

***GRACE
LIVINGSTON
HILL***



***LO,
MICHAEL!***

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Chapter I

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"Hi, there! Mikky! Look out!"

It was an alert voice that called from a huddled group of urchins in the forefront of the crowd, but the child flashed past without heeding, straight up the stone steps where stood a beautiful baby smiling on the crowd. With his bundle of papers held high, and the late morning sunlight catching his tangle of golden hair, Mikky flung himself toward the little one. The sharp crack of a revolver from the opposite curbstone was simultaneous with their fall. Then all was confusion.

It was a great stone house on Madison Avenue where the crowd had gathered. An automobile stood before the door, having but just come quietly up, and the baby girl three years old, in white velvet, and ermines, with her dark curls framed by an ermine-trimmed hood, and a bunch of silk rosebuds poised coquettishly over the brow vying with the soft roses of her cheeks came out the door with her nurse for her afternoon ride. Just an instant the nurse stepped back to the hall for the wrap she had dropped, leaving the baby alone, her dark eyes shining like stars under the straight dark brows, as she looked gleefully out in the world. It was just at that instant, as if by magic, that the crowd assembled.

Perhaps it would be better to say that it was just at that minute that the crowd focused itself upon the particular house where the baby daughter of the president of a great defaulting bank lived. More or less all the morning, men had been gathering, passing the house, looking up with troubled or threatening faces toward the richly laced windows, shaking menacing heads, muttering imprecations, but there had been no disturbance, and no concerted crowd until the instant the baby appeared.

The police had been more or less vigilant all the morning but had seen nothing to disturb them. The inevitable small boy had also been in evidence, with his natural instinct for excitement. Mikky with his papers often found himself in that quarter of a bright morning, and the starry eyes and dark curls of the little child were a vision for which he often searched the great windows as he passed this particular house: but the man with the evil face on the other side of the street, resting a shaking hand against the lamp post, and sighting the baby with a vindictive eye, had never been seen there before. It was Mikky who noticed him first: Mikky, who circling around him innocently had heard his imprecations against the rich, who caught the low-breathed oath as the baby appeared, and saw the ugly look on the man's face. With instant alarm he had gone to the other side of the street, his eye upon the offender, and had been the

first to see the covert motion, the flash of the hidden weapon and to fear the worst.

But a second behind him his street companions saw his danger and cried out, too late. Mikky had flung himself in front of the beautiful baby, covering her with his great bundle of papers, and his own ragged, neglected little body; and receiving the bullet intended for her, went down with her as she fell.

Instantly all was confusion.

A child's cry—a woman's scream—the whistle of the police—the angry roar of the crowd who were like a pack of wild animals that had tasted blood. Stones flew, flung by men whose wrongs had smothered in their breasts and bred a fury of hate and murder. Women were trampled upon. Two of the great plate glass windows crashed as the flying missiles entered the magnificent home, regardless of costly lace and velvet hangings.

The chauffeur attempted to run his car around the corner but was held up at once, and discreetly took himself out of the way, leaving the car in the hands of the mob who swarmed into it and over it, ruthlessly disfiguring it in their wrath. There was the loud report of exploding tires, the ripping of costly leather cushions, the groaning of fine machinery put to torture as the fury of the mob took vengeance on the car to show what they would like to do to its owner.

Gone into bankruptcy! He! With a great electric car like that, and servants to serve him! With his baby attired in the trappings of a queen and his house swathed in lace that had taken the eyesight from many a poor lace-maker! He! Gone into bankruptcy, and slipping away scot free, while the men he had robbed stood helpless on his sidewalk, hungry and shabby and hopeless because the pittances they had put away in his bank, the result of slavery and sacrifice, were gone,—hopelessly gone! and they were too old, or too tired, or too filled with hate, to earn it again.

The crowd surged and seethed madly, now snarling like beasts, now rumbling portentously like a storm, now babbling like an infant; a great emotional frenzy, throbbing with passion, goaded beyond fear, desperate with need; leaderless, and therefore the more dangerous.

