

A Man for the Ages

A Story of the Builders of Democracy

By Irving Bacheller

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CHAPTER VIII.

Wherein Abe Announces His Purpose to Be a Candidate for the Legislature, at Kelo'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 butternut background striped into large checks.

"This—is this my new suit," Harry answered, looking down at it. "It's a tiresome suit," said she impatiently. "I've been playing checkers on it since I caught sight of you, and I've got a man crowned in the king now."

"I thought you'd like it," he answered, quite seriously, and with a look of disappointment. "Say, I've got that razor and I've shaved three times already. '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 I 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. She nodded 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 of sick. Come into the store 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.

thought his apple was the biggest thing in the world. We're all a good deal like him. We keep dropping our apples and calling for the boat to stop. Soon we find out that there are many apples in the world as good as that one. You have all come to a stretch of bad water up at your house. The folks have been sick. They're a little lonesome and discouraged. 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 help me 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 mail?" 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, hissed 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 resumed her sewing by the fire. Little Joe came and stood by her knee and gave his oft repeated blessing: "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, Harry," she answered.

She observed that there were tears in his eyes. "We are all very fond of you," she said, as she bent to her task. 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 found a fool, you're lucky to have found it out so soon," said Sarah. "She does little but ride the pony and play around with a gun. I don't believe she ever spun a hank o' yarn in her life. She'll get her teeth cut by and by."

Then fell a moment of silence. Soon she said: "There's a bitter wind blowing and there's no hurry about the rails, I guess. You sit here by the fire and read your book this forenoon. 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 debate in the tavern on the issues of the day, in which Abe won the prize of all for an able presentation of the claim 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 resolution led to a like insanity in others and an age of unexampled hairiness 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 Kelsos. That night Harry stayed at home with the children. Kelo was in his best mood. "Come," he said, when dinner was ready. "Life is more than friendship. It is partly meat." "And mostly Kelo," said Doctor Allen. "Ah, Doctor! Long life has made you as smooth as an old shilling and nimbler than a sixpence," Kelo declared. "And, speaking of life, Aristotle said that the learned and the unlearned were as the living and the dead."

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is a sure foundation to build your life upon." Kelo paused to pour whisky 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.



'I'd Like to Read My Declaration to the Voters.'

Samson's diary briefly describes this appeal as follows: "He said that 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 usury 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 Kelo. "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 and soon became its captain. On the tenth of April he and Harry Needles left for Richland to go into training. Samson was eager to go, but could not leave his family.

Bim Kelso rode out into the fields where Harry was at work the day before he went away. "I'm going away," the boy said, in a rather mournful tone. "I hate to have you go. I just love to know you're here, if I don't see you. Only I wish you was older and knew more." There was half a moment of silence. She ended it by saying: "Ann and I are going to the spelling school tonight."

"Can I go with you?" "Could you stand it to be talked to and scolded by a couple of girls till you didn't care what happened to you?" "Yes; I've got to be awful careless." "We'll be all dressed up and ready at quarter of eight. Come to the tavern. I'm going to have supper with Ann. She is just terribly happy. John McNeil has told her that he loves her. It's a secret. Don't you tell." "I won't. Does she love him?" "Devotedly; but she wouldn't let him know it—not yet. I reckon he'll be plumb anxious before she owns up. But she truly loves him. She'd die for him." "Girls are awful curious—nobody can tell what they mean," said Harry. "Sometimes they don't know what they mean themselves. Often I say something or do something and wonder and wonder what it means. Did you ever ride a horse sitting backwards—when you're going one way and looking another and you don't know

what's coming?" she asked. "What's behind you is before you and the faster you is before you you're in?" Harry laughed. "Isn't that the way we have to travel in this world, whether we're going to love or to mill?" the girl asked, with a sigh. "We cannot tell what is ahead. We see only what is behind us. It is very sad."

Harry looked at Bim. He saw the tragic truth of the words and suddenly her face was like them. Unconsciously in the midst of her playful talk this thing had fallen. He did not know what to make of it. "I feel sad when I think of Abe," said Harry. "He don't know what is ahead of him, I guess. I know what Mrs. Traylor says that he was in love with Ann."

"I reckon he is, but he don't know how to show it. He's never told her. I reckon he's mighty good, but he don't know how to love a girl. Did you ever see an elephant talking with a cricket?" "Not as I remember," said Harry. "I never did myself, but if I did, I'm sure they'd both look very tired. It would be still harder for an elephant to be engaged to a cricket. I don't reckon the elephant's love would fit the cricket or that they'd ever be able to agree on what they'd talk about. It's some that way with Abe and Ann. She is small and spry; he is slow and high. She'd need a ladder to get up to his face, and I just tell you it ain't purty when ye get there. She ain't got a chance to love him."

"I love him," said Harry. "I think he's a wonderful man. I'd fight for him till I died. John McNeil is nothing but a grasshopper compared to him." "That's about what my father says," Bim answered. "I love Abe, too, and so does Ann, but it ain't the hope to die, marryin' love. It's like a man's love for a man or a woman's love for a woman. John McNeil is handsome—he's just plumb handsome, and smart, too. He's bought a big farm and is going into the grocery business. Mr. Rutledge says he'll be a rich man."

