GENE STRATTON-PORTER

MICHAEL O'HALLORAN

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CHAPTER I - Happy Home in Sunrise Alley

"*Aw* KID, *come on! Be square!*"

"*You look out what you say to me.*"

"*But ain't you going to keep your word?*"

"*Mickey, do you want your head busted?*"

"*Naw! But I did your work so you could loaf; now I want the pay you promised me.*"

"*Let's see you get it! Better take it from me, hadn't you?*"

"*You're twice my size; you know I can't, Jimmy!*"

"*Then you know it too, don't you?*"

"*Now look here kid, it's 'cause you're getting so big that folks will be buying quicker of a little fellow like me; so you've laid in the sun all afternoon while I been running my legs about off to sell your papers; and when the last one is gone, I come and pay you what they sold for; now it's up to you to do what you promised.*"

"*Why didn't you keep it when you had it?*"

"*'Cause that ain't business! I did what I promised fair and square; I was giving you a chance to be square too.*"

"*Oh! Well next time you won't be such a fool!*"

Jimmy turned to step from the gutter to the sidewalk. Two things happened to him simultaneously: Mickey became a projectile. He smashed with the force of a wiry fist on the larger boy's head, while above both, an athletic arm gripped him by the collar.

Douglas Bruce was hurrying to see a client before he should leave his office; but in passing a florist's window his eye was attracted by a sight so beautiful he paused an instant, considering. It was spring; the Indians were coming down to Multiopolis to teach people what the wood Gods had put into their hearts about flower magic.

The watcher scarcely had realized the exquisite loveliness of a milk-white birch basket filled with bog moss of silvery green, in which were set maidenhair and three yellow lady slippers, until beside it was placed another woven of osiers blood red, moss carpeted and bearing five pink moccasin flowers, faintly fined with red lavender; between them rosemary and white ladies' tresses. A flush crept over the lean face of the Scotsman. He saw a vision. Over those baskets bent a girl, beautiful as the flowers. Plainly as he visualized the glory of the swamp, Douglas Bruce pictured the woman he loved above the orchids. While he lingered, his heart warmed, glowing, his wonderful spring day made more wonderful by a vision not adequately describable, on his ear fell Mickey's admonition: "Be square!"

He sent one hasty glance toward the gutter. He saw a sullen-faced newsboy of a size that precluded longer success at paper selling, because public sympathy goes to the little fellows. Before him stood one of these same little fellows, lean, tow-haired, and blue-eyed, clean of face, neat in dress; with a peculiar modulation in his voice that caught Douglas squarely in the heart. He turned again to the flowers, but as his eyes revelled in beauty, his ears, despite the shuffle of passing feet, and the clamour of cars, lost not one word of what was passing in the gutter, while with each, slow anger surged higher. Mickey, well aware that his first blow would be all the satisfaction coming to him, put the force of his being into his punch. At the same instant Douglas thrust forth a hand that had pulled for Oxford and was yet in condition.

"Aw, you big stiff!" gasped Jimmy, twisting an astonished neck to see what was happening above and in his rear so surprisingly. Had that little Mickey O'Halloran gone mad to hit *him?* Mickey standing back, his face upturned, was quite as surprised as Jimmy.

"What did he promise you for selling his papers?" demanded a deep voice.

"Twen—ty-*five*," answered Mickey, with all the force of inflection in his power. "And if you heard us, Mister, you heard him own up he was owing it."

"I did," answered Douglas Bruce tersely. Then to Jimmy: "Hand him over twenty-five cents."

Jimmy glared upward, but what he saw and the tightening of the hand on his collar were convincing. He drew from his pocket five nickels, dropping them into the outstretched hand of Douglas, who passed them to Mickey, the soiled fingers of whose left hand closed over them, while his right snatched off his cap. Fear was on his face, excitement was in his eyes, triumph was in his voice, while a grin of comradeship curved his lips.

"Many thanks, Boss," he said. "And would you add to them by keeping that strangle hold 'til you give me just two seconds the start of him?" He wheeled, darting through the crowd.

"Mickey!" cried Douglas Bruce. "Mickey, wait!"

But Mickey was half a block away turning into an alley. The man's grip tightened a twist.

"You'll find Mickey's admonition good," he said. "I advise you to take it. 'Be square!' And two things: first, I've got an eye on the Mickeys of this city. If I ever again find you imposing on him or any one else, I'll put you where you can't. Understand? Second, who is he?"

"Mickey!" answered the boy.

"Mickey who?" asked Douglas.

"How'd I know?" queried Jimmy.

"You don't know his name?" pursued Douglas.

"Naw, I don't!" said the boy.

"Where does he live?" continued Douglas.

"I don't know," answered Jimmy.

"If you have a charge to prefer, I'll take that youngster in for you," offered a policeman passing on his beat.

"He was imposing on a smaller newsboy. I made him quit," Douglas explained. "That's all."

"Oh!" said the officer, withdrawing his hand. Away sped Jimmy; with him went all chance of identifying Mickey, but Bruce thought he would watch for him. He was such an attractive little fellow.

