



CHAPTER II.

Going to Bed.

Mr. Stagg had fastened Prince's strap to the porch rail and he now came in with the bag.

"Is that all the child's baggage, Joseph Stagg?" asked Aunt Rose, taking it from his hand.

"Why—why, I never thought to ask her," the man admitted. "Have you a trunk check, Carolyn?"

"No, sir."

"They sent you up here with only that bag?" Mr. Stagg said with some exasperation.

"Mrs. Price said—said they weren't suitable," explained the little girl, "you see, they aren't black."

"Oh!" exploded her uncle.

"You greatly lack tact, Joseph Stagg," said Aunt Rose, and the hardware dealer cleared his throat loudly as he went to the sink to perform his pre-supper ablutions.

"Alone!" said Uncle Joe gruffly. "I will show you the room Hannah Stagg had for her own when she was a girl."

"Thank you, Aunt Rose," said the little girl humbly.

"She picked up the bag and followed the stately old woman into the back hall and up the stairway into the ell. Carolyn May saw that at the foot of the stairs was a door leading out upon the porch where Prince was now moving about uneasily at the end of his leash.

"Do you need any help, child?" asked Mrs. Kennedy, standing in her soldierly manner in the doorway. It was dusky there and the little girl could not see her face.

"Oh, no, ma'am," said Carolyn May faintly.

"Very well," said Aunt Rose and turned away. Carolyn May stood in the middle of the room and listened to her descending footsteps.

"Just like a big, big pillow," thought the little girl. "And if I do get into it I'm liable to sink down and down and down till I'm buried, and won't ever be able to get up in the morning."

"The window was open and she went to it and looked out. A breath of honeysuckle blew in. Then, below, on the porch, she heard the uneasy movements of Prince. And he whined.

quite as sternly as before. The little girl approached her. The old lady sat in one of the straightest of the straight-backed chairs, her hands in her comfortable lap.

"If you wish to say your prayers here, before going upstairs, you may, Carolyn May," she said.

"Oh, may I?" gasped the little girl. She dropped her hands into Aunt Rose's lap. Somehow they found those larger, comforting hands and cuddled into them as the little girl sank to her knees on the braided mat.

If the simple "Now I Lay Me" was familiar to Aunt Rose's ear from long ago she gave no sign. When the



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earnest little voice added to the formal supplication a desire for the blessing of "Uncle Joe and Aunt Rose" the latter's countenance retained its composure.

She asked a blessing upon all her friends, including the Prices, and even Prince. But it was after that she put the timid question to Aunt Rose that proved to be almost too much for that good woman's studied calm.

"Aunt Rose, do you p'pose I might ask God to bless my mamma and papa, even if they are lost at sea? Somehow I don't think it would seem so lonesome if I could keep that in my prayer."

CHAPTER III.

"Well—She'll Be a Nuisance." Mr. Joseph Stagg, going down to his store, past the home and carpenter shop of Jeddiah Parlow, at which he did not even look, finally came to his destination in a very brown study.

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"And I tell you what I think, mother," Chet said, with his mouth full, at supper that evening. "I think her coming's going to bring about changes. Yes, ma'am!"

"But he pays you, Chet," his mother said anxiously.

"Yes, I know. Don't be afraid I'll leave him till I see something better," he reassured her. "But I might be clerkin' for him till the cows come home and never see more'n six or eight dollars a week. But now it's apt to be different."

"How different, Chet?" she asked, puzzled.

"You know Mr. Stagg's as hard as nails—as hard as the goods he sells," declared the gawky boy. "Mind you, he don't do nothin' mean. That ain't his way. But he don't seem to have a mite of interest in anything but his shop. Now, it seems to me, this little niece is bound to wake him up. He calls her 'Hannah's Car'lyn.'"

"Hannah Stagg was his only sister," said Mrs. Gormley softly. "I remember her."

"And she's just died, or something, and left this little girl," Chet continued. "Mr. Stagg's bound to think of something now besides business. And maybe he'll need me more. And I'll get a chance to show him I'm worth something to him. So, by and by, he'll put me forward in the business," said the boy, his homely face glowing.

"Who knows? Maybe it'll be Stagg & Gormley over the door one of these days. Stranger things have happened."