The very sight of that luxurious baby with her dancing eyes and happy smiles "rolling in luxury," called to mind their own little puny darling, grimy with neglect, lean with want, and hollow-eyed with knowledge aforesaid. Why should one baby be pampered and another starved? Why did the bank-president's daughter have any better right to those wonderful furs and that exultant smile than their own babies? A glimpse into the depths of the rooms beyond the sheltering plate glass and drapery showed greater contrast even than they had dreamed between this home and the bare tenements they had left that morning, where the children were crying for bread and the wife shivering with cold. Because they loved their own their anger burned the fiercer; and for love of their

pitiful scrawny babies that flower-like child in the doorway was hated with all the vehemence of their untamed natures. Their every breath cried out for vengeance, and with the brute instinct they sought to hurt the man through his child, because they had been hurt by the wrong done to their children.

The policeman's whistle had done its work, however. The startled inmates of the house had drawn the beautiful baby and her small preserver within the heavy carved doors, and borne them back to safety before the unorganized mob had time to force their way in. Amid the outcry and the disorder no one had noticed that Mikky had disappeared until his small band of companions set up an outcry, but even then no one heard.

The mounted police had arrived, and orders were being given. The man who had fired the shot was arrested, handcuffed and marched away. The people were ordered right and left, and the officer's horses rode ruthlessly through the masses. Law and order had arrived and there was nothing for the downtrodden but to flee.

In a very short time the square was cleared and guarded by a large force. Only the newspaper men came and went without challenge. The threatening groups of men who still hovered about withdrew further and further. The wrecked automobile was patched up and taken away to the garage. The street became quiet, and by and by some workmen came hurriedly, importantly, and put in temporary protections where the window glass had been broken.

Yet through it all a little knot of ragged newsboys stood their ground in front of the house. Until quiet was restored they had evaded each renewed command of officer or passer-by, and stayed there; whispering now and again in excited groups and pointing up to the house. Finally a tall policeman approached them:

"Clear out of this, kids!" he said not unkindly. "Here's no place for you. Clear out. Do you hear me? You can't stay here no longer."

Then one of them wheeled upon him. He was the tallest of them all, with fierce little freckled face and flashing black eyes in which all the evil passions of four generations back looked out upon a world that had always been harsh. He was commonly known as fighting Buck.

"Mikky's in dare. He's hurted. We kids can't leave Mick alone. He might be dead."

Just at that moment a physician's runabout drew up to the door, and the policeman fell back to let him pass into the house. Hard upon him followed the bank president in a closed carriage attended by several men in uniform who escorted him to the door and touched their hats politely as he vanished within. Around the corners scowling faces haunted the shadows, and murmured imprecations were scarcely withheld in spite of the mounted officers. A shot was fired down the street, and several policemen hurried away. But through it all the boys stood their ground.

"Mikky's in dare. He's hurted. I seen him fall. Maybe he's deaded. We kids want to take him away. Mikky didn't do nothin', Mikky jes' tried to save der little kid. Mikky's a good'un. You get the folks to put Mikky out here. We kids'll take him away"

The policeman finally attended to the fierce pleading of the ragamuffins. Two or three newspaper men joined the knot around them and the story was presently written up with all the racy touches that the writers of the hour know how to use. Before night Buck, with his fierce black brows drawn in helpless defiance was adorning the evening papers in various attitudes as the different snapshots portrayed him, and the little group of newsboys and boot-blacks and good-for-nothings that stood around him figured for once in the eyes of the whole city.

The small band held their place until forcibly removed. Some of them were barefoot, and stood shivering on the cold stones, their little sickly, grimy faces blue with anxiety and chill.

The doctor came out of the house just as the last one, Buck, was being marched off with loud-voiced protest. He eyed the boy, and quickly understood the situation.

"Look here!" he called to the officer. "Let me speak to the youngster. He's a friend, I suppose, of the boy that was shot?"

The officer nodded.

"Well, boy, what's all this fuss about?" He looked kindly, keenly into the defiant black eyes of Buck.

"Mikky's hurted—mebbe deaded. I wants to take him away from dare," he burst forth sullenly. "We kids can't go off'n' leave Mikky in dare wid de rich guys. Mikky didn't do no harm. He's jes tryin' to save de kid."

"Mikky. Is that the boy that took the shot in place of the little girl?"

The boy nodded and looked anxiously into the kindly face of the doctor.

"Yep. Hev you ben in dare? Did youse see Mikky? He's got yaller hair. Is Mikky deaded?"