Mickey raced through the first alley, down a street, then looked behind. Jimmy was not in sight.

"Got *him* to dodge now," he muttered. "If he ever gets a grip on me he'll hammer me meller! I'm going to have a bulldog if I half starve to buy it. Maybe the pound would give me one. I'll see to-morrow."

He looked long, then started homeward, which meant to jump on a car and ride for miles, then follow streets and alleys again. Finally he entered a last alley that faced due east. A compass could not have pointed more directly toward the rising sun; while there was at least half an hour each clear morning when rickety stairs, wavering fire-escapes, flapping washes, and unkept children were submerged in golden light. Long ago it had been named. By the time of Mickey's advent Sunrise Alley was as much a part of the map of Multiopolis as Biddle Boulevard, and infinitely more pleasing in name. He began climbing interminable stairs. At the top of the last flight he unlocked his door to enter his happy home; for Mickey had a home, and it was a happy one. No one else lived in it, while all it contained was his.

Mickey knew three things about his father: he had had one, he was not square, and he drank himself to death. He could not remember his father, but he knew many men engaged in the occupation of his passing, so he well understood why his mother never expressed any regrets.

Vivid in his mind was her face, anxious and pale, but twinkling; her body frail and overtaxed, but hitting back at life uncomplainingly. Bad things happened, but she explained how they might have been worse; so fed on this

sop, and watching her example, Mickey grew like her. The difficult time was while she sat over a sewing machine to be with him. When he grew stout-legged and self-reliant, he could be sent after the food, to carry the rent, and to sell papers, then she could work by the day, earn more, have better health, while what both brought home paid the rent of the top room back, of as bad a shamble as a self-respecting city would allow; kept them fed satisfyingly if not nourishingly, and allowed them to slip away many a nickel for the rainy day that she always explained would come. And it did.

One morning she could not get up; the following Mickey gave all their savings to a man with a wagon to take her to a nice place to rest. The man was sure about it being a nice place. She had told Mickey so often what to do if this ever happened, that when it did, all that was necessary was to remember what he had been told. After it was over and the nice place had been paid for, with the nickels and the sewing machine, with enough left for the first month's rent, Mickey faced life alone. But he knew exactly what to do, because she had told him. She had even written it down lest he forget. It was so simple that only a boy who did not mind his mother could have failed. The formula worked perfectly.

Morning: Get up early. Wash your face, brush your clothes. Eat what was left from supper for breakfast. Put your bed to air, then go out with your papers. Don't be afraid to offer them, or to do work of any sort you have strength for; but be deathly afraid to beg, to lie, or to steal, while if you starve, freeze, or die, never, never touch any kind of drink.

Any fellow could do that; Mickey told dozens of them so.

He got along so well he could pay the rent each month, dress in whole clothing, have enough to eat, often cooked food on the little gasoline stove, if he were not too tired to cook it, and hide nickels in the old place daily. He had a bed

and enough cover; he could get water in the hall at the foot of the flight of stairs leading to his room for his bath, to scrub the floor, and wash the dishes. From two years on, he had helped his mother with every detail of her housekeeping; he knew exactly what must be done.

It was much more dreadful than he thought it would be to come home alone, and eat supper by himself, but if he sold papers until he was almost asleep where he stood, he found he went to sleep as soon as he reached home and had supper. He did not awaken until morning; then he could hurry his work and get ahead of the other boys, and maybe sell to their customers. It might be bad to be alone, but always he could remember her, and make her seem present by doing every day exactly what she told him. Then, after all, being alone was a very wonderful thing compared with having parents who might beat and starve him and take the last penny he earned, not leaving enough to keep him from being hungry half the time.

When Mickey looked at some of the other boys, and heard many of them talk, he almost forgot the hourly hunger for his mother, in thankfulness that he did not have a father and that his mother had been herself. Mickey felt sure that if she had been any one of the mothers of most other boys he knew, he would not have gone home at all. He could endure cold, hunger, and loneliness, but he felt that he had no talent for being robbed, beaten, and starved; while lately he had fully decided upon a dog for company, when he could find the right one.

Mickey unlocked his door, entering for his water bucket. Such was his faith in his environment that he relocked the door while he went to the water tap. Returning to the room he again turned the key, then washed his face and hands. He looked at the slip nailed on the wall where she had put it. He knew every word of it, but always it comforted him to see her familiar writing, to read aloud what to do next as if it were her voice speaking to him. Evening: "Make up your

bed." Mickey made his. "Wash any dirty dishes." He had a few so he washed them. "Sweep your floor." He swept. "Always prepare at least one hot thing for supper." He shook the gasoline tank to the little stove. It sounded full enough, so he went to the cupboard his mother had made from a small packing case. There were half a loaf of bread wrapped in its oiled paper, with two bananas discarded by Joe of the fruit stand. He examined his pocket, although he knew perfectly what it contained. Laying back enough to pay for his stock the next day, then counting in his twenty-five cents, he had forty cents left. He put thirty in the rent box, starting out with ten. Five paid for a bottle of milk, three for cheese, two for an egg for breakfast.

