

The BROWN MOUSE

by Herbert Quick



SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Jennie Woodruff contemptuously refuses to marry Jim Irwin, young farm hand, because of his financial condition and poor prospects. He is intellectually above his station, and has advanced ideas concerning the possibilities of expert school teaching, for which he is ridiculed by many.

CHAPTER II.—More as a joke than otherwise Jim is selected as teacher of the Woodruff district school.

CHAPTER III

What Is a Brown Mouse?

Immediately upon the accidental election of Jim Irwin to the position of teacher of the Woodruff school, he developed habits somewhat like a ghost's or a bandit's. That is, he walked of nights and on rainy days.

On fine days, he worked in Colonel Woodruff's fields as of yore. Jim's salary was to be just \$300 for nine months' work in the Woodruff school, and he was to find himself—and his mother. Therefore, he had to indulge in his loose habits of night walking and roaming about after hours only, or on holidays and in foul weather.

The Simms family, being from the "mountains" of Tennessee, were rather startled one night, when Jim Irwin, homely, stooped and errandless, silently appeared in their family circle about the front door. They had lived where it was the custom to give a whoop from the big road before one passed through the pailin's and up to the house. Otherwise, how was one to know whether the visitor was friend or foe?

From force of habit, Old Man Simms started for his gun-rack at Jim's ap-



Old Man Simms Started for His Gun.

pearance, but the Lincolnian smile and the low slow speech, so much like his own in some respects, ended that.

"Stranger," said Mr. Simms, after greetings had been exchanged, "you're right welcome, but in my kentry you'd find it dangerous to walk in this-way."

"How so?" queried Jim Irwin.

"You'd more'n likely get shot up some," replied Mr. Simms, "unless you whooped from the big road."

"I didn't know that," replied Jim. "I'm ignorant of the customs of other countries. Would you rather I'd whoop from the big road—nobody else will."

"I reckon," replied Mr. Simms, "that we-all will have to accommodate ourselves to the ways here."

Evidently Jim was the Simms' first caller since they had settled on the little brushy tract whose hills and trees reminded them of their mountains. Low hills, to be sure, with only a footing of rocks where the creek had cut through, and not many trees, but down in the creek bed, with the oaks, elms and box-elders arching overhead, the Simmses could imagine themselves beside some run falling into the French Broad, or the Holston. The creek bed was a withdrawing room in which to retire from the eternal black soil and level cornfields of Iowa.

The soil was so poor, in comparison with those black uplands, that the owner of the old wood-lot could find no renter but it was better than the soil in the mountains, and suited the lonesome Simmses much more than a better farm would have done. They were not of the Iowa people anyhow, not understood, not their equals—they were "pore," and expected to stay "pore"—while the Iowa people all seemed to be either well-to-do, or expecting to become so.

Jim Irwin asked Old Man Simms about the fishing in the creek, and whether there was any duck shooting spring and fall.

"We git right smart of these little panfish," said Mr. Simms, "an' Calista done shot two butterball ducks about 'tatar-plantin' time."

Calista blushed—but this stranger, so much like themselves, could not see the rosy suffusion. The allusion gave him a chance to look about him at the family. There was a boy of sixteen, a girl—the duck-shooting Calista—youngee than Raymond—a girl of

eleven, named Virginia, but called Minnie—and a smaller lad who rejoiced in the name of McGeehee, but was merely called Buddy.

Calista squirmed for something to say. "Raymond runs a line o' traps when the fur's prime," she volunteered.

Then came a long talk on traps and trapping, shooting, hunting and the joys of the mountings—during which Jim noted the ignorance and poverty of the Simmses. The clothing of the girls was not decent according to local standards; for while Calista wore a skirt hurriedly slipped on, Jim was quite sure—and not without evidence to support his views—that she had been wearing when he arrived the same regimentals now displayed by Minnie—a pair of ragged blue overalls. Evidently the Simmses were wearing what they had and not what they desired. The father was faded, patched, gray and earthy, and the boys looked better than the rest solely because we expect boys to be torn and patched. Mrs. Simms was invisible except as a gray blur beyond the rain-barrel, in the midst of which her pipe glowed with a regular ebb and flow of embers.

On the next rainy day Jim called again and secured the services of Raymond to help him select seed corn. He was going to teach the school next winter, and he wanted to have a seed-corn frolic the first day, instead of waiting until the last—and you had to get seed corn while it was on the stalk, if you got the best.

No Simms could refuse a favor to the fellow who was so much like themselves, and who was so greatly interested in trapping, hunting and the Tennessee mountains—so Raymond went with Jim, and with Newt Bronson and five more they selected Colonel Woodruff's seed corn for the next year, under the colonel's personal superintendence.