"No, he isn't dead," said the physician kindly, "but he's pretty badly hurt. The ball went through his shoulder and arm, and came mighty near some vital places. I've just been fixing him up comfortably, and he'll be all right after a bit, but he's got to lie very still right where he is and be taken care of."

"We kids'll take care o' Mikky!" said Buck proudly. "He took care of Jinney when she was sick, an' we'll take care o' Mikky, all right, all right. You jes' brang him out an' we'll fetch a wheelbarry an' cart him off'n yer han's. Mikky wouldn't want to be in dare wid de rich guys."

"My dear fellow," said the doctor, quite touched by the earnestness in Buck's eyes, "that's very good of you, I'm sure, and Mikky ought to appreciate his friends, but he's being taken care of perfectly right where he is and he couldn't

be moved. It might kill him to move him, and if he stays where he is he will get well. I'll tell you what I'll do," he added as he saw the lowering distress in the dumb eyes before him, "I'll give you a bulletin every day. You be here tonight at five o'clock when I come out of the house and I'll tell you just how he is. Then you needn't worry about him. He's in a beautiful room lying on a great big white bed and he has everything nice around him, and when I came away he was sleeping. I can take him a message for you when I go in tonight, if you like."

Half doubtfully the boy looked at him.

"Will you tell Mikky to drop us down word ef he wants annythin'? Will you ast him ef he don't want us to git him out?"

"Sure!" said the doctor in kindly amusement. "You trust me and I'll make good. Be here at five o'clock sharp and again tomorrow at quarter to eleven."

"He's only a slum kid!" grumbled the officer. "'Tain't worth while to take so much trouble. 'Sides, the folks won't want um botherin' 'round."

"Oh, he's all right!" said the doctor. "He's a friend worth having. You might need one yourself some day, you know. What's your name, boy? Who shall I tell Mikky sent the message?"

"Buck," said the child gravely, "Fightin' Buck, they calls me."

"Very appropriate name, I should think," said the doctor smiling. "Well, run along Buck and be here at five o'clock."

Reluctantly the boy moved off. The officer again took up his stand in front of the house and quiet was restored to the street.

Meantime, in the great house consternation reigned for a time.

The nurse maid had reached the door in time to hear the shot and see the children fall. She barely escaped the bullet herself. She was an old servant of the family and therefore more frightened for her charge than for herself. She had the presence of mind to drag both children inside the house and shut and lock the door immediately, before the seething mob could break in.

The mistress of the house fell in a dead faint as they carried her little laughing daughter up the stairs and a man and a maid followed with the boy who was unconscious. The servants rushed hither and thither; the housekeeper had the coolness to telephone the bank president what had happened, and to send for the family physician. No one knew yet just who was hurt or how much. Mikky had been brought inside because he blocked the doorway, and there was need for instantly shutting the door. If it had been easier to shove him out the nurse maid would probably have done that. But once inside common humanity bade them look after the unconscious boy's needs, and besides, no one knew as yet just exactly what part Mikky had played in the small tragedy of the morning.

"Where shall we take him?" said the man to the maid as they reached the second floor with their unconscious burden.

"Not here, Thomas. Here's no place for him. He's as dirty as a pig. I can't think what come over Morton to pull him inside, anyway. His own could have tended to him. Besides, such is better dead!"

They hurried on past the luxurious rooms belonging to the lady of the mansion; up the next flight of stairs, and Norah paused by the bath-room door where the full light of the hall windows fell upon the grimy little figure of the child they carried.

Norah the maid uttered an exclamation.

"He's not fit fer any place in this house. Look at his cloes. They'll have to be cut off'n him, and he needs to go in the bath-tub before he can be laid anywheres. Let's put him in the bath-room, and do you go an' call Morton. She got him in here and she'll have to bathe him. And bring me a pair of scissors. I'll mebbe have to cut the cloes off'n him, they're so filthy. Ach! The little beast!"

Thomas, glad to be rid of his burden, dropped the boy on the bath-room floor and made off to call Morton.

Norah, with little knowledge and less care, took no thought for the life of her patient. She was intent on making him fit to put between her clean sheets. She found the tattered garments none too tenacious in their hold to the little, half-naked body. One or two buttons and a string were their only attachments. Norah pulled them off with gingerly fingers, and holding them at arm's length took them to the bath-room window whence she pitched them down into the paved court below, that led to the kitchen regions. Thomas could burn them, or put them on the ash pile by and by. She was certain they would never go on again, and wondered how they had been made to hold together this last time.