Then he went home. At the foot of the fire-escape that he used in preference to the stairs, he met a boy he knew tugging a heavy basket.

"Take an end for a nickel," said the boy.

"Thanks," said Mickey. "It's my time to dine. 'Sides, I been done once to-day."

"If you'll take it, I'll pay first," he offered.

"How far?" questioned Mickey.

"Oh, right over here," said the boy indefinitely.

"Sure!" said Mickey. "Cross my palm with the silver."

The nickel changed hands. Mickey put the cheese and egg in his pocket, the milk in the basket, then started. The place where they delivered the wash made Mickey feel almost prosperous. He picked up his milk bottle and stepped from the door, when a long, low wail that made him shudder, reached his ear.

"What's that?" he asked the woman.

"A stiff was carried past to-day. Mebby they ain't took the kids yet."

Mickey went slowly down the stairs, his face sober. That was what his mother had feared for him. That was why she had trained him to care for himself, to save the pennies, so that when she was taken away, he still would have a home.

Sounded like a child! He was halfway up the long flight of stairs before he realized that he was going. He found the door at last, then, stood listening. He heard long-drawn, heart-breaking moaning. Presently he knocked. A child's shriek was the answer. Mickey straightway opened the door. The voice guided him to a heap of misery in a corner.

"What's the matter kid?" inquired Mickey huskily.

The bundle stirred, while a cry issued. He glanced around the room. What he saw reassured him. He laid hold of the tatters, beginning to uncover what was under them. He dropped his hands, stepping back, when a tangled yellow mop and a weazened, bloated girl-child face peered at him, with wildly frightened eyes.

"If you'd put the wind you're wastin' into words, we'd get something done quicker," advised Mickey.

The tiny creature clutched the filthy covers, still staring.

"Did you come to '*get*' me?" she quavered.

"No," said Mickey. "I heard you from below so I came to see what hurt you. Ain't you got folks?"

She shook her head: "They took granny in a box and they said they'd come right back and '*get*' me. Oh, please, please don't let them!"

"Why they'd be good to you," said Mickey largely. "They'd give you"—he glanced at all the things the room lacked, then enumerated—"a clean bed, lots to eat, a window you could be seeing from, a doll, maybe."

"No! No!" she cried. "Granny always said some day she'd go and leave me; then they'd '*get*' me. She's gone! The big man said they'd come right back. Oh don't let them! Oh hide me quick!"

"Well—well—! If you're so afraid, why don't you cut and hide yourself then?" he asked.

"My back's bad. I can't walk," the child answered.

"Oh Lord!" said Mickey. "When did you get hurt?"

"It's always been bad. I ain't ever walked," she said.

"Well!" breathed Mickey, aghast. "And knowing she'd have to leave you some day, your granny went and scared you stiff about the Home folks taking you, when it's the only place for you to be going? Talk about women having the sense to vote!"

"I won't go! I won't! I'll scratch them! I'll bite them!" Then in swift change: "Oh boy, don't. Please, please don't let them '*get*' me."

Mickey took both the small bony hands reaching for him. He was so frightened with their hot, tremulous clutch, that he tried to pull away, dragging the tiny figure half to light and bringing from it moans of pain.

"Oh my back! Oh you're hurting me! Oh don't leave me! Oh boy, oh *dear* boy, please don't leave me!"

When she said "Oh dear boy," Mickey heard the voice of his mother in an hourly phrase. He crept closer, enduring the touch of the grimy claws.

"My name's Mickey," he said. "What's your?"

"Peaches," she answered. "Peaches, when I'm good. Crippled brat, when I'm bad."

"B'lieve if you had your chance you could look the peaches," said Mickey, "but what were you bad for?"

"So's she'd hit me," answered Peaches.

"But if me just pulling a little hurt you so, what happened when she hit you?" asked Mickey.

"Like knives stuck into me," said Peaches.

"Then what did you be bad for?" marvelled Mickey.

"Didn't you ever get so tired of one thing you'd take something that hurt, jus' for a change?"

"My eye!" said Mickey. "I don't know one fellow who'd do that, Peaches."

"Mickey, hide me. Oh hide me! Don't let them '*get*' me!" she begged.

"Why kid, you're crazy," said Mickey. "Now lemme tell you. Where they'll take you *looks* like a nice place. Honest it does. I've seen lots of them. You get a clean soft bed all

by yourself, three big hot meals a day, things to read, and to play with. Honest Peaches, you do! I wouldn't tell you if it wasn't so. If I'll stay with you 'til they come, then go with you to the place 'til you see how nice it is, will you be good and go?"

She burrowed in the covers, screeching again.

"You're scared past all reason," said Mickey. "You don't know anything. But maybe the Orphings' Homes ain't so good as they look. If they are, why was mother frightened silly about them getting *me?* Always she said she just *had* to live until I got so big they wouldn't 'get' me. And I kept them from getting me by doing what she told me. Wonder if I could keep them from getting you? There's nothing of you. If I could move you there, I bet I could feed you more than your granny did, while I know I could keep you cleaner. You could have my bed, a window to look from, and clean covers." Mickey was thinking aloud. "Having you to come home to would be lots nicer than nothing. You'd beat a dog all hollow, 'cause you can talk. If I could get you there, I believe I could be making it. Yes, I believe I could do a lot better than this, and I believe I'd like you, Peaches, you are such a game little kid."

