young to think of marriage. Then, sir, we know very little about you, and may I be pardoned if I add that it does not recommend you?"

The young man was surprised. He had not expected such talk from a ladder climber. He looked at Kelso, groping for an answer. Then he said:

"Perhaps not," said he. "I have been a little wild, but that is all in the past. You can learn 'bout me and my family from any one in St. Louis. I am not ashamed of anything I have done. May I not hope that you will change your mind?"

"Not at present. Let the future take care of itself."

"I generally get what I want," said the young man.

"And now and then something that you don't want," said Kelso, a bit nettled by his persistence.

"You ought to think of her happiness. She is too sweet and beautiful for a home like this."

There was an awkward moment of silence. The going man said good-night and opened the door.

"I'll go with you," said Kelso.

He went with Mr. Biggs to the tavern and got his daughter and returned home with her.

Mrs. Kelso chided her husband for being hard on Mr. Biggs.

"He has had his lesson, perhaps he will turn over a new leaf," she said.

"I fear there isn't a new leaf in his book," said Kelso. "They're all dirty."

He told his wife what Abe had said in the store.

"The wisdom of the common folk is in that headless young giant," he said. "It is the wisdom of many generations gathered in the hard school of bitter experience. I wonder where it is going to lead him."

As Eliphalet Biggs was going down the south road next morning he met Bim on her pony near the schoolhouse, returning from the field with her cow. They stopped.

"I'm coming back, little girl," he said.

"What for?" she asked.

"To tell you a secret and ask you a question. May I come?"

"I suppose you can—if you want to," she answered.

"I'll come and I'll write to you and send the letters to Ann."

Monitor Graham, the schoolmaster, who lived in the schoolhouse, had one out of his door.

"Good-by," said young Mr. Biggs, as his horse touched the flanks of his horse. Then he went flying down the road.

CHAPTER VIII.

Wherein Abe Announces His Purpose to Be a Candidate for the Legislature, at Kelso's Dinner Party.

Harry Needles met Bim Kelso on the road next day, when he was going down to see if there was any mail. She was on her pony. He was in his new suit of clothes—a buttoned back-shoulder striped into large checks.

"You look like a walking check-board," said she.

"This—this is my new suit," Harry answered, looking down at it.

"It's a tiresome suit," said she impatiently. "I've been playing checkers so it since I caught sight of you, and we got at man crowded in the king 'em."

"I thought you'd like it," he answered, quite seriously, and with a look of disappointment. "Say, I've got hot razor and I've shaved three times today."

"Don't tell anybody," he warned her. "They'd laugh at me. They couldn't know how I feel."

"I won't say anything," she answered. "I reckon I ought to tell you that I don't love you—not so much as did, anyway—not near so much. I only love you just a wee bit now."

Harry's face fell.

"Do you—love—some other man?" he asked.

"Yes—a regular man—mustache, six feet tall and everything. I just tell you he's purty."

"Is it that rich feller from St. Louis?" he asked.

"No, he's not, and then whispered: 'Don't you tell.'"

The boy's lips trembled when he answered. "I won't tell. But I don't see how you can do it."

"Why?"

"He drinks. He isn't respectable."

"That's a lie," she answered quickly. "I don't care what you say."

Bim touched her pony with the whip and rode away.

Harry staggered for a moment as he went on. His eyes filled with tears. It seemed to him that the world had been ruined. On his way to the village he tried and convicted it of being no fit place for a boy to live in. Down by the tavern he met Abe, who stopped him.

"Howdy, Harry," said Abe. "You look kind o' sick. Come into the store



"Do You—Love—Some Other Man?" He Asked.

and sit down. I want to talk to you."

Harry followed the big man into Offut's store, flattered by his attention. There had been something very grateful in the sound of Abe's voice and the feel of his hand. The store was empty.

"You and I mustn't let ourselves be worried by little matters," said Abe, as they sat down together by the fire.

"Things that seem to you to be as big as a mountain now will look like a mole hill in six months. You and I have got things to do, partner. We mustn't let ourselves be bothered. I was once in a boat with old 'Tuff' Chase on the Illinois river. We had got into the rapids. It was a narrow channel in dangerous water. They had to keep her headed just so. I was in the fore-peak. Suddenly my drooping apple overboard and began to loller. He wanted to have the boat stopped. For a minute that boy thought his apple was the biggest thing in the world. We're all a good deal like him. We keep jiggling our apples and calling for the boat to stop. Soon we find out that there are many apples in the world. It's not as that one. You have all come to stretch of bad water up at your house. The folks have been sick. The world's a little some and disconcerted. Don't you make it any harder by crying over a lost apple. Ye know it's possible that the apple will float along down into the still water where you can pick it up by and by. The important thing is to keep going ahead."

This bit of fatherly counsel was a help to the boy.

