

# FOR EVERY BOY AND GIRL

## THE "U. S. M." BY ALICE MORGAN.

LARRY, the stage-driver, has broken a leg, and Mr. Wright says I may run the stage for a month or two. I'd like to do it, sir, if—if you've no objection," begged Tom of his guardian, Judge Gifford.

The judge looked down at him with amusement.

"Do you hear that, doctor?" he said, walking to the other end of the piazza, where the old doctor sat with his feet on the railing and a New York newspaper in his hand.

Tom, who was always in dead earnest about everything he undertook, had been studying too hard or too much, and had grown thin and nervous; so, by the doctor's advice, and greatly against his own will, he had been compelled to leave school.

The doctor looked up absently.

"He's been out of school three days," explained the judge, stepping aside and exposing the bashful boy, who had followed close at his heels, "and now he's ready to run a stage."

"Only three trips a day," pleaded Tom, with the air of a culprit. "It starts from Mr. Wright's store at Van Buren Center, and goes down to the railway station. It connects with the 8:30 A. M. and the 2 and 5 P. M. trains for New York. It carries the mail."

"Um-m!" remarked the doctor, thoughtfully, looking intently toward the orchard.

"It's better than lounging anyway," ventured Tom, and instantly retreated again behind the judge.

"Um-m! So it is, judge, so it is," said the doctor, lowering his feet, one at a time, and holding them in place with a hand on either knee. "It'll keep the youngster out of doors, too; and that's what he needs. He's small for his age. Go ahead, young man; here's my hand on it."

And Tom, emerging from his retirement, shook the chubby old hand with a glad "Thank you, sir," and a glance at his guardian that was three parts merry and one part triumphant.

That evening found him stretched upon the boards of the western porch with an open book before him, straining his eyes in the fading light.

The judge commented gravely.

"It's only a book of postal laws and regulations," apologized Tom. "I got it of Wright. Of course he must answer for me as mail-carrier; but I thought I ought to know what the rights and duties of the office are." (Tom was taking some ideas from the Constitution of the United States.)

"That's right, my boy, that's right," exclaimed the judge, with a heartiness that brought a glad light into Tom's eyes, for he loved his guardian most devotedly. "Whether you are a private citizen or a public officer, always keep yourself informed as to the duties the laws of your country require of you and the privileges they accord to you. But we want you now to let books alone as far as may be."

The stage was clumsy, with low, heavy running-gear and a tunnel-like top of canvas. Upon the wagon-box, hardly decipherable through disfigurement of weather and soil, appeared the name of the nimblest race-horse of the day—"Eclipse"; for every time the vehicle received a new coat of paint it was, with no idea of any joke, renamed for the race-horse once so famous. At the back, just above a pair of steps by which passengers climbed in or out, appeared the letters "U. S. M."

The driver's seat was high, and Tom felt lifted up in more senses than one when, on the morning of his entry into the mail service, Mr. Wright, storekeeper, postmaster, stage-driver, and mail-carrier all in one—though giving to others the duties of the last two offices—tossed up to him the mail-bag with its imposing combination of iron staples and lock and leather pouch that, as the story runs, made an old sailor's jack-knife laugh.

As it fell rattling before him, he put a foot upon it, gathered up his reins, and started off, feeling himself a public official.

His route lay past Riggs's Corners, a tavern stand, thence to the station, a drive or two miles by the regular route or old road, or a much longer drive if, as was often the case, he had to go by the hill road.

On each of his trips he was obliged to connect with a train for his passengers' convenience as well as to deliver the mail-bag to a trainman. Then he must wait a half-hour for return trains from which he received the mail and generally a few passengers.

Our hero had been stage-driver about a month when, upon his morning trip, he was signaled from the home of Farmer Cushman—a fine old house standing sixty feet from the road. The farmer had been kind to Tom. The lad had a grateful heart, and saw with pleasure that the passenger coming out from the greenery of trees and shrubs that almost hid the house was his old friend.

"Room up there for me, Tom?" he asked, indicating the driver's seat.

"Certainly, sir, certainly!" Tom blinked with satisfaction as he slipped to one side, making room.

A few rods before them was Riggs's Corners. Early as it was, the idlers of the place were lounging upon the long, narrow piazza. Mr. Cushman scanned the group narrowly.