"She could lift me with one hand," she panted. "Oh Mickey, take me! Hurry!"

"Lemme see if I can manage you," said Mickey. "Have you got to be took any particular way?"

"Mickey, ain't you got folks that beat you?" she asked.

"I ain't got folks now," said Mickey, "and they didn't beat me when I had them. I'm all for myself—and if you say so, I guess from now on, I'm for you. Want to go?"

Her arms wound tightly around his neck. Her hot little face pressed against it.

"Put one arm 'cross my shoulders, an' the other round my legs," she said.

"But I got to go down a lot of stairs; it's miles and miles," said Mickey, "and I ain't got but five cents. I spent it all for

grub. Peaches, are you hungry?"

"No!" she said stoutly. "Mickey, hurry!"

"But honest, I can't carry you all that way. I would if I could, Peaches, honest I would."

"Oh Mickey, dear Mickey, hurry!" she begged.

"Get down and cover up 'til I think," he ordered. "Say you look here! If I tackle this job do you want a change bad enough to be mean for me?"

"Just a little bit, maybe," said Peaches.

"But I won't hit you," explained Mickey.

"You can if you want to," she said. "I won't cry. Give me a good crack now, an' see if I do."

"You make me sick at my stummick," said Mickey. "Lord, kid! Snuggle down 'til I see. I'm going to get you there some way."

Mickey went back to the room where he helped deliver the clothes basket. "How much can you earn the rest of the night?" he asked the woman.

"Mebby ten cents," she said.

"Well, if you will loan me that basket and ten cents, and come with me an hour, there's that back and just a dollar in it for you, lady," he offered.

She turned from him with a sneering laugh.

"Honest, lady!" said Mickey. "This is how it is: that crying got me so I went Anthony Comstockin'. There's a kid with a lame back all alone up there, half starved and scared fighting wild. We could put her in that basket, she's just a handful, and take her to a place she wants to go. We could ride most of the way on the cars and then a little walk, and get her to a cleaner, better room, where she'd be taken care of, and in an hour you'd be back with enough nickels in your pocket to make a great, big, round, shining, full-moon cartwheel. Dearest lady, doesn't the prospect please you?"

"It would," she said, "if I had the cartwheel now."

"In which case you wouldn't go," said Mickey. "Dearest lady, it isn't business to pay for undone work."

"And it isn't business to pay your employer's fare to get to your job either," she retorted.

"No, that beats business a mile," said Mickey. "That's an *investment*. You invest ten cents and an hour's time on a gamble. Now look what you get, lady. A nice restful ride on the cars. Your ten cents back, a whole, big, shining, round, lady-liberty bird, if you trust in God, as the coin says the bird does, and more'n that, dearest lady, you go to bed feeling your pinfeathers sprouting, 'cause you've done a kind deed to a poor crippled orphing."

"If I thought you really had the money—" she said.

"Honest, lady, I got the money," said Mickey, "and 'sides, I got a surprise party for you. When you get back you may go to that room and take every scrap that's in it. Now come on; you're going to be enough of a sporting lady to try a chance like that, ain't you? May be a gold mine up there, for all I know. Put something soft in the bottom of the basket while I fetch the kid."

Mickey ran up the stairs.

"Now Peaches," he said, "I guess I got it fixed. I'm going to carry you down; a nice lady is going to put you in a big basket, then we'll take you to the cars and so get you to my house; but you got to promise, 'cross your heart, you won't squeal, nor say a word, 'cause the police will 'get' you sure, if you do. They'll think the woman is your ma, so it will be all right. See?"

Peaches nodded. Mickey wrapped her in the remnants of a blanket, carried her downstairs and laid her in the basket. By turning on her side and drawing up her feet, she had more room than she needed.

"They won't let us on the cars," said the woman.

"Dearest lady, wait and see," said Mickey. "Now Peaches, shut your eyes, also your mouth. Don't you take a chance at saying a word. If they won't stand the basket, we'll carry

you, but it would hurt you less, while it would come in handy when we run out of cars. You needn't take coin only for going, dearest lady; you'll be silver plated coming back."

"You little fool," said the woman, but she stooped to her end of the basket.

"Ready, Peaches," said Mickey, "and if it hurts, 'member it will soon be over, and you'll be where nobody will ever hurt you again."

"Hurry!" begged the child.

Down the long stairs they went and to the car line. Crowded car after car whirled past; finally one came not so full, it stopped to let off passengers. Mickey was at the conductor's elbow.

"Please mister, a lame kid," he pleaded. "We want to move her. Please, please help us on."

"Can't!" said the conductor. "Take a taxi."

"Broke my limousine," said Mickey. "Aw come on mister; ain't you got kids of your own?"

"Get out of the way!" shouted the conductor.

