

The BROWN MOUSE

by Herbert Quick



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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—Jim, in his new position, sets out to make staunch friends of his pupils, especially two boys, Newton Bronson and "Buddy" Simms, the latter the son of a shiftless farmer. Colonel Woodruff, Jennie's father, has little faith in Jim's ideas of improving rural educational methods. His nickname names him the "Brown Mouse," in illustration of an anecdote.

CHAPTER IV—Jim's conduct of the school, where he endeavors to teach the children the wonders of nature and some of the scientific methods of farming, as well as "book learning," is condemned.

CHAPTER V—Jennie Woodruff is nominated for the position of county superintendent of schools. The school board grows bitter in its opposition to Jim and his innovations.

CHAPTER VI

Jim Talks the Weather Cold.

"Going to the rally, James?" Jim had finished his supper, and yearned for a long evening in his attic den with his cheap literature. But as the district schoolmaster he was to some extent responsible for the protection of the school property, and felt some sense of duty as to exhibiting an interest in public affairs.

"I guess I'll have to go, mother," he replied regretfully. "I want to see Mr. Woodruff about borrowing his Babcock milk tester, and I'll go that way. I guess I'll go on to the meeting."

He kissed his mother when he went—a habit from which he never deviated, and another of those personal peculiarities which had marked him as different from the other boys of the neighborhood. His mother urged his overcoat upon him in vain—for Jim's overcoat was distinctly a bad one, while his best suit, now worn every day as a concession to his scholastic position, still looked passably well after several weeks of schoolroom duty. It seemed more logical to assume that the weather was milder than it really was, on that sharp October evening, and appear at his best, albeit rather aware of the cold. Jennie was at home, and he was likely to see and be seen of her.

"You can borrow that tester," said the colonel, "and the cows that go with it, if you can use 'em. They ain't earning their keep here. But how does the milk tester fit into the curriculum of the school? A decoration?"

"We want to make a few tests of the cows in the neighborhood," answered Jim. "Just another of my fool notions."

"All right," said the colonel. "Take it along. Going to the speakin'?"

"Certainly, he's going," said Jennie, entering. "This is my meeting, Jim."

"Surely, I'm going," assented Jim. "And I think I'll run along."

"I wish we had room for you in the car," said the colonel. "But I'm going around by Bronson's to pick up the speaker, and I'll have a chinch-up lead."

"Not so much of a lead as you think," said Jennie. "You going with Jim. The walk will do me good."

Any candidate warms to her voting population just before election; but Jennie had a special kindness for Jim. He was no longer a farm hand. The fact that he was coming to be a center of disturbance in the district, and that she quite failed to understand how his eccentric behavior could be harmonized with those principles of teaching which she had imbibed at the state normal school in itself lifted him nearer to equality with her. A public nuisance is really more respectable than a nonentity.

She gave Jim a thrill as she passed through the gate that he opened for her. White moonlight on her white furs suggested purity, exaltation, the essence of womanhood—things far finer in the woman of twenty-seven than the glamour thrown over him by the school girl of sixteen.

Jim gave her no thrill; for he looked gaunt and angular in his skimpy, ready-made suit, too short in legs and sleeves, and too thin for the season. Yet, as they walked along, Jim grew upon her. He strode on with immense strides, made slow to accommodate her shorter steps, and embracing her by his entire absence of effort to keep step. For all that, he lifted his face to the stars, and he pointed out the great open spaces in the Milky Way, wondering at their emptiness and at the fact that no telescope can find stars in them.

They stopped and looked. Jim laid his hand on the shoulders of her white fur collar.

"What's the use of political meetings," said Jim, "when you and I can stand here and think our way out, even beyond the limits of our universe?"

"A wonderful journey," said she, not quite understanding his mood, "but while we roam beyond the Milky Way, we aren't getting any votes for me for county superintendent."

Jim said nothing. He was quite re-established on the earth.

"Don't you want me to be elected, Jim?"

Jim seemed to ponder this for some time—a period of taking the matter under advisement which caused Jennie to drop her arm and busy herself with her skirts.

"Yes," said Jim, at last; "of course I do."

Nothing more was said until they reached the schoolhouse door.