"I suppose it's too early for Bates to be around yet," he said. "He's a fellow that's been buying up horses about here. Have you seen him, Tom? He drives a bay and a flashy little buggy with yellow gear. He puts up at Riggs's. McMahon's (the constable) 'hobnobbs with him a good deal—is treated by him, I suppose, and of course thinks Bates is just right. I offered him my old gray yesterday for seventy-five dollars; but I regretted it afterward, and I really hope he won't take me up. The old fellow's been too good a servant to be sold to strangers who may not treat him kindly."

Tom agreed with him—somehow he and Mr. Cushman agreed on most subjects they talked about—and the trip to the station was a pleasure to both.

In the afternoon Tom left Wright's, as usual, to connect with the two-o'clock train. At he approached the Cushman place his face lighted up with a very lively curiosity, for something answering the description of Bates's rig stood at the gate, with Cushman's little black mare, "Dinah," tied behind. As he came nearer he saw little Harmony Cushman at Dinah's head, and just within the gate Harmony's grandmother, a meek-faced old lady, mildly arguing with some one whom Tom took to be Bates himself.



"YOUNG MAN, YOU GO ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS, SAID MR. MCMAHON."

Approaching the group, Tom drove more and more slowly, forgetting all politeness in his pity for the child when he saw that Harmony was crying and tugging at Dinah's tie-strap with all her little might. The Eclipse came to a standstill.

"Papa did n't sell Dinah, Tommy! Papa did n't!" cried the little girl, dropping the strap, running forward, and reach up her hands to him in a pitiful appeal.

Tom was beside her in a moment, and seizing his hand, she ran with him to her grandmother's side.

"It is unfortunate, Mr. Bates," the old lady was protesting, "that you should have come when there is no one home but me. Even the hired men are not around. They would have known. Of course I don't doubt your word, but I'm afraid there's some misunderstanding. Can't you leave the mare now, and come for her when my son is at home?"

"I would like to oblige you, ma'am, indeed I would," answered the man, very blandly, "but I have promised to deliver these horses to-morrow. You know that your son had sold a horse, didn't you?"

"I did hear him say that he had offered one for seventy-five dollars cash, but I thought it was old Prince," the gray. "I did not suppose he'd sell Dinah for any amount of money or under any circumstances, for—"

"Papa did n't sell Dinah!" The child confronted the man unflinchingly. "I was there. Don't you remember it was Prince?" Dinah's mine. Papa gave her to me a long time ago! In spite of her sobbing, her voice rang clearly every sound she attempted but the letter r.

"Nonsense!" said Bates, though smilingly. He attempted to stroke the little girl's hair, but she flew from him with a frantic gesture.

Tom felt that he could keep quiet no longer. "Something is wrong, Mrs. Cushman," Tom said. "Mr. Cushman told me only this morning that he had given Mr. Bates the refusal of Prince. Anyway, he'll be home on the last train to-night to speak for himself. That it's n't long to wait."

That Bates paid no attention to him did not in the least trouble the boy; but McMahon, who had sauntered over from the hotel and had heard the latter part of the conversation, braced himself before him with feet apart, and began a sort of cross-questioning, emphasizing with an index-finger upon his open palm.

"Mr. Cushman told you that he had offered Prince, eh, young man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, what have we to do with Prince? Clearly nothing at all. The question is—did he tell you that he had sold Dinah?"

"No; but he had sold her."

"Tut, tut! Keep to the facts. The law can't recognize 'ifs'; it's facts we want. Young man, you go about your business. You'll miss your train if you waste much more time here. Wright don't stand much foolin', you know."

Then to Mrs. Cushman he said impressively:

"Allow me, ma'am, to introduce to you my friend Mr. Bates, of New York. Mr. Bates is a gentleman, ma'am. I'll stand for him. It's simply absurd that his word should be called into question by that young prig. It's late now, and further delay may put him to a great deal of trouble. You were to pay the money and take the horse, Mr. Bates?"

"That was the bargain," said Bates, with the calmness of one who's sure he's right and waits patiently for permission to go ahead.

McMahon was naturally headstrong; still he might not have acted with so much assurance had he not been imbibing freely at the tavern.