"Hang on de back wid the basket," cried the woman.

With Peaches laid over her shoulder, she swung to the platform, and found a seat, while Mickey grabbed the basket and ran to the back screaming after her: "I got my fare; only pay for yourself." Mickey told the conductor to tell the lady where to leave the car. When she stepped down he was ready with the basket. Peaches, panting and in cold perspiration with pain, was laid in it.

"Lovely part of the village, ain't it, lady?" said Mickey. "See the castles of the millyingaires piercing the sky; see their automobiles at the curb; see the lovely ladies and gents promenading the streets enjoying the spring?"

Every minute Mickey talked to keep the woman from noticing how far she was going; but soon she growled: "How many miles furder is it?"

"Just around a corner, up an alley, and down a side street a step. Nothing at all! Nice promenade for a spry, lovely young lady like you. Evening walk, smell spring in the air. 'Most there now, Peaches."

"Where are ye takin' this kid? How'll I ever get back to the car line?" asked the woman.

Mickey ignored the first question. "Why, I'll be eschorting you of course, dearest lady," he said.

At the point of rebellion, Mickey spoke. "Now set the basket down right here," he ordered. "I'll be back in no time with the lady-bird."

He returned in a few minutes. Into her outstretched palm he counted twenty-two nickels, picked the child from the basket, darted around a corner calling, "Back in a minute," and was gone.

"Now Peaches, we got some steps to climb," he said. "Grip my neck tight and stand just a little more."

"I ain't hurt!" she asserted. "I like seein' things. I never saw so much before. I ain't hurt—much!"

"Your face, your breathing, and the sweating on your lips, is a little disproving," said Mickey, "but I'll have to take your word for it, 'cause I can't help it; but it'll soon be over so you may rest."

Mickey climbed a flight, then sat down until he could manage another. The last flight he rested three times. One reason he laid Peaches on the floor was because he couldn't reach the bed. After a second's pause he made a light, and opened the milk bottle.

"Connect with that," he said. "I got to take the lady back to the cars."

"Oh!" cried the connected child. "Oh Mickey, how good!"

"Go slow!" said Mickey. "You better save half to have with some bread for your supper. Now I got to leave you a little bit, but you needn't be afraid, 'cause I'll lock you in. Nobody will '*get*' you here."

"Now for the cars," said Mickey to his helper.

"What did them folks say?" she asked.

"Tickled all over," answered Mickey promptly.

"That bundle of dirty rags!" she scoffed.

"They are going to throw away the rags and wash her," said Mickey. "She's getting her supper now."

"Sounds like lying," said the woman, "but mebby it ain't. Save me, I can't see why anybody would want a kid at any time, let alone a reekin' bunch of skin and crooked bones."

"You've known folks to want a dog, ain't you?" said Mickey. "Sure something that can think and talk back must be a lot more amusing. I see the parks are full of the rich folks dolling up the dogs, feeding them candy and sending them out for an airing in their automobiles; so it's up to the poor people to look after the homeless children, isn't it?"

"Do you know the folks that took her?"

"Sure I do!" said Mickey.

"Do you live close?" she persisted.

"Yes! I'm much obliged for your help, dearest lady. When you get home, go up to the last attic back, and if there is anything there you want, help yourself. Peaches don't need it now, while there's no one else. Thank you, and good-bye. Don't fly before your wings grow, 'cause I know you'll feel like trying to-night."

Mickey hurried back to his room. The milk bottle lay on the floor, the child asleep beside it. The boy gazed at her. There were strange and peculiar stirrings in his lonely little heart. She was so grimy he scarcely could tell what she looked like, but the grip of her tiny hot hands was on him. Presently he laughed.

"Well fellers! Look what I've annexed! And I was hunting a dog! Well, she's lots better. She won't eat much more, she can talk, and she'll be something alive waiting when I come home. Gee, I'm *glad* I found her."

Mickey set the washtub on the floor near the sleeping child, and filling the dishpan with water, put it over the gasoline burner. Then he produced soap, a towel, and

comb. He looked at the child again, and going to the box that contained his mother's clothing he hunted out a nightdress. Then he sat down to wait for the water to heat. The door slammed when he went after a bucket of cold water, and awakened the girl. She looked at him, then at his preparations.

"I ain't going to be washed," she said. "It'll hurt me. Put me on the bed."

"Put you on my bed, dirty like you are?" cried Mickey. "I guess not! You are going to be a soaped lady. If it hurts, you can be consoling yourself thinking it will be the last time, 'cause after this you'll be washed every day so you won't need skinning alive but once."

"I won't! I won't!" she cried.

"Now looky here!" said Mickey. "I'm the boss of this place. If I say wash, it's *wash!* See! I ain't going to have a dirty girl with mats in her hair living with me. You begged me and begged me to bring you, now you'll be cleaned up or you'll go back. Which is it, back or soap?"

The child stared at him, then around the room.

"Soap," she conceded.

"That's a lady," said Mickey. "Course it's soap! All clean and sweet smelling like a flower. See my mammy's nice white nightie for you? How bad is your back, Peaches? Can you sit up?"