"I shouldn't wonder. Is he going to the spelling school?" "No, he went off to Richland today with my father to join the company. They're going to fight the Indians, too." The shell sounded for dinner. Bim started for the road at a gallop, waving her hand. He unhitched his team and followed it slowly across the black furrows toward the barn. He did not go to the spelling school. Abe came at seven and said that he and Harry would have to walk to Springfield that night and get their equipment and take the stage in the morning. Abe said if they started right away they could get to the Globe tavern by midnight. In the hurry and excitement Harry forgot the spelling school. To Bim it was a tragic thing. Before he went to bed that night he wrote a letter to her.

CHAPTER IX.

In Which Bim Kelso Makes History, While Abe and Harry and Other Good Citizens of New Salem Are Making an Effort to That End in the Indian War.

In the midst of springtime there came cheering news from the old home in Vermont—a letter to Sarah from her brother, which contained the welcome promise that he was coming to visit them and expected to be in Beardstown about the fourth of May. Samson drove across country to meet the steamer. He was at the landing when the Star of the North arrived. He saw every passenger that came ashore, and Eliphalet Biggs, leading his big bay mare, was one of them, but the expected visitor did not arrive. There would be no other steamer bringing passengers from the East for a number of days.

Samson went to a store and bought a new dress and sundry bits of finery for Sarah. He returned to New Salem with a heavy heart. Sarah stood in the open door as he drove up. "Didn't come," he said mournfully. Without a word, Sarah followed him to the barn, with the lantern in her hand. He gave her a hug as he got down from the wagon. He was little given to like displays of emotion. "Don't feel bad," he said. "I've given them up—I don't believe we shall ever see them again," said Sarah, as they were walking toward the door. "I think I know how the dead feel who are so soon forgotten."

"Ye can't blame 'em," said Samson. "They've probably heard about the Injun scare and would expect to be massacred if they came." Indeed the scare, now abating, had spread through the border settlements and kept the people awake o' nights. Samson and other men, left in New Salem, had met to consider plans for a stockade. "And then there's the fever an' ague," Samson added. "Sometimes I feel sorry I told 'em about it, because they'll think it worse

lighted his candle lantern and went out to do his chores while Sarah, partly reconciled to her new disappointment, dressed and began the work of another day. So they and Abe and Harry and others like them each under the urge of his own ambition, spent their great strength in the building and defense of the republic and grew prematurely old. Their work began and ended in darkness and often their days were doubled by the burdens of the night. So in the reckoning of their time each year was more than one.

Sarah went down to the village in the afternoon of the next day. When Samson came in from the fields to his supper she said: "Mr. Biggs is stopping at the tavern. He brought a new silk dress and some beautiful linen for Mrs. Kelso. He tells her that Bim has made a new man of him. Claims he has quit drinking and gone to work. Bim and her mother are terribly excited. He wants them to move to St. Louis and live on his big plantation in a house next to his—rent free."

Samson knew that Biggs was the type of man who weds virtue for dowry. "A man's judgment is needed there," said he. "It's a pity Jack is gone. Biggs will take that girl away with him sure as shooting if we don't look out." "Oh, I don't believe he'd do that," said Sarah. "I hope he has turned over a new leaf and become a gentleman."

"We'll see," said Samson. They saw and without much delay the background of his pretensions, for one day within the week he and Bim rode away and did not return. Soon a letter came from Bim to her mother, mailed at Beardstown. It told of their marriage in that place and said that they would be starting for St. Louis in a few hours on the Star of the North. She begged the forgive-

than it is. But we've got to tell the truth if it kills us." "Yes; we've got to tell the truth," Samson rejoined. "There'll be a railroad coming through here one of these days and then we can all get back and forth easy. If it comes it's going to make us rich. Abe says he expects it within three or four years." Sarah had a hot supper ready for him. As he stood warming himself by the fire she put her arms around him and gave him a little hug. "You poor tired man!" she said. "How patient and how good you are!" There was a kind of apology for this moment of weakness in her look and manner. Her face seemed to say: "It's silly but I can't help it."

"I've been happy all the time, for I knew you was waiting for me," Samson remarked. "I feel rich every time I think of you and the children. Say, look here." He untied the bundle and put the dress and finery in her lap. "Well, I want to know!" she exclaimed, as she held it up to the candlelight. "That must have cost a pretty penny." "I don't care what it cost—it ain't half good enough—not half," said Samson. As he sat down to his supper he said:

"I saw that slaver, Biggs, get off the boat with his big bay mare. There was a ducky following him with another horse." "Good land!" said Sarah. "I hope he isn't coming here. Mrs. Onstot told me today that Bim Kelso has been getting letters from him." "She's such an odd little critter and she's got a mind of her own—anybody could see that," Samson reflected. "She ought to be looked after purty careful. Her parents are so taken up with shooting and fishing and books they kind o' forget the girl. I wish you'd go down there tomorrow and see what's up. Jack is away, you

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