Morton had not come yet, but Norah discovering a pool of blood under the little bare shoulder, lifted him quickly into the great white bath-tub and turned on the warm water. There was no use wasting time, and getting blood on white tiles that she would have to scrub. She was not unkind but she hated dirt, and partly supporting the child with one arm she applied herself to scrubbing him as vigorously as possible with the other hand. The shock of the water, not being very warm at first, brought returning consciousness to the boy for a moment, in one long shuddering sigh. The eyelashes trembled for an instant on the white cheeks, and his eyes opened; gazed dazedly, then wildly, on the strange surroundings, the water, and the vigorous Irish woman who had him in her power. He threw his arms up with a struggling motion, gasped as if with sudden pain and lost consciousness again, relaxing once more into the strong red arm that held him. It was just at this critical moment that Morton entered the bath-room.

Morton was a trim, apple-cheeked Scotch woman of about thirty years, with neat yellow-brown hair coiled on the top of her head, a cheerful tilt to her freckled nose, and eyes so blue that in company with her rosy cheeks one

thought at once of a flag. Heather and integrity exhaled from her very being, flamed from her cheeks, spoke from her loyal, stubborn chin, and looked from her trustworthy eyes. She had been with the bank president's baby ever since the little star-eyed creature came into the world.

"Och! look ye at the poor wee'un!" she exclaimed. "Ye're hurtin' him, Norah! Ye shouldn't have bathed him the noo! Ye should've waited the docther's comin'. Ye'll mebbe kin kill him."

"Ach! Get out with yer soft talk!" said Norah, scrubbing the more vigorously. "Did yez suppose I'll be afther havin' all this filth in the nice clean sheets? Get ye to work an' he'p me. Do ye hold 'im while I schrub!"

She shifted the boy into the gentler arm's of the nurse, and went to splashing all the harder. Then suddenly, before the nurse could protest, she had dashed a lot of foamy suds on the golden head and was scrubbing that with all her might.

"Och, Norah!" cried the nurse in alarm. "You shouldn't a done that! Ye'll surely kill the bairn. Look at his poor wee shoulder a bleedin', and his little face so white an' still. Have ye no mercy at all, Norah? Rinse off that suds at once, an' dry him softly. What'll the docther be sayin' to ye fer all this I can't think. There, my poor bairnie," she crooned to the child, softly drawing him closer as though he were conscious,—

"There, there my bairnie, it'll soon be over. It'll be all right in just a minute, poor wee b'y! Poor wee b'y! There! There—"

But Norah did her perfect work, and made the little lean body glistening white as polished marble, while the heavy hair hung limp like pale golden silk.

The two women carried him to a bed in a large room at the back of the house, not far from the nursery, and laid him on a blanket, with his shoulder stanchied with soft linen rags. Morton was softly drying his hair and crooning to the child—although he was still unconscious—begging Norah to put the blanket over him lest he catch cold; and Norah was still vigorously drying his feet unmindful of Morton's pleading, when the doctor entered with a trained nurse. The boy lay white and still upon the blanket as the two women, startled, drew back from their task. The body, clean now, and beautifully shaped, might have been marble except for the delicate blue veins in wrists and temples. In spite of signs of privation and lack of nutrition there was about the boy a showing of strength in well developed muscles, and it went to the heart to see him lying helpless so, with his drenched gold hair and his closed eyes. The white limbs did not quiver, the lifeless fingers drooped limply, the white chest did not stir with any sign of breath, and yet the tender lips that curved in a cupid's bow, were not altogether gone white.

"What a beautiful child!" exclaimed the nurse involuntarily as she came near the bed. "He looks like a young god!"

"He's far more likely to be a young devil," said the doctor grimly, leaning over him with practised eyes, and laying a listening ear to the quiet breast. Then, he started back.

"He's cold as ice! What have you been doing to him? It wasn't a case of drowning, was it? You haven't been giving him a bath at such a time as this, have you? Did you want to kill the kid outright?"

"Oauch, the poor wee b'y!" sobbed Morton under her breath, her blue eyes drenched with tears that made them like blue lakes. "He's like to my own wee b'y that I lost when he was a baby," she explained in apology to the trained nurse who was not, however, regarding her in the least.

