

# The Daredevil

By Maria Thompson Davies  
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### SYNOPSIS

Roberta, an orphan, half French, half American, starting for America to stay with an uncle, meets Count de Lasselles crossing to secure mules for France.

By a mistake, Roberta's uncle believes she is a nephew. Knowing him to be a woman later, Roberta adopts man's attire.

Her uncle, General Carruthers, informs his supposed nephew that he needs his knowledge of French to straighten out a deal for providing mules for France. The governor's honor is involved in the mule deal.

### CHAPTER IV.

"Here's My Boy, Governor."

AND it was on route to the mansion of the governor of the state of Harpeth that my uncle, the General Robert, did enlighten me as to the urgent need of me in his affairs of business.

"It is a question of mules, sir, and of a dishonor to the state that I'm going to prevent if my hot old head is laid low in doing it, as it probably will be if I get into the ruckus with Jefferson Whitworth that now threatens. They have insinuated themselves into the confidence of Governor Faulkner until they have made it well nigh impossible for him to see the matter except as they put it. They will get his signature to the rental grant of the lands, make a getaway with the money and let the state crash down upon his head when it finds out that he has been led into bringing it and himself into dishonor. Why, dash it, sir, I'd like to have every one of them, especially Jeff Whitworth, at the end of a halter and feed him a raw mule, hoof and ears. I'm probably going to be done to death all alone before the pack of wolves, but I'm going to die hard—for Bill Faulkner, who holds in his hand the honor of his state and my state, I'll die hard!" And he spoke the words with such a fierceness that his white mustache, which was waxed with the propriety of the world, divided like crossed silver swords beneath his straight nose with its thin and trembling nostrils.

"It will be that I can help you protect this honor of the Governor Faulkner and the state of Harpeth, will it not, my Uncle Robert?" I asked with a great anxiety. "If you must fall on the field of honor it will be the glory of Robert Carruthers of Grez and Bye to fall beside you, sir. I am a very good sport, my father has said."

"God bless my soul, how like Henry you are, boy!" exclaimed my uncle, the General Robert, and he did lay one of his long and very strong arms across my shoulder and give to me the embrace for which I had so longed, but for not enough time for me to yield myself to it. "Henry always wanted to tag 'Brother Bob,' and he, too, would—have died—fighting for me—at my side. I've been hard—and when I heard of his death—I wanted you, boy, I wanted you more— Now, what do you mean, sir, by making me forget for one moment the fix Bill Faulkner and I are in?" And my uncle, the General Robert, gave to me a good shake, as he extracted his very large white handkerchief and blew upon his nose with such power that the black chauffeur looked around at us and made the car to jump even as he and I had done.

"And those mules that it would be your wish to feed to that Mr. Jeff Whitworth, my Uncle Robert, will you not tell me further about them? In Paris it is said that they are a very good food when made fat after being killed or wounded in the army. I have—"

"That will do, sir. If you've had to eat mule in Paris don't tell me about it. My constitution wouldn't stand that, though during our war, just before Vicksburg, I ate—but we won't go into that either. Now this is the situation, as much as a lad from the wilds of Paris could understand it. The French government wants 5,000 mules by the fall of the year, and there are no such mules in the world as this state produces. They are sending a man over here to try to make a deal with the state of Harpeth to purchase the mules from private breeders,

graze them on the government lands and deliver them in a lot for shipment the 1st of August at Savannah. There is no authority on the statute book for the state to make such a deal, but Jeff Whitworth has fixed up a sort of contract, that wouldn't hold water in the courts, by which the governor of the state, Williamson Faulkner, grants the grazing rights on the state's lands to a private company, of which he is to be a member, which in a way guarantees the deal. They've made him believe it to be a good financial thing for the state, and he can't see that they are going to buy cheap stock, fatten it on a low rate from the state and hand it over to the French government at a fancy raffle, and then leave him with the bag to hold when the time for settlement and complaint comes. There is a strong Republican party in this state, and they're keeping quiet, but year after next, when

Bill Faulkner comes up for re-election, downright illegality will be alleged, and he will be defeated in dishonor and with dishonor to the state. I am his secretary of state, and I'm going to save him if I can. And you are going to help me, sir!" And as he spoke my uncle, the General Robert, gave to me a distinguished shake of the hand that made my pride to rise in my throat, which gave to my speaking a great huskiness.

"I will help in the rescue of the honor of that Gouverneur Bill Faulkner, my Uncle Robert, with the last breath in my body, and I will also assist to feed mule to that Mr. Jefferson Whitworth, though not to his beautiful wife, whom I do so much admire."