"A little while," she answered. "My legs won't go."

"Never you mind," said Mickey. "I'll work hard and get a doctor, so some day they will."

"They won't ever," insisted Peaches. "Granny carried me to the big doctors once, an' my backbone is weak, an' I won't ever walk, they all said so."

"Poot! Doctors don't know everything," scorned Mickey. "That was *long* ago, maybe. By the time I can earn enough to get you a dress and shoes, a doctor will come along who's found out how to make backs over. There's one that put different legs on a dog. I read about it in the papers I

sold. We'll save our money and get him to put another back on you. Just a bully back."

"Oh Mickey, will you?" she cried.

"Sure!" said Mickey. "Now you sit up and I'll wash you like Mammy always did me."

Peaches obeyed. Mickey soaped a cloth, knelt beside her; then he paused. "Say Peaches, when was your hair combed last?"

"I don't know, Mickey," she answered.

"There's more dirt in it than there is on your face."

"If you got shears, just cut it off," she suggested.

"Sure!" said Mickey.

He produced shears and lifting string after string cut all of them the same distance from her head.

"Girls' shouldn't be short, like boys'," he explained. "Now hang your head over the edge of the tub and shut your eyes so I can wash it," he ordered.

Mickey soaped and scoured until the last tangle was gone, then rinsed and partly dried the hair, which felt soft and fine to his fingers.

"B'lieve it's going to curl," he said.

"Always did," she answered.

Mickey emptied and rinsed the tub at the drain, then started again on her face and ears, which he washed thoroughly. He pinned a sheet around her neck, then she divested herself of the rags. Mickey lifted her into the tub, draped the sheet over the edge, poured in the water, and handed her the soap.

"Now you scour, while I get supper," he said.

Peaches did her best. Mickey locked her in and went after more milk. He wanted to add several extras, but remembering the awful hole the dollar had made in his finances, he said grimly: "No-sir-ee! With a family to keep, and likely to need a doctor at any time and a Carrel back to buy, there's no frills for Mickey. Seeing what she ain't had, she ought to be thankful for just milk."

So he went back, lifted Peaches from the tub and laid her on the floor, where he dried her with the sheet. Then he put the nightdress over her head, she slipped her arms in the sleeves, and he stretched her on his bed. She was so lost in the garment he tied a string under her arms to hold it, and cut off the sleeves at her elbows. The pieces he saved for washcloths. Mickey spread his sheet over her, rolled the bed before the window where she could have air, see sky and housetops, then brought her supper. It was a cup of milk with half the bread broken in, and a banana. Peaches was too tired to eat, so she drank the milk while Mickey finished the remainder. Then he threw her rags from the window, and spread his winter covers on the floor for his bed. Soon both of them were asleep.

CHAPTER II - Moccasins and Lady Slippers

"No messenger boy for those," said Douglas Bruce as he handed the florist the price set on the lady slippers. "Leave them where people may enjoy them until I call."

As he turned, another man was inquiring about the orchids; he too preferred the slippers; but when he was told they were taken, he had wanted the moccasins all the time, anyway. The basket was far more attractive. He refused delivery, returning to his waiting car smiling over the flowers. He also saw a vision of the woman into whose sated life he hoped to bring a breath of change with the wonderful gift. He saw the basket in her hands, and thrilled in anticipation of the favours her warmed heart might prompt her to bestow upon him.

In the mists of early morning the pink orchids surrounded by rosemary and ladies' tresses had glowed and gleamed from the top of a silvery moss mound four feet deep, under a big tamarack in a swamp, through the bog of which the squaw plunged to her knees at each step to uproot them. In the evening glow of electricity, snapped from their stems, the beautiful basket untouched, the moccasins lay on the breast of a woman of fashion, while with every second of contact with the warmth of her body, they drooped lower, until clasped in the arms of her lover, they were quite crushed, then flung from an automobile to be ground to pulp by passing wheels.

The slippers had a happier fate. Douglas Bruce carried them reverently. He was sure he knew the swamp in which they grew. As he went his way, he held the basket, velvet-white, in strong hands, swaying his body with the motion of

the car lest one leaf be damaged. When he entered the hall, down the stairs came Leslie Winton.

"Why Douglas, I wasn't expecting you," she said.

Douglas Bruce held up the basket.

"Joy!" she cried. "Oh joy unspeakable! Who has been to the tamarack swamp?"

"A squaw was leaving Lowry's as he put these in his window," answered Douglas.

"Bring them," she said.

He followed to a wide side veranda, set the basket on a table in a cool spot, then drew a chair near it. Leslie Winton seated herself, leaning on the table to study the orchids. Unconsciously she made the picture Douglas had seen. She reached up slim fingers in delicate touchings here and there of moss, corolla and slipper.

"Never in all my days—" she said. "Never in all my days—I shall keep the basket always, and the slippers as long as I possibly can. See this one! It isn't fully open. I should have them for a week at least. Please hand me a glass of water."