"Well, Mr. McMahon," said yielding grandma, "if you say it's all right, why—"

"Of course it's all right, ma'am. Come in, Mr. Bates, and count out your money." And with the familiarity of an old neighbor, he led the way into the house, grandma following meekly, only stopping for an instant to pacify Harmony, who clutched her gown in speechless protest.

"Don't cry, deary," she said; "and you may ride to the station with Tommy, if he'll let you."

But with a faint scream Harmony flew out and began again her helpless tug at the tie-strap. Tom looked at her a second, then crossed the road and let down the bars of a pasture lot; then with steady, nimble fingers he unhitched his near horse, and put him into the lot. He was at Harmony's side the next instant, with a low, comforting "Sh-sh!" he took the strap from her shaking fingers, untied it, flung it into the buggy box, and lead Dinah into the vacant place. The rusty old harness was a loose fit, but it was made to answer with only the change of a buckle or two.

Meanwhile the haughty little beast showed a pair of disdainful eyes under the shabby blinders, and tossed her head and lifted her feet in a way that showed her to be quite out of patience with this new work. But Harmony, whose active little brain had quickly guessed Tom's purpose, ran to her head.

"You must be a good Dinah," she said, and at a sound of her voice the affectionate creature lowered her head for a caress. The child drew her palms resolutely across her wet lashes, heaved one last sob, and took up with her whole soul her part as peace-maker. A tiptoe she stroked and patted and coaxed and counseled.

"You went double twice before, Dinah. Don't you remember? Papa drove you with Prince, and papa said you was a— a p'intelligent creature. You must be good to us, Dinah, and we'll be good to you. Tommy likes nice, smart creatures, don't you, Tom?"

She looked up and saw Tom upon his perch, ready to start. In an instant she was climbing up to him, clutching in her ascent the steps, wheel, anything her little hands could grasp.

Tom caught her just as Dinah leaped forward. "Grandma said I might go," she panted.

Her sunbonnet had fallen back upon her shoulders,

and in his frenzy he might have

her hair tumbled wildly about its rim, traces of tears and of soiled, restraining fingers were upon her face; but as she snuggled up to him with a long, wavering breath of relief and trust, Tom felt her cause was his cause, heart and soul, for weal or woe.

He looked at his watch, and knew that if he made the train he must do it by the shorter route. He urged his team ahead. Dinah capered at first, and would not do her part; but Harmony, clinging to Tom's sleeve and bending eagerly forward, entreated her:

"Oh, be a good Dinah; be a good Dinah!" And Dinah, quieted again by a voice she knew, subsided into a steady pace.

They had passed the corners and had turned into the old road before Tom looked back. Two bewildered men were standing before the Cushman gate.

Some minutes passed before they fully understood the situation, and then McMahon exclaimed:

"The young idiot! He's forgotten that the road's blocked! He'll have to come back to the corners!" and Mr. McMahon doubled himself together in triumphant glee.

But Tom had n't forgotten anything. He came up to the closed portion of the road. A chain was stretched across, hooked to a post upon each side. The foreman of a gang of laborers said surlily:

"No thoroughfare. You can't pass here."

The boy rose upon his feet, looked at the broken road, and saw that it was passable. Then he lifted the mail-bag into sight, saying quietly:

"I carry the United States Mail, sir."

The man made no reply, but tugged away and kicked sullenly into a clod of earth.

Tom sprang to the ground, unhooked the chain at one end, carried it to the other side, dropped it, and, regaining his seat at a bound, drove on. The road was rough in places, but not dangerous, and he passed safely over it, though to the inconvenience of several groups of workmen.

Ahead of him he saw the train already slowing at the station. It would not do to go close with the frisky Dinah, so drawing to the sidewalk a few rods away, he flung himself to the ground, put a dime and Dinah's bridle into the hands of a gaping idler, lifted Harmony to the ground for safety, snatched his mail-bag, and made a dash for the platform. He reached it just in time to hurl the bag aboard as the train was starting.

He must now wait a half-hour for the mail-train from New York; and from the platform he scanned the homeward road, the long hill road, for he knew that if Bates and the constable were to come after him they would come that way.