"That's just it; she'll have to eat mule the first one. She's at the governor day and night with her wiles, and in my mind it's her dimly influence that is making him see things with his slant. They say she put her brand on him in early youth. He's the soul of honor, but what chance has a man's soul honor got when a woman wants to cash it in for a fortune with which to lead a gay life? None! None, sir!" And the countenance of my uncle, the General Robert, became so fierce that it was difficult to find words to answer.

"Oh, my Uncle Robert, is it that a woman would make a cheat in giving the mule animal of not sufficient strength to carry food to poor boys of France in the trenches when there is so much mud for gasoline?" I exclaimed with a great horror from knowledge given me by my captain, the Count de Lasselles.

"Just exactly what she is trying to do, boy. Let those poor chaps with guns in their hands to defend her civilization as well as theirs die for want of a supply train hauled by reliable mules when unreliable gasoline fails. That's what women are like." And as he spoke I perceived the depth of dislike that was in the heart of my uncle, the General Robert, for all of woman-kind.

"There are some women who would not so comport themselves, my Uncle Robert. I give you my word as one!"—Then as I hesitated in terror at the revelation of my woman's estate I had been about to make, my uncle, the General Robert, made this remark to me:

"Women are like crows—all black, and the exceptional white one only makes the rest look blacker. The only way to stop them in their depredations is to trap them since the law forbids



"I will help in the rescue."

shooting them." And as he made this judgment of women I forgot for a moment that we discussed that Madam Whitworth whom it was causing me great pain to discover to be the enemy of France, and I thought of my beautiful mother, whom he had judged without ever having encountered, and a great longing rose in my heart so to comfort myself that his heart should learn to trust in me as a man and then discover the honor of woman through me at some future time. I took a resolve that such should be the case, and to that end I asked of him:

"How is it that I can serve you in these serious troubles, my Uncle Robert?" And as I asked that question I made also a vow in my heart against that black crow woman.

"Now, that's what I'm coming to. The French government is sending an army expert down here to look over the situation and make the contracts. I can't speak their heathenish tongue or read it, and I want somebody whom I can trust—trust, mind you—to help me talk with him and make any necessary translations. That Whitworth hussy has been translating for us, and I don't trust her. Your letter was handed to me in the governor's private office, and both he and I saw what a help it would be to have you here when this Frenchie—who is a Count Something or Other—and his servants and secretaries, what he calls his suit, arrive. By George, sir, we need your advice in eating and drinking them. Do you suppose they'll have

intelligence enough to eat the manna of the gods, which is corn pone, and drink the nectar, which is plain whiskey, or will we be expected to furnish them with snails and absinth?"

At that I laughed a very large laugh and made this answer to the perturbation of my uncle, the General Robert:

"I will tell you after luncheon, my Uncle Robert, because I have not as yet eaten in this Harpeth country of America."

"All right; we'll talk about it after you've had one of old Kizzie's fried chicken dinners. Here we are at the mansion. Remember, you know the whole situation and are only supposed to know the part that Governor Bill thinks is the whole. Look at me, boy!" And as the big car drove up to the curb before a great stone house with tall pillars on guard of its front, he laid both his hands upon my shoulders and turned me toward him with force

and no gentleness, and then with his keen eyes did he look down into the very soul of me.

"Yes, I see I can trust, you, sir. God bless you, boy!" he said, after a very long moment of time.

"Yes, my Uncle Robert," I answered him without turning my eyes from his.

"Well, then, here we are. I came to the side door so I wouldn't have to introduce you to any of the boys this morning, for we want to have a talk with the governor before dinner, and I don't dare keep Kizzie waiting. It flies her, and a riled woman burns up things, masters, husbands, cooking or worse. Come on."

"Here's my boy, governor," was all the introduction my uncle, the General Robert, administered to me; then I stood and looked into the face of him whom afterward I discovered to be the greatest gentleman in the world, with my heart beating in my throat and yet astray under my woman's breast in the place it had always before resided, after we had been ushered into the governor's room by an old black servant called Cato.

### CHAPTER V.

"We Both Need You."

I DO not know how it is that I shall find words in which to write down the loveliness of that gouverneur of Old Harpeth. He was not as tall as my uncle, the General Robert, and he was slender and lithe as some wild thing in a forest, but the power in the breadth of his shoulders and in the strength of his nervous hands was of a greatness of which to be frightened—that is, I think, of which a man should be frightened, but in which a woman would take much glory. His hair was of the tarnished gold of a sunset storm, and upon his temples was a curved crest of white that sparkled like the spray of a wave. All of which I must have seen with some kind of inward eyes, for from the moment my eyes lifted themselves from contemplating the carpet in embarrassment over my tweed trousers they were looking into his in a way which at dawn my eyes have gazed into the morning star rising near to me over the little wood at the Chateau de Grez.