"I've got a book here that I want you to read," Abe went on. "It is the 'Life of Henry Clay.' Take it home and read it carefully and then bring it back, and tell me what you think of it. You may be a Henry Clay yourself by and by. The world has something big in it for every one if he can only find it. We're all searching—some for gold and some for fame. I pray God every day that He will light up to find my work—the thing I can do better than anything else—and when it is found help me to do it. I expect it will be a hard and dangerous search and that I shall make mistakes. I expect to drop some apples on my way. They'll look like gold to me, but I'm not going to lose sight of the main purpose."

When Harry got home he found Sarah sewing by the fireside, with Joe and Betsy playing by the bed. Samson had gone to the woods to split rails.

"Any family," Sarah asked.

"No mail," he answered.

Sarah went to the window and stood for some minutes looking out at the plain. Its sere grasses, protruding out of the snow, blessed and bent in the wind. In its cheerless winter colors it was a dreary thing to see.

"How I long for home," she exclaimed, as she trembled, weeping by the fire.

Little Joe came and stood by her knee and gave his olive-green breast to her.

"God help us and make His face to shine upon us."

She kissed him and said: "Dear comforter! It shines upon me every time I hear you say those words."

"Would you mind if I called you mother?" Harry asked.

"I shall be glad to have you do it if it gives you any comfort," she answered.

She observed that there were tears in his eyes.

"We are all very fond of you," she said, as she bent to kiss his forehead.

Then the boy told her the history of his morning—the talk with Bim, with the razor omitted from it.

"Well, Harry, if she's such a fool, you're lucky to have her. It's not so soon," said Sarah. "She's a little but ride the pony and play with a gun. I don't believe she'll get her teeth cut by and by."

Then fell a moment of silence. Soon she said:

"There's a letter said blowing and there's no hurry about the rails. I guess you sit here at the fire and read your book this evening. Maybe it will help you to find your work."

So it happened that the events of Harry's morning found their place in the diary which Sarah and Samson kept. Long afterward Harry added the sentences about the razor.

One evening Sarah and Samson, with Harry, went to a dance in the tavern on the house of the day, in which Abe won the prize of all for an able presentation of the status of Internal Improvements. During that evening Alexander Ferguson declared that he would not cut his hair until Henry Clay became President, the news of which resounded in a like manner in every end and ear of the

examined hairness on that part of the border.

For Samson and Sarah the most notable social event of the winter was a chicken dinner at which they and Mr. and Mrs. James Rutledge and Ann and Abe Lincoln and Doctor Allen were the guests of the Kelso. That night Harry stayed at home with the children.

Kelso was in his best mood. "Come," he said, when dinner was ready. "Life is more than friendship. It is partly meat."

"And mostly Kelso," said Doctor Allen.

"Ah, Doctor! Long life has made you as smooth as an old shilling and nimbler than a sixpence," Kelso declared. "And, speaking of life, Aristotle said that the learned and the unlearned were as the living and the dead."

"It is true," Abe interposed. "I say it, in spite of the fact that it slays me."

"You? No! You are alive to your finger tips," Kelso answered.

"But I have mastered only eight books," said Abe.

"And one—the book of common sense, and that has wised you," Kelso went on. "Since I came to this country I have learned to beware of the one-book man. There are more living men in America than in any land I have seen. The man who reads one good book thoughtfully is alive and often my master in wit or wisdom. Reading is the gate and thought is the pathway of real life."

"I think that most of the men I know have read the Bible," said Abe.

"A wonderful and a saving fact! It is a sure foundation to build your life upon."

Kelso paused to pour whiskey from a jug at his side for those who would take it.

"Let us drink to our friend Abe and his new ambition," he proposed.

"What is it?" Samson asked.

"I am going to try for a seat in the legislature," said Abe.

The toast was drunk, and by some in water, after which Abe said:

"If you have the patience to listen to it, I'd like to read my declaration to the voters of Sangamon county."

Samson's diary briefly describes this appeal as follows:

"He said, but he wanted to win the confidence and esteem of his fellow citizens. This he hoped to accomplish by doing something which would make him worthy of it. He had been thinking of the county. A railroad would do more for it than anything else, but a railroad would be too costly. The improvement of the Sangamon river was the next best thing. He favored a navy law and said, in view of the talk he had just heard, he was going to favor the improvement and building of schools, so that every one could learn how to read, at least, and learn for himself what is in the Bible and other great books. It was a modest statement and we all liked it."

"Whatever happens to Sangamon, one statement in that platform couldn't be improved," said Kelso.

"What is that?" Abe asked.

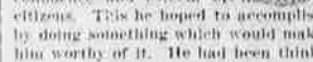
"It's the one that says you wish to win the regard of your fellows by serving them."

Early in April an Indian scare spread from the capital to the remotest corners of the state. Black Hawk, with many warriors, had crossed the Mississippi and was moving toward the Rock River country. Governor Reynolds called for volunteers to check the invasion.

Abe, whose address to the voters had been printed in the Sangamon Journal, joined a volunteer company

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