The road was clear, and he went back to look after Harmony. His team was quiet, the boy he had hired still holding the pair, and Dinah gravely eating clover from Harmony's hand. Saying to himself, "Jussy hours go fast," he pulled a few fresh tufts from under a fence and fed them to the patient old creature at Dinah's side. Then he set himself the task of scraping the mud from the wheels of the stage, but he worked in nervous haste, as it, instead of killing time, he was trying to gain it. Then he turned his team about, heading them toward the hill road and home. Then he made a bargain with his hostler, giving him another dime to remain until the train arrived.

"It must be nearly due," he thought, and looked at his watch. Just ten minutes had sped!

Fretted by what he called his foolishness, he placed a foot firmly upon a hub and with nicest precision whittled a stick to a pin-point. He as carefully sharpened the other end, then threw it away and mounted the stage steps to view the road. No Bates in sight. Again he pulled out his watch.

"Is it 'most half an hour now?" whispered Harmony.

"Ten minutes more," he said, and stooping, untied her bonnet and smoothed back her hair, talking soothingly to her meanwhile.

"When we get another mail-bag aboard and get started, I don't believe they'll dare to take Dinah away from us. They won't unless they get us another horse, and no one here has one to lend."

"And will you keep Dinah and me and the United States mail with you 'ev'ry speck of time till papa comes?"

"I'll try to," and with a parting pat of encouragement he left her and went and stood upon the platform.

It perhaps the twentieth time he jerks out his watch. "Time up, and no train in sight!"

He steps from the platform and puts his ear to the ground. "The train is coming!"

Upon the platform again, he tries to look round a corner a hundred rods away, where the track bends out of the thick woods.

But it is coming. It is almost in sight, announced by rattle and whistle and hum of smoke sitting upward through the tree-tops. He runs his eye along the hill road. No vehicle in sight, but upon the summit a cloud of dust. It takes shape under his straining gaze; a scampering horse, a tumbling buggy, and the drivers—Tom cannot see them, but his instinct outleaps his senses.

But though his heart has stood still, the belated train has not. It is close at hand, and in his eagerness the boy stretches out his arms and wildly beckons it forward. It comes slowing and scraping alongside of the platform, and he runs with it abreast of the car that holds the covered bag. It is flung at his feet. He hitches it, and stands ready, waiting for the crowing passengers to come out upon the platform. Only a moment, then—

"All aboard!" he shouts, "all aboard for Van Buren!" and he bounds forward.

As he runs down the steps he glances up the road. Bates is not far away, but his horse is rearing and plunging, made frantic by the shrieking engine before and shouts and blows from behind. The boy looks everything that may make delay, and as he comes up in the rear of the Eclipse he flings the door wide open, lest a would-be passenger waste precious time in fumbling with its old fastenings.

Little Harmony had taken in the long view of the hill road, and taken in it while clinging to the rail of a fence, and as soon as Tom made his dash for the stage, she had scrambled to her place, and sat there mute, but following distressfully his every motion. As he tossed the bag at her feet, she with gentle, reverent hands, adjusted the ungainly thing for ready grasping, for having seen its value in one peep, she had faith in it as a passport through all perils.

Only three passengers appeared, active men—Tom knew them all—and he sprang to his seat, gathered up his reins, waved away his groom, and was off before they were fairly seated. But he went at a slow pace, seeming to fear any stoppage as little as if he drove the chariot of the sun.

"Stop, you thief!" yelled the fuming Bates; and "Stop, you thief!" echoed McMahon.

The stage was brought to a standstill.

"You audacious rascal," shouted Bates. He flourished his whip, and in his frenzy he might have

struck at Tom had not Harmony suddenly pushed in front, lifting into sight with both hands her bear-hope, her last refuge, the mail-bag. Her sunbonnet had fallen off again; her tossing hair was blown backward on the breeze; her great, wide-open eyes were tearless, and there was not a tremor in her piping voice.

"The United States mail," she cried; "the United States mail!"

The passengers had alighted, and stood gazing at her as if she had been from another world; but Bates was in too great a rage to be impressed by any mortal presence.

"Come down here, you young scamp," he shouted, "and I'll teach you a lesson!"

"No, thank you, sir," said Tom, gently restraining Harmony lest she should lose her balance. "Another time I might oblige you; but just now I happen to have the United States mail in charge, and—"

"What's the trouble?" asked a passenger.

"The rascal has stolen my horse that I bought of Cushman!" Bates danced about and waved his arms.

"Papa did n't sell Dinah, papa did n't," insisted the little girl.