"It is good that you have come, Robert Carruthers, for the general and I both need you," were the words I heard him saying to me in a voice that was as deep and of as much interest as the eyes, and as he spoke those words he took one of my hands in both of his strong ones. "And if you say snails, snails it shall be, if Cato and I have to invade every rose garden in Hayessville and vicinity and stay up all night to catch them."

"I think I shall choose that corn pone and whisky that my uncle, the General Robert, has promised to me from one bad tempered cook at the time of my luncheon," I found myself saying with a laugh that answered the barefooted boy who suddenly looked at me out of the cool eyes.

"I thought I would let him have a tryout with Kizzie before we decided to feed the savages," also said my uncle, the General Robert, with a laugh. "Besides, he's one himself, and I'll have to go slow and tame him gradually."

"No, he's ours. He's just come back to his own from a strange land, general, and you'll kill the fatted calf or coozer, whichever Kizzie decides, with joy at getting him." And this time the star eyes gave to me the quick sympathy for which I had prayed before the Virgin with the infant in her arms in the little chapel of the old convent just before we had to flee from the shells, leaving my father to the sisters to bury after the enemy had come. I think my eyes did tell that tale to his, and the tears seched in my throat.

"I know, boy," he said softly, and then turned and presented me to the Mr. Clendenning, who was arranging papers at a desk beside the window.

I do like with my whole heart that funny Buzz Clendenning, who has the reddest hair, the largest brown spectacles on his face and the widest mouth that I have ever beheld. Also, his laugh is even wider than is his mouth, and overflows the remainder of his face in ripples of what is called grin. He is not much taller than am I, but of much more powerful build, as is natural, though he did not at that moment recognize the reason thereof.

"Shake hands, boys. Don't stand looking at each other like young puppies," said my uncle, the General Robert, as he clapped his hand on the back of the Mr. Buzz Clendenning. "You don't have to fight it out. Your fathers licked each other weak about for twenty years."

"Can't I even ask him to take off his coat once, general?" answered that Mr. Buzz with the grin all over his face and spreading to my countenance as he took my hand in his to administer one of those shakes of which I

had had so many since my arrival in America. For a second he looked startled and glanced down at my white hand that he held in his, and from it to my eyes that were looking into his with the entire friendliness of my heart. Suddenly I had a great fright of discovery within me, and my knees began to again tremble together for their skirts, but before that fright had reached my eyes quite I had borne to me an elder brother in the person of that Buzz Clendenning, and I now know that I can never lose him, even when he knows that—

"I'm no shakes in the duel, prince, so let's kiss and make up before you get out your sword," he said as he also, as my uncle, the General Robert, had done, laid an arm across my shoulders in an embrace of affection. It was then I made a discovery in the strange land into which I was penetrating—men have much sentiment in

their hearts that it is impossible for a woman to discover from behind a fan. They keep it entirely for each other as comrades, and I received a large portion of such an affection when that Mr. Buzz Clendenning adopted me in what he thought was my foreign weakness as a small brother to be protected in his large heart.

"I am very happy to so salute you instead of the duel," I made answer and did immediately put a kiss on his



"I made answer and did immediately put a kiss on his one cheek."

one cheek, expecting that he would return it upon my cheeks, first one and then another, as is the custom of comrades and officers in France.

"Help, help! Don't do that again, or I'll call out the police," responded that funny Mr. Buzz Clendenning, as he shook me away from him, while my uncle, the General Robert, and the great gouverneur did both indulge in laughter.

"I am ashamed, and I beg your pardon for offending against the customs of your country. I do remember now that my father did not permit such a salutation from his brother officers, and I will not do so again, M. Buzz Clendenning." I said as my cheeks became crimson with mortification, and tears would have come over my eyes had my pride permitted.

"This is what he meant you to do, Buzz, you duffer. I said goodby to twenty-two of my friends this way the day I set sail from old Heidelberg," and as he spoke that great and beautiful and exalted Gouverneur Faulkner did bend his head to mine and give to me the correct comrade salute of my own country on first one of my cheeks and then upon the other.