Norah had vanished frightened to consult with Thomas. It was Morton who brought the things the doctor called for, and showed the nurse where to put her belongings; and after everything was done and the boy made comfortable and brought back to consciousness, it was she who stood at the foot of the bed and smiled upon him first in this new world to which he opened his eyes.

His eyes were blue, heavenly blue and dark, but they were great with a brave fear as he glanced about on the strange faces. He looked like a wild bird, caught in a kindly hand,—a bird whose instincts held him still because he saw no way of flight, but whose heart was beating frightfully against his captor's fingers. He looked from side to side of the room, and made a motion to rise from the pillow. It was a wild, furtive motion, as of one who has often been obliged to fly for safety, yet still has unlimited courage. There was also in his glance the gentle harmlessness and appeal of the winged thing that has been caught.

"Well, youngster, you had a pretty close shave," said the doctor jovially, "but you'll pull through all right! You feel comfortable now?"

The nurse was professionally quiet.

"Poor wee b'y!" murmured Morton, her eyes drenched again.

The boy looked from one to another doubtfully. Suddenly remembrance dawned upon him and comprehension entered his glance. He looked about the room and toward the door. There was question in his eyes that turned on the doctor but his lips formed no words. He looked at Morton, and knew her for the nurse of his baby. Suddenly he smiled, and that smile seemed to light up the whole room, and filled the heart of Morton with joy unspeakable. It seemed to her it was the smile of her own lost baby come back to shine upon her. The tears welled, up and the blue lakes ran over. The boy's face was most lovely when he smiled.

"Where is—de little kid?" It was Morton whose face he searched anxiously as he framed the eager question, and the woman's intuition taught her how to answer.

"She's safe in her own wee crib takin' her morning nap. She's just new over," answered the woman reassuringly.

Still the eyes were not satisfied.

"Did she"—he began slowly—"get—hurt?"

"No, my bairnie, she's all safe and sound as ever. It was your own self that saved her life."

The boy's face lit up and he turned from one to another contentedly. His smile said: "Then I'm glad." But not a word spoke his shy lips.

"You're a hero, kid!" said the doctor huskily. But the boy knew little about heroes and did not comprehend.

The nurse by this time had donned her uniform and rattled up starchily to take her place at the bedside, and Morton and the doctor went away, the doctor to step once more into the lady's room below to see if she was feeling quite herself again after her faint.

The nurse leaned over the boy with a glass and spoon. He looked at it curiously, unknowingly. It was a situation entirely outside his experience.

"Why don't you take your medicine?" asked the nurse.

The boy looked at the spoon again as it approached his lips and opened them to speak.

"Is—"

In went the medicine and the boy nearly choked, but he understood and smiled.

"A hospital?" he finished.

The nurse laughed.

"No, it's only a house. They brought you in, you know, when you were hurt out on the steps. You saved the little girl's life. Didn't you know it?" she said kindly, her heart won by his smile.

A beautiful look rewarded her.

"Is de little kid—in this house?" he asked slowly, wonderingly. It was as if he had asked if he were in heaven, there was so much awe in his tone.

"Oh, yes, she's here," answered the nurse lightly. "Perhaps they'll bring her in to see you sometime. Her father's very grateful. He thinks it showed wonderful courage in you to risk your life for her sake."

But Mikky comprehended nothing about gratitude. He only took in the fact that the beautiful baby was in the house and might come there to see him. He settled to sleep quite happily with an occasional glad wistful glance toward the door, as the long lashes sank on the white cheeks, for the first sleep the boy had ever taken in a clean, white, soft bed. The prim nurse, softened for once from her precise attention to duties, stood and looked upon the lovely face of the sleeping child, wondered what his life had been, and how the future would be for him. She half pitied him that the ball had not gone nearer to the vital spot and taken him to heaven ere he missed the way, so angel-like his face appeared in

the soft light of the sick room, with the shining gold hair fluffed back upon the pillow now, like a halo.

Chapter II

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Little Starr Endicott, sleeping in her costly lace-draped crib on her downy embroidered pillow, knew nothing of the sin and hate and murder that rolled in a great wave on the streets outside, and had almost touched her own little life and blotted it out. She knew not that three notable families whose names were interwoven in her own, and whose blood flowed in her tiny veins represented the great hated class of the Rich, and that those upon whom they had climbed to this height looked upon them as an evil to be destroyed; nor did she know that she, being the last of the race, and in her name representing them all, was hated most of all.