Douglas started to say that ice water would be too cold, but with the wisdom of a wise man waited; and as always, was joyed by the waiting. For the girl took the glass and cupping her hands around it sat talking to the flowers, and to him, as she warmed the water with heat from her body. Douglas was so delighted with the unforeseen second that had given him first chance at the orchids, and so this unexpected call, that he did not mind the attention she gave the flowers. He had reasons for not being extravagant; but seldom had a like sum brought such returns. He began drawing interest as he watched Leslie. Never had her form seemed so perfect, her dress so becoming and simple. How could other women make a vulgar display in the same pattern that clothed her modestly? How wonderful were the soft coils of her hair, the tints paling and flushing on her cheeks, her shining

eyes! Why could not all women use her low, even, perfectly accented speech and deliberate self-control?

He was in daily intercourse with her father, a high official of the city, a man of education, social position, and wealth. Mr. Winton had reared his only child according to his ideas; but Douglas, knowing these things, believed in blood also. As Leslie turned and warmed the water, watching her, the thought was strong in his mind: what a woman her mother must have been! Each day he was with Leslie, he saw her do things that no amount of culture could instil. Instinct and tact are inborn; careful rearing may produce a good imitation, they are genuine only with blood. Leslie had always filled his ideal of a true woman. To ignore him for his gift would have piqued many a man; Douglas Bruce was pleased.

"You wonders!" she said softly. "Oh you wonders! When the mists lifted in the marshes this morning, and the first ray of gold touched you to equal goldness, you didn't know you were coming to me. I almost wish I could put you back. Just now you should be in such cool mistiness, while you should be hearing a hermit thrush sing vespers, a cedar bird call, and a whip-poor-will cry. But I'm glad I have you! Oh I'm so glad you came to me! I never materialized a whole swamp with such vividness as only this little part of it brings. Douglas, when you caught the first glimpse of these, how far into the swamp did you see past them?"

"To the heart—of the swamp—and of my heart."

"I can see it as perfectly as I ever did," she said. "But I eliminate the squaw; possibly because I didn't see her. And however exquisite the basket is, she broke the law when she peeled a birch tree. I'll wager she brought this to Lowry, carefully covered. And I'm not sure but there should have been a law she broke when she uprooted these orchids. Much as I love them, I doubt if I can keep them alive, and bring them to bloom next season. I'll try, but I don't possess flower magic in the highest degree."

She turned the glass, touching it with questioning palm. Was it near the warmth of bog water? After all, was bog water warm? Next time she was in a swamp she would plunge her hand deeply in the mosses to feel the exact temperature to which those roots had been accustomed. Then she spoke again.

"Yes, I eliminate the squaw," she said. "These golden slippers are the swamp to me, but I see you kneeling to lift them. I am so glad I'm the woman they made you see."

Douglas sat forward and opened his lips. Was not this the auspicious moment?

"Did the squaw bring more?" she questioned.

"Yes," he answered. "Pink moccasins in a basket of red osiers, with the same moss, rosemary and white tresses. Would you rather those?"

She set down the glass, drawing the basket toward her with both hands. As she parted the mosses to drop in the water she slowly shook her head.

"One must have seen them to understand what that would be like," she said. "I know it was beautiful, but I'm sure I should have selected the gold had I been there. Oh I wonder if the woman who has the moccasins will give them a drink to-night! And will she try to preserve their roots?"

"She will not!" said Douglas emphatically.

"How can you possibly know?" queried the girl.

"I saw the man who ordered them," laughed Douglas.

"Oh!" cried Leslie, comprehendingly.

"I'd stake all I'm worth the moccasins are drooping against a lavender dress; the roots are in the garbage can, while the cook or maid has the basket," he said.

"Douglas, how can you!" exclaimed Leslie.

"I couldn't! Positively couldn't! Mine are here!"

The slow colour crept into her cheek. "I'll make those roots bloom next spring; you shall see them in perfection," she promised.

"That would be wonderful!" he exclaimed warmly.

"Tell me, were there yet others?" she asked hastily.

"Only these," he said. "But there was something else. I came near losing them. While I debated, or rather while I possessed these, and worshipped the others, there was a gutter row that almost made me lose yours."

"In the gutter again?" she laughed.

"Once again," he admitted. "Such a little chap, with an appealing voice, while his inflection was the smallest part of what he was saying. 'Aw kid, come on. Be square!' Oh Leslie!"

"Why Douglas!" the girl cried. "Tell me!"

"Of all the wooden-head slowness!" he exclaimed. "I've let him slip again!"

"Let who 'slip again?'" questioned Leslie. "My little brother!" answered he.

"Oh Douglas! You didn't really?" she protested.

"Yes I did," he said. "I heard a little lad saying the things that are in the blood and bone of the men money can't buy and corruption can't break. I heard him plead like a lawyer and argue his case straight. I lent a hand when his eloquence failed, got him his deserts, then let him go! I did have an impulse to keep him. I did call after him. But he disappeared."

"Douglas, we can find him!" she comforted.

"I haven't found either of the others I realized I'd have been interested in, after I let them slip," he answered, "while this boy was both of them rolled into one, and ten more like them."