"Well," said Jennie rather indignantly, "I'm glad there are plenty of voters who are more enthusiastic about me than you seem to be!"

More interesting to a keen observer than the speeches were the unusual things in the room itself. On the blackboards, with problems in arithmetic, were calculations as to the feeding value of various rations for live stock, records of laying hens and computation as to the excess of value in eggs produced over the cost of feed.

Pinned to the wall were market reports on all sorts of farm products, and especially numerous were the statistics on the prices of cream and butter. There were files of farm papers piled about, and racks of agricultural bulletins. In one corner of the room was a typewriting machine, and in another a sewing machine. Parts of an old telephone were scattered about on the teacher's desk. A model of a piggy bank stood on a shelf, done in cardboard.

Instead of the usual collection of text-books in the desk, there were hectograph copies of exercises, reading lessons, arithmetical tables and essays on various matters relating to agriculture, all of which were accounted for by two or three hand-made hectographs—a very fair sort of printing plant—lying on a table.

The members of the school board were there, looking on these evidences of innovation with wonder and more or less disfavor. Things were disorderly. The text-books recently adopted by the board against some popular protest had evidently been pitched, neck and crop, out of the school by the man whom Bronner had termed a dub. It was a sort of contempt for the powers that be.

Colonel Woodruff was in the chair. After the speechifying was over, and the stereotyped, though rather illogical, appeal had been made for voters of the one party to cast the straight ticket, and for those of the other faction to scratch, the colonel rose to adjourn the meeting.

Newton Bronson, safely concealed behind taller people, called out, "Jim Irwin! speech!"

There was a giggle, a slight sensation, and many voices joined in the call for the new schoolmaster.

Colonel Woodruff felt the unwisdom of ignoring the demand. Probably he relied upon Jim's discretion and expected a declination.

Jim arose, steady and bank, and the voices ceased, save for another suppressed titter.

"I don't know," said Jim, "whether this call upon me is a joke or not. If it is, it isn't a practical one, for I can't talk. I don't care much about parties or politics. I don't know whether I'm a Democrat, a Republican or a Populist."

This caused a real sensation. The nerve of the fellow! Really, it must in justice be said, Jim was losing himself in a desire to tell his true feelings. He forgot all about Jennie and her candidacy—about everything except his real, true feelings. This proves that he was no politician.

"I don't see much in this county campaign that interests me," he went on—and Jennie Woodruff reddened, while her seasoned father covered his mouth with his hand to conceal a smile. "The politicians come out into the farming districts every campaign and get us hayseeds for anything they want. They always have got us. They've got us again! They give us clodhoppers the glad hand, a cheap cigar, and a cheaper smile after election; and that's all. I know it, you all know it, they know it. I don't blame them so very much. The trouble is we don't ask them to do anything better."

"I want a new kind of rural school; but I don't see any prospect, no matter how this election goes, for any change in them. We in the Woodruff district will have to work out our own salvation. Our political ring never'll do anything but the old things. They don't want to, and they haven't sense enough to do it if they did. That's all—and I don't suppose I should have said as much as I have!"

There was stark silence for a moment when he sat down, and then as many cheers for Jim as for the prin-

cipal speaker of the evening, cheers mingled with titters and catcalls. Jim felt as if he had made an ass of himself. And as he walked out of the door, the future county superintendent passed by him in high displeasure, and walked home with someone else. Jim found the weather much colder than it had been while coming. He really needed an Eskimo's fur suit.

(To be continued)

Frock in Blue Twill for Business Women



The "Jiffy" frock in blue twill, designed for business women, was displayed at a recent fashion show held in New York.

Simple and Smart Togs for Little Children

In days gone by every child was supposed to go through a period called the awkward age. In reality it was not an awkward age at all, but in those days mothers had not got beyond a certain stereotyped style of youthful dressing and did not understand the possibilities of that age between babyhood and subdeb.

Few things indicate more decidedly the progress of designing than the charming clothes created for the modern child. They are colorful and exquisite, simple and smart, and above everything else, appropriate. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of these frocks and coats is their individuality.

It does not take long for a mother to decide just what particular color is becoming to her small daughter and whether her type calls for frills and ruffles or for an almost exaggerated slowness and lack of ornamentation.