In the evening they looked the grain over on the Woodruff lawn, and the colonel talked about corn and corn selection. They had supper at half past six, and Jennie waited on them—having assisted her mother in the cooking. It was quite a festival.

Jim Irwin was the least conspicuous person in the gathering, but the colonel, who was a seasoned politician, observed that the farm-hand had become a fisher of men, and was angling for the souls of these boys, and their interest in the school. Jim was careful not to flush the coye, but every boy received from the next winter's teacher some confidential hint as to plans, and some suggestion that Jim was relying on the aid and comfort of that particular boy.

Newt Bronson, especially, was leaned on as a strong staff and a very present help in time of trouble. As for Raymond Simms, it was clearly best to leave him alone. All this talk of corn selection and related things was new to him, and he drank it in thirstily. He had an inestimable advantage over Newt in that he was starved, while Newt was surfeited with "advantages" for which he had no use.

"Jennie," said Colonel Woodruff, after the party had broken up, "I'm losing the best hand I ever had, and I've been sorry."

"I'm glad he's leaving you," said Jennie. "He ought to do something except work in the field for wages."

"I've had no idea he could make good as a teacher—and what is there in it if he does?"

"What has he lost if he doesn't?" rejoined Jennie. "And why can't he make good?"

"The school board's against him, for one thing," replied the colonel. "They'll fire him if they get a chance. They're the laughing-stock of the country for hiring him by mistake, and they're irritated. But after seeing him perform tonight, I wonder if he can't make good."

"If he could feel like anything but an underling, he'd succeed," said Jennie.

"That's his heredity," stated the colonel, whose live stock operations were based on heredity. "Jim's a scrub, I suppose; but he acts as if he might turn out to be a Brown Mouse."

"What do you mean, pa?" scoffed Jennie—"a Brown Mouse?"

"A fellow in Edinburgh," said the colonel, "crossed the Japanese waltzing mouse with the common white mouse. Jim's peddling father was a waltzing mouse, no good except to jump from one spot to another for no good reason. Jim's mother is an albino of a woman, with all the color washed out in one way or another. Jim ought to be a mongrel, and I've always considered him one. But the Edinburgh fellow every once in a while got out of his variously-colored, waltzing and albino hybrids, a brown mouse. It wasn't a common house mouse, either, but a wild mouse unlike any he had ever seen. It ran away,

and bit and gnawed and raised hob. It was what we breeders call a Mendelian segregation of genetic factors that had been in the waltzers and albinos all the time—their original wild ancestor of the woods and fields. If Jim turns out to be a brown mouse, he may be a bigger man than any of us. Anyhow, I'm for him."

"He'll have to be a big man to make anything out of the job of a country school teacher," said Jennie.

"Any job's as big as the man who holds it down," said her father.

Next day Jim received a letter from Jennie.

"Dear Jim," it ran. "Father says you are sure to have a hard time—the school board's against you, and all that. But he added 'I'm for Jim, anyhow.' I thought you'd like to know this. Also he said, 'Any job's as big as the man who holds it down.' And I believe this also, and I'm for you, too! You are doing wonders even before the school starts in getting the pupils interested in a lot of things, which, while they don't belong to school work, will make them friends of yours. I don't see how this will help you much, but it's a fine thing, and shows your interest in them. Don't be too original. The wheel runs easiest in the beaten track. Yours, Jennie."

Jennie's caution made no impression on Jim—but he put the letter away, and every evening took it out and read the words, "I'm for you, too!" The colonel's dictum, "Any job's as big as the man who holds it down," was an Emersonian truism to Jim. It reduced all jobs to an equality, and it meant equality in intellectual and spiritual development. It didn't mean, for instance, that any job was as good as another in making it possible for a man to marry—and Jennie Woodruff's "Humph!" returned to kill and drag off her "I'm for you, too!"

(To be continued)

TERHUNE DOG DIES HERO

Pet of Author Loses Life to Save That of Tramp Canine From a Train's Onrush.

Many of the heroes of the stories of Albert Payson Terhune, author of "The Comedy Kid," says the Designer, have been dogs—Scotch collies. You will remember Lad, and his harum-scarum son, Wolf—Wolf of the understanding eyes. Wolf is dead. He died like a thoroughbred. From the Terhune home town in New Jersey comes this story:

"Wolf had constituted himself warder of the Terhune lawns and custodian of the driveways. When motor-party came in and endangered the lives of the puppies playing about the driveways, Wolf, at the first sound of the motor, would dash importantly down into the drive and every puppy would scurry out of harm's way."