"Yes, sir; it's mighty pretty to look at, but I reckon the kid had better stow the habit before he is introduced to Jeff Whitworth and Miles Menefee and the rest of the bunch," said that Mr. Buzz as he left off wiping from his cheek with the back of his hand the kiss I had put there and administered to me another embrace on my shoulders with his long arm. "Besides, youngster, there are girls in Hayessville," he added, with a grin that again was reflected on my face without my will and which did entirely take away my anger and embarrassment at his repulse.

"Girls, girls!" exploded my uncle, the General Robert. "The female young generally known as girls are about as much use to humanity as a bunch of pinfeathers tied with a pink ribbon would be in the place of the household feather duster that the Lord lets them grow into after they reach their years of discretion. Robert has no time to waste with the undressed. Don't even suggest it to him, Clendenning. And now you can take him around to my house and tell Kizzie to begin billing you both up while I wait for a moment to go over these papers with the governor. And both of you avoid the female young, for we've work for you—mind you, work and no gallivanting. Now go! Depart!"

"The old boy is a forty-two centimeter gun that fires at the mention of the lovely sex and doesn't stop until the ammunition gives out," said Mr. Buzz Clendenning as he slid into the seat of his slim gray racer beside me and started from the curb on high without a single kick of the engine. "I'd like to wish a nice girl whom he couldn't shake off on to him for about a week and watch him squirm along to surrender. Wait until you see Sue Tomlinson get hold of him down on the street some day. He shuts his eyes and just fires away at her while she purrs at him, and it is a sight for the gods. Sue's father died and left her with her invalid mother and not enough money to invite in the auctioneer, but the general took some old accounts of the doctor's, collected and invested them and made up plenty of money for Sue's grulstake, though he goes around three blocks to get past her. Sue adores him and approaches him from all sides, but has never made a landing yet. Say, you'll like Sue. She is pretty enough to eat, but don't try to bite. It's no use."

"Is it that this lovely Mlle. Sue does not like gentlemen save my uncle, the General Robert?" I asked with great interest. I was glad in my heart that I was soon to see and speak with a nice girl, even if it had to be in character of a man.

"Oh, she loves us—all!" answered that Mr. Buzz, with the greatest gloom.

"All of us—every blamed son of a gun of us."

"Oh, I comprehend now that it is your wish that she love only you, Mr. Clendenning, and are sad that she does not," I said as I looked at him with much sympathy.

"That is about it, prince, but don't say I said so. Everybody chases Susan. She even wins an occasional ice cream smile from his excellency. I bet she'd go up against that august iceberg itself in a tryout for a 'First Lady of the State' badge if Mrs. Pat Whitworth hadn't got the whole woman bunch to believe she has a corner on his ice. Mrs. Pat is some little cornerer, believe me."

"Oh, I did like that Madam Whitworth, and I hope that it will be my pleasure to see her again soon," I said with an ice in my voice as I caught my breath while Mr. Buzz Clendenning drove between two cars and a wagon with not so much as an inch to spare on all three sides of the car. It is as I like to drive when at the wheel, but sitting beside another—

"You'll see her at the governor's dinner for you Tuesday, if not sooner, and just watch her and the general war dance with each other. He opens his eyes when Mrs. Pat attacks, and he imagines he is the whole Harpeth valley militia defending his excellency of Iceland from her wiles. Just watch him!" And this time it was three wagons that we slid between and beyond.

"Here we are at the general's, and I can smell Kizzie's cream gray with L. Y. mind's nose. I understand that your father was the last Henry Carruthers of five born up in the old mahogany bedstead that the general inhabits between the hours of 1 and 5 a. m. Some shack, this of the general's, isn't it? Nothing finer in the state." And as he spoke that Mr. Buzz Clendenning stopped the car before the home of my uncle, the General Robert, and we alighted from it together.

I do not know how it is that I can put into words the beautiful feeling that rose from the inwardness of me as I stood in front of the home of my fathers in this faraway America. The entire city of Hayessville is a city of old homes I had noticed as I drove in

the gray car so rapidly along with Mr. Buzz Clendenning while he was speaking to me, but no house had been as beautiful as was this one. It was old, with almost the vine covered walls of the Chateau de Grez, but instead of being of graystone it was of a red brick that was as warm as the embers of an oak fire with the film of ashes crusting upon it. Thus it seemed to be both red and gray beneath the vines that were casting delicate green traceries over its walls. Great white pillars were to the front of it like at the mansion of the gouverneur and many wide windows and doors opened out from it. Two old oak trees which give to it the name of Twin Oaks stood at each side of the old brick walk that led from the tall gate, and as I walked under them I felt that I had from a cruel world come home.

(To Be Continued.)

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