"Does any one here believe that Mr. Cushman sold that mare for seventy-five dollars?" asked Tom, stretching out his whip-hand over Dinah's back.

Some one blew a low, long "Whew-ew-ew!" that partly soothed McMahon and made Bates realize the danger of delay.

"Constable," he roared, "I can't stay here talking all the afternoon. Unhitch the little beast!" and he began to unharness her.

"Constable," said Tom, "get me another horse, then. You must see that I am not interfered with in my duties as Mr. Wright's agent. Wright does n't stand fooling, you know."

"What's this? A breakdown?" asked some one who came panting up behind. "Lucky thing for me. I might have had to foot it all the way home. What was your hurry, Tom? I scrambled along about as spryly as an old man like me can be expected—"

"Oh, papa, papa, did you sell my Dinah?"

Mr. Cushman—for it was he, returned a train earlier than he had planned—caught his little girl as she sprang.

"Sell your Dinah? I guess not—I guess not! Not a hair or a shred of anything my linnet claims. Who says I sold your Dinah?"

But the tired little thing had buried her face on his neck and was crying.

Tom showed him Dinah, and told the story.

"The rascal!" he exclaimed. "I told him she was not for sale, and that, if she were, three hundred would n't buy her. Where is he?"

"There he is," said an impatient passenger, pointing to a buggy that was flying over the hill, "and now let's follow his example."

In a trice the stage was rumbling forward.

At the Cushman gate stood grandma, with a placid face.

"I'm so glad," she said, "that you were able to settle the matter without parting with Dinah."

"How 'settled' it, Mrs. Cushman?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"Why, Mr. Bates said they had made a new deal, and he's taken Prince and gone."

"Well, he ought to be arrested, I suppose; but let him go. He has n't got any more than belongs to him now," said the easy-going, mild old man, his anger over; "but as for you, my boy, I'll see that you're paid for this day's work; I'll make it all right for you."

"You made it all right for me years ago, Mr. Cushman," replied Tom, as gravely as if he were looking back over the various ups and downs of fifty years of life instead of fifteen.

## WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

By ANNA HARRISS JESSUP.

A WORTHLESS but shrewd fellow from Ain Zibde, who went to Damascus on business, got into some scrap; or other, and started for home very suddenly, and snatching up on the way, and taking with him from the city, a drum left by some children on a deserted mill. There was no place to sleep except in the hopper over the great millstones.

Very early he was awakened by a shuffling near him, and as it grew light he saw that a good-sized bear had come into the mill and was snuffing about, getting uncomfortably near. The man had no weapon, but began to bear on the drum. The bear was terrified and tried to dash out of the door, but one of his clumsy sidewise motions hit the door and closed it.

So the man and the bear were imprisoned within the mill together. The man did n't dare get out and open the door, and the bear started for him; so he beat his drum, and the bear dashed around; and he kept on pounding, and the bear became frantic, tearing around and stirring up the white dust. Soon some muleteers with mules laden with pottery came by. They heard the sound of the drum, and wondered, and opened the door of the mill. As soon as it was opened, out dashed the bear, scattering the men, and causing a panic among the mules, who dashed off, breaking all the pottery against the rocks.

The bear escaped to the mountains.

The muleteers, angry at their loss, came in and found the man climbing out of the hopper. "We'll have the law on you; your bear has broken all our jars. Give us five hundred piasters, the price of what we have lost!"

"Give you five hundred piasters, indeed! Give me back that bear! I want my bear! Did n't you see me teaching him to dance. And you let him out, and now he's gone!"

But the muleteers took him off with them to Damascus to the judge. He listened to the muleteers, and then to Simple Simon. The latter demanded justice for the loss of his bear, let loose by the muleteers, and so glib was he that he got sentence in his favor. The muleteers lost their pottery and had to pay two thousand piasters for the bear, and departed.

Simple Simon went his way rejoicing, met some travelers, and told of his good fortune.

"And where are your piasters?"

"Right here in my belt."

"Oblige us by presenting us with them," said his new acquaintances, who happened to be friends of the muleteers; and they fell on him and relieved him of the entire sum—and even took from him the drum he had stolen. One of them recognized it, and said he would restore it to its young owner.

So the man from Ain Zibde got his deserts, after all, being punished for his theft, his trickery, and his falsehood.