"Every evening it was the habit of Wolf to saunter off on a long walk. The exercise, it seems, prepared Wolf for sleep. One night recently Wolf ambled away and—

"Down in the darkness at the railroad station some of the folks were waiting to see the Stroudsburg express flash by. It was a few minutes late. A nondescript dog, with a hunted, homeless droop to his tail, trotted on to the tracks. Far down the line there came the warning screech of the express. The canine tramp didn't pay any attention to it.

"The headlights of the express shot a beam glistening along the rails. Wolf saw the dog and the danger. With a bark and a snap the son of Lad drove the stranger to safety. The express was whistling for a crossing far past the station when they picked up what was Wolf and started for the Terhune home."



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Daddy's Evening Fairy Tale

MARY GRAHAM BONNER

BIRDS TALK

"So we can hear of some of the other birds in the world besides those we see I'm going to tell you of still another Bird Talk they had in the zoo when they told each other who they were and some of their family ways."

"I think," Daddy continued, "that it is nice to hear of different birds around different parts of the world just as it is nice to know of different people and of foreign lands and of interesting places."

"So I will tell you of some more of the birds' own stories about themselves."

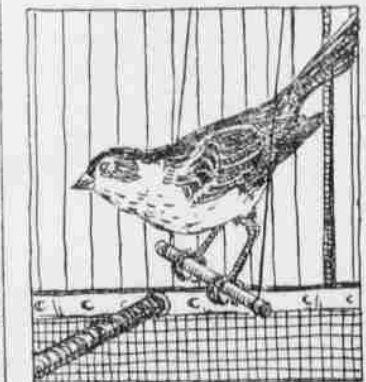
"I," said the Grass Finch, "come from Australia. There I am a very popular cage bird. I am very, very small and dainty."

"We do not mind if we have very small quarters, and we do not mind if the little birdlings share the smallest of quarters with us."

"I mean by quarters the same as any one would mean by speaking of their home. I do not mean money, of course you understand!"

"Well, I have a gray head and I have a black throat and a black tail. The rest of my feathers are a mixture of tan and red and a dull yellow."

"My name," said another bird, "is the Black-Cheeked Love Bird, and I



A Very Popular Cage Bird.

come from East Africa. I have soft black feathered cheeks."

"We welcome the little birds to the zoo. None of us are very strong, but we keep pretty well."

"We have green feathers and red throats and tan heads and our beaks are like the beaks of parrots, only very small."

"I am the Brush-Bronze-Wing Pigeon from Eastern Australia," said the next speaker at the meeting.

"I come from Eastern Australia, as I've said, but you're hearing so many stories that I thought I would repeat that twice so that you are doubly sure of remembering it."

"I like low, swampy underbrush kind of country, and I can fly quickly."

"But I seldom do fly. I have gray-brown wings with touches of green and orange. My breast is gray and slate blue in color, and I am supposed to be very pretty. I hope you all think so, too."

"And the birds all agreed that they did."

"I am the Java Sparrow," said the next one. "I am not very unusual."

"I have white cheeks and a black head and a little of my throat is black, too."

"My beak is pink and my body is of gray slate color, and folks say I'm nice looking."

"The little birdlings are born here in the zoo, too, for they think we have such a big, big home here."

"I've the same name," said another bird, "but I am a special Japanese bird. My beak is pink, too. I think pink is such a cheerful color."

"Dear me, dear me," said the Jackson Whydah bird, "I was afraid that there would not be time for me to tell my story."

"I come from British East Africa. I am black and I am very fat and puffed out and good-natured looking."

"I chirp, chirp, chirp steadily, for I'm fond of chattering."

"I have brownish touches on my wings, and my tail is long and feathery as a nice tail should be, and is curved beautifully."

"It hangs down very far. I'm as proud of the way my tail hangs down as some girls are of the length of their hair."

"I've heard them boasting here in the zoo. One said she could sit on her hair, and her friend almost turned a backward somersault to prove that her hair was long, too!"

"That was a great joke! Well, I believe the meeting is over, but even so, I shall chirp, chirp, chirp."

"And the Jackson Whydah chirped, chirped, chirped," ended Daddy.

To Keep You Guessing.

Read these riddles aloud to the family, withholding the answers, and see how many can guess them!

What three letters frighten a thief?
I C T.

Why is a tooth that has been pulled like a thing forgotten? Because it is out of the head.

What was the first bet ever made?
The alphabet.

What tree stands for number four anywhere? Ivy (IV).

Who was the fastest runner in the world? Adam, because he was first in the human race.



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