Starr Delevan Endicott! It was graven upon her tiny pins and locket, upon the circlet of gold that jewelled her finger, upon her brushes and combs; it was brodered upon her dainty garments, and coverlets and cushions, and crooned to her by the adoring Scotch nurse who came of a line that knew and loved an aristocracy. The pride of the house of Starr, the wealth of the house of Delevan, the glory of the house of Endicott, were they not all hers, this one beautiful baby who lay in her arms to tend and to love. So mused Morton as she hummed:

"O hush thee my babie, thy sire was a knight,
Thy mother a ladie, both gentle and bright—"

And what cared Morton that the mother in this case was neither gentle nor bright, but only beautiful and selfish? It did but make the child the dearer that she had her love to herself.

And so the little Starr lay sleeping in her crib, and the boy, her preserver, from nobody knew where, and of nobody knew what name or fame, lay sleeping also. And presently Delevan Endicott himself came to look at them both.

He came from the swirl of the sinful turbulent world outside, and from his fretting, petted wife's bedside. She had been fretting at him for allowing a bank in which he happened to be president to do anything which should cause such a disturbance outside her home, when he knew she was so nervous. Not one word about the little step that had stood for an instant between her baby and eternity. Her husband reminded her gently how near their baby had come to death, and how she should rejoice that she was safe, but her reply had been a rush of tears, and "Oh, yes, you always think of the baby, never of me, your wife!"

With a sigh the man had turned from his fruitless effort to calm her troubled mind and gone to his little daughter. He had hoped that his wife would go with him, but he saw the hopelessness of that idea.

The little girl lay with one plump white arm thrown over her head, the curling baby fingers just touching the rosy cheek, flushed with sleep. She looked like a rosebud herself, so beautiful among the rose and

lacey draperies of her couch. Her dark curls, so fine and soft and wonderful, with their hidden purple shadows, and the long dark curling lashes, to match the finely pencilled brows, brought out each delicate feature of the lovely little face. The father, as he looked down upon her, wondered how it could have been in the heart of any creature, no matter how wicked, to put out this vivid little life. His little Starr, his one treasure!

The man that had tried to do it, could he have intended it really, or was it only a random shot? The testimony of those who saw judged it intention. The father's quickened heart-beats told him it was, and he felt that the thrust had gone deep. How they had meant to hurt him! How they must have hated him to have wished to hurt him so! How they would have hurt his life irretrievably if the shot had done its work. If that other little atom of human life had not intervened!

Where was the boy who had saved his child? He must go and see him at once.

The gratitude of a lifetime should be his.

Morton divined his thought, as he stepped from the sacred crib softly after bending low to sweep his lips over the rosy velvet of little Starr's cheek. With silent tread she followed her master to the door:

"The poor wee b'y's in the far room yon," she said in a soft whisper, and her tone implied that his duty lay next in that direction. The banker had often noticed this gentle suggestion in the nurse's voice, it

minded him of something in his childhood and he invariably obeyed it. He might have resented it if it had been less humble, less trustfully certain that of course that was the thing that he meant to do next. He followed her direction now without a word.

The boy had just fallen asleep when he entered, and lay as sweetly beautiful as the little vivid beauty he had left in the other room. The man of the world paused and instinctively exclaimed in wonder. He had been told that it was a little gamin who had saved his daughter from the assassin's bullet, but the features of this child were as delicately chiseled, his form as finely modeled, his hair as soft and fine as any scion of a noble house might boast. He, like the nurse, had the feeling that a young god lay before him. It was so that Mikky always had impressed a stranger even when his face was dirty and his feet were bare.

The man stood with bowed head and looked upon the boy to whom he felt he owed a debt which he could never repay.

He recognized the child as a representative of that great unwashed throng of humanity who were his natural enemies, because by their oppression and by stepping upon their rights when it suited his convenience, he had risen to where he now stood, and was able to maintain his position. He had no special feeling for them, any of them, more than if they had been a pack of wolves whose fangs he must keep clear of, and whose hides he must get as soon as convenient; but this boy was different! This spirit-

child with the form of Apollo, the beauty of Adonis, and the courage of a hero! Could he have come from the hotbeds of sin and corruption? It could not be! Sure there must be some mistake. He must be of good birth. Enquiry must be made. Had anyone asked the child's name and where he lived?