"Oh Douglas! I'm so sorry! But maybe some other man has already found him," said Leslie.

"No. You can always pick the brothered boys," said Douglas. "The first thing that happens to them is a clean-up and better clothing; then an air of possessed importance. No man has attached this one."

"Douglas, describe him," she commanded. "I'll watch for him. How did he look? What was the trouble?"

"One at a time," cautioned the man. "He was a little chap, a white, clean, threadbare little chap, with such a big voice, so wonderfully intoned, and such a bigger principle, for which he was fighting. One of these overgrown newsboys the public won't stand for unless he is in the way when they are making a car, had hired him to sell his papers while he loafed. Mickey——"

"'Mickey?'" repeated Leslie questioningly.

"The big fellow called him 'Mickey'; no doubt a mother who adored him named him Michael, and thought him 'like unto God' when she did it. The big fellow had loafed all afternoon. When Mickey came back and turned over the money, and waited to be paid off, his employer laughed at the boy for not keeping it when he had it. Mickey begged him 'to be square' and told him that 'was not business'—'*not business*,' mind you, but the big fellow jeered at him and was starting away. Mickey and I reached him at the same time; so I got in the gutter again. I don't see how I can be so slow! I don't see how I did it!"

"I don't either," she said, with a twinkle that might have referred to the first of the two exclamations. "It must be your Scotch habit of going slowly and surely. But cheer up! We'll find him. I'll help you."

"Have you reflected on the fact that this city covers many square miles, of which a fourth is outskirts, while from them three thousand newsboys gathered at the last Salvation Army banquet for them?"

"That's where we can find him!" she cried. "Thanksgiving, or Christmas! Of course we'll see him then."

"Mickey didn't have a Salvation Army face," he said. "I am sure he is a free lance, and a rare one; besides, this is May. I want my little brother to go on my vacation with me. I want him now."

"Would it help any if I'd be a sister to you?"

"Not a bit," said Douglas. "I don't in the very least wish to consider you in the light of a sister; you have another place

in my heart, very different, yet all your own; but I do wish to make of Mickey the little brother I never have had. Minturn was telling me what a rejuvenation he's getting from the boy he picked up. Already he has him in his office, and is planning school and partnership with a man he can train as he chooses."

"But Minturn has sons of his own!" protested Leslie.

"Oh no! Not in the least!" exclaimed Douglas. "Minturn has sons of his *wife's*. She persistently upsets and frustrates Minturn's every idea for them, while he is helpless. You will remember she has millions; he has what he earns. He can't separate his boys, splendid physical little chaps, from their mother's money and influence, and educate them to be a help to him. They are to be made into men of wealth and leisure. Minturn will evolve his little brother into a man of brains and efficiency."

"But Minturn is a power!" cried the girl.

"Not financially," explained Douglas. "Nothing but money counts with his wife. In telling me of this boy, Minturn confessed that he was forced, *forced* mind you, to see his sons ruined, while he is building a street gamin as he would them, if permitted."

"How sad, Douglas!" cried Leslie. "Your voice is bitter. Can't he do something?"

"Not a blooming thing!" answered Douglas. "She has the money. She is their mother. Her character is unimpeachable. If Minturn went to extremes, the law would give them to her; she would turn them over to ignorant servants who would corrupt them, and be well paid for doing it. Why Minturn told me—but I can't repeat that. Anyway, he made me eager to try my ideas on a lad who would be company for me, when I can't be here and don't wish to be with other men."

"Are you still going to those Brotherhood meetings?"

"I am. And I always shall be. Nothing in life gives me such big returns for the time invested. There is a world of talk

breaking loose about the present 'unrest' among women; I happen to know that the 'unrest' is as deep with men. For each woman I personally know, bitten by 'unrest,' I know two men in the same condition. As long as men and women are forced to combine, to uphold society, it is my idea that it would be a good thing if there were to be a Sisterhood organized; then the two societies frankly brought together and allowed to clear up the differences between them."

"But why not?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Because we are pursuing false ideals, we have a wrong conception of what is *worth while in life*," answered the Scotsman. "Because the sexes except in rare, very rare, instances, do not understand each other, and every day are drifting farther apart, while most of the married folk I know are farthest apart of all. Leslie, what is it in marriage that constrains people? We can talk, argue and agree or disagree on anything, why can't the Minturns?"

"From what you say, it would seem to me it's her idea of what is worth while in life," said Leslie.

"Exactly!" cried Douglas. "But he can sway men! He can do powerful work. He could induce her to marry him. Why can't he control his own blood?"

"If she should lose her money and become dependent upon him for support, he could!" said Leslie.

"He should do it anyway," insisted Douglas.

"Do you think you could?" she queried.

"I never thought myself in his place," said Douglas, "but I believe I will, and if I see glimmerings, I'll suggest them to him."

"Good boy!" said the girl lightly. And then she added: "Do you mind if I think myself in her place and see if I can suggest a possible point at which she could be reached? I know her. I shouldn't consider her happy. At least not with what I call joy."

"What do you call joy?" asked Douglas.

"Being satisfied with your environment."