As always, certain phases of grown-up fashions are repeated in miniature. There is, for instance, the sleeveless frock with its wide frill about the neck and the tight-waisted, full-skirted dress which delights the soul of its small owner because it is so like mother's.

Outdoor garments are made of soft, light-weight wools in tones which set off the lovely coloring of childhood. They have trimmings of fur that are suitable to the years of these small persons.

Rich Fabrics Are Used in New Evening Gowns

Gorgeous is the word that best describes the evening modes of the winter. It seems as if the creators of fabrics had surpassed their previous efforts and have given to us such stuffs "as dreams are made of." Rarely has color been handled with such consummate skill and the texture is something to marvel at. On the sheerest of chiffon backgrounds are woven marvelous patterns of metal threads or raised brocaded designs of velvet and chenille. Both Chinese and Persian colors and designs have been reproduced and for those of more conservative tastes there are conventional patterns of wonderful allure.

Metal fabrics, both plain and brocaded, are the medium through which many of the most exclusive houses have interpreted the mode for evening wear. Because of the extreme richness of the fabrics the lines are noticeably simple.

In fact, there is more than a suggestion of the medieval in the straight, unbroken line of some of the new frocks of metal brocade.

Feathers are to be especially popular on hats. Stiff quills give perkiness to felt and velours sports hats, with the new shaving-brush feather as an attractive alternative. The latter type of pompon is of glycerined ostrich, and is most often seen on hats with melon crowns and rolling brims turned up in front.

No Jewels With Sports Clothes. Jewels for sports clothes are not done, really. The two things do not go together, that is all. And yet so many of the girls one meets upon the street show earrings or jeweled hat pins or diamond bracelets or some other incongruous ornament along with their heavy tweeds.

LETTERS THAT WRECK LIVES

How Pests of the Pen Are Tracked by Various Methods and Sometimes Caught.

More anonymous letters are being written today than ever before. This is the alarming verdict of a well-known handwriting and forgery expert.

Seventy per cent of the writers go undiscovered, the remaining 30 per cent being traced by various methods, says London Tit-Bits.

The investigator ascertains, in the first place, whether the recipient of the letter suspects any particular person. If he does, the inquiry naturally is confined to one direction, steps being taken to secure an example of the suspected person's handwriting.

With this to guide him, the investigator compares the handwriting in the example with that in the anonymous letter.

He uses the microscope to enable him to detect minute similarities and differences, and the camera to record and enlarge these details.

Usually the anonymous letter is photographed and enlarged bodily, each individual character in the enlargement being cut out afterward and pasted in a reference album.

All the A's are pasted in one row, all the B's in another and so on. This makes the work of comparing the letters considerably easier.

Frequently it happens that the writer of the anonymous letter is given away by a trifling detail. An uncrossed "t" repeated three times in the same letter sufficed to convict one of these criminals, while joins in the middle of strokes have often led to their downfall.

On the Great Divide.

The Great Divide is a high ridge of land in the United States where occurs the parting of the waters which flow to the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. The name, "The Great Divide," is now commonly applied to a greater extent of country than the "Continental Divide," or watershed proper, says the Detroit News.

It comprises that region in Montana and Wyoming wherein so many of the large rivers of the United States have their source and which possesses within itself all the characteristics of a continent. The arrangement of the elevated land masses in relation to the valleys and plateaus is continental. Its waters flow to the Gulf, the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans and streams rise on its eastern borderland whose waters flow to the Arctic ocean. It is the natural geographical center of North America.

Translated into food, at the price the farmer gets it takes 63½ dozen, or 762, eggs to pay a plasterer for one day of eight hours' work in New York city. It takes 17½ bushels of corn, or a year's receipts from half an acre, to pay a bricklayer one day. It takes 23 chickens weighing three pounds each to pay a painter for one day's work in New York. It requires 42 pounds of butter, or the output from 14 cows, fed and milked for twenty-four hours, to pay a plumber \$14 a day. To pay a carpenter for one day's work, it takes a hog weighing 175 pounds, representing eight months' feeding and care.—Dearborn Independent.

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