"Perhaps even Chetwood's assurance would have been quenched had he just then known the thoughts in the hardware merchant's mind. Mr. Stagg sat in his back office poring over the letter written by his brother-in-law's lawyer friend, a part of which read:

From the above recital of facts you will plainly see, being a man of business yourself, that Mr. Cameron's financial affairs were in a much worse condition when he went away than he himself dreamed of. I immediately looked up the Stonebridge Building and Loan association. It is even more moribund than the papers state. The fifteen hundred dollars Mr. Cameron put into it from time to time might just as well have been dropped into

You know he had only his salary on the Morning Beacon. They were rather breaking down, when they saw his health going to the Mediterranean as correspondent. He was to furnish articles on "The Debris of a World War"—stories of the peaceful sections of Europe which have to care for the human wrecks from the battlefields.

If rather cramped Mr. Cameron's immediate resources for your sister to go with him, and he drew ahead on his expense and salary account. I know that Mrs. Cameron feared to allow him to go alone across the ocean. He was really in a bad way; but she proposed to come back immediately on the Dunraven if he improved on the voyage across.

Their means really did not allow of their taking the child; the steamship company would not hear of a half-fare for her. She is a nice little girl, and my wife would have been glad to keep her longer, but in the end she would have to go to you, as, I understand, there are no other relatives.

Of course the flat is here, and the furniture. If you do not care to come on to attend to the matter yourself, I will do the best I can to dispose of either or both. Mr. Cameron had paid a year's rent in advance—rather an unwise thing, I thought—and the term has still ten months to run. He did it so that his wife, on her return from abroad, might have no worry on her mind. Perhaps the flat might be sublet, furnished, to advantage. You might state your pleasure regarding this.

You will see, by the copy of your brother-in-law's will that I enclose, that you have been left in full and sole possession and guardianship of his property and affairs, including Carolyn May.

And if somebody had shipped him a crocodile from the Nile Joseph Stagg would have felt little more at a loss as to what disposal to make of the creature than he felt now regarding his little niece.

"Well—she'll be a nuisance; an awful nuisance," was his final comment, with a mountainous sigh.

Thus far, Aunt Rose Kennedy's attitude towards the little stranger had been the single pleasant disappointment. Aunt Rose was an autocrat. Joseph Stagg had never been so comfortable in his life as since Mrs. Kennedy had taken up the management of his home. But he stood in great awe of her.

He put the lawyer's letter in the safe. For once he was unable to respond to a written communication promptly. Although he wore that band of crepe on his arm he could not actually realize the fact that his sister Hannah was dead.

Any time these fifteen years he might have run down to New York to see her. First she had worked in the newspaper office as a stenographer. Then she had married John Lewis Cameron and they had gone immediately to housekeeping.

Cameron was a busy man; he held a "desk job" on the paper. Vacations had been hard to get. And before long Hannah had written about her baby—"Hannah's Car'lyn."

After the little one's arrival there seemed less chance that before for the city family to get up to Sunrise Cove. But at any time he might have gone to them. If Joseph Stagg had shut up his store for a week and gone to New York, it would not have brought the world to an end.

Nor was it because he was stingy that he had not done this. No, he was no miser. But he was fairly buried in his business. And there was no "look up" in that dim little office in the back of the hardware store.

On this evening he closed the store later than usual and set out for The Corners slowly. To tell the truth, Mr. Stagg rather shrank from arriving home. The strangeness of having a child in the house disturbed his tranquillity.

The kitchen only was lighted when he approached; therefore he was reassured. He knew Hannah's Car'lyn must have been put to bed long since. It was dark under the trees and only long familiarity with the walk enabled him to reach the back porch noiselessly. Then it was that something scrambled up in the dark and the roar of a dog's barking made Joseph Stagg leap back in fright.

"That mongrel!" he ejaculated, remembering Prince.

The kitchen door opened, revealing Aunt Rose's ample figure. Prince whined sheepishly and dropped his abbreviated tail, going to lie down again at the extreme end of his leash and blinking his eyes at Mr. Stagg.

"The critter's as savage as a bear!" grumbled the hardware merchant.

"He is a good watchdog; you must allow that, Joseph Stagg," Aunt Rose said calmly.

The hardware dealer gasped again. It would be hard to say which had startled him the most—the dog or Aunt Rose's manner.

(To be continued)

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