Then, as if in answer to his thought, the dark blue eyes suddenly opened. He found them looking at him, and started as he realized it, as if a picture on which he gazed had suddenly turned out to be alive. And yet, for the instant, he could not summon words, but stood meeting that steady searching gaze of the child, penetrating, questioning, as if the eyes would see and understand the very foundation principles on which the man's life rested. The man felt it, and had the sensation of hastily looking at his own motives in the light of this child's look. Would his life bear that burning appealing glance?

Then, unexpectedly the child's face lit up with his wonderful smile. He had decided to trust the man.

Never before in all his proud and varied experience had Delevan Endicott encountered a challenge like that. It beat through him like a mighty army and took his heart by storm, it flashed into his eyes and dazzled him. It was the challenge of childhood to the fatherhood of the man. With a strange new impulse the man accepted it, and struggling to find words, could only answer with a smile.

A good deal passed between them before any words were spoken at all, a good deal that the boy never forgot, and that the man liked to turn back to in his moments of self-reproach, for somehow that boy's eyes called forth the best that was in him, and made him ashamed of other things.

"Boy, who is your father?" at last asked the man huskily. He almost dreaded to find another father owning a noble boy like this—and such a father as he would be if it were true that he was only a street gamin.

The boy still smiled, but a wistfulness came into his eyes. He slowly shook his head.

"Dead, is he?" asked the man more as if thinking aloud. But the boy shook his head again.

"No, no father," he answered simply.

"Oh," said the man, and a lump gathered in his throat. "Your mother?"

"No mother, never!" came the solemn answer. It seemed that he scarcely felt that either of these were deep lacks in his assets. Very likely fathers and mothers were not on the average desirable kindred in the neighborhood from which he came. The man reflected and tried again.

"Who are your folks? They'll be worried about you. We ought to send them word you're doing well?"

The boy looked amazed, then a laugh rippled out.

"No folks," he gurgled, "on'y jest de kids."

"Your brothers and sisters?" asked Endicott puzzled.

"None o' dem," said Mikky. "Buck an' me're pards. We fights fer de other kids."

"Don't you know it's wrong to fight?"

Mikky stared.

Endicott tried to think of something to add to his little moral homily, but somehow could not.

"It's very wrong to fight," he reiterated lamely.

The boy's cherub mouth settled into firm lines.

"It's wronger not to, when de little kids is gettin' hurt, an' de big fellers what ought ter work is stole away they bread, an' they's hungry."

It was an entirely new proposition. It was the challenge of the poor against the rich, of the weak against the strong, and from the lips of a mere babe. The man wondered and answered not.

"I'd fight fer your little kid!" declared the young logician. He seemed to know by instinct that this was the father of his baby.

Ah, now he had touched the responsive chord. The father's face lit up. He understood. Yes, it was right to fight for his baby girl, his little Starr, his one treasure, and this boy had done it, given his life freely. Was that like fighting for those other unloved, uncared-for, hungry darlings? Were they then dear children, too, of somebody, of God, if nobody else? The boy's eyes were telling him plainly in one long deep look, that all the world of little children at least was kin, and the grateful heart of the father felt that in mere decency of gratitude he must acknowledge so much. Poor little hungry babies. What if his

darling were hungry! A sudden longing seized his soul to give them bread at once to eat. But at least he would shower his gratitude upon this one stray defender of their rights.

He struggled to find words to let the child know of this feeling but only the tears gathering quickly in his eyes spoke for him.

"Yes, yes, my boy! You did fight for my little girl. I know, I'll never forget it of you as long as I live. You saved her life, and that's worth everything to me. Everything, do you understand?"

At last the words rushed forth, but his voice was husky, and those who knew him would have declared him more moved than they had ever seen him.

The boy understood. A slender brown hand stole out from the white coverlet and touched his. Its outline, long and supple and graceful, spoke of patrician origin. It was hard for the man of wealth and pride to realize that it was the hand of the child of the common people, the people who were his enemies.

"Is there anything you would like to have done for you, boy?" he asked at last because the depth of emotion was more than he could bear.

The boy looked troubled.

"I was thinkin', ef Buck an' them could see me, they'd know 'twas all right. I'd like 'em fine to know how 'tis in here."

"You want me to bring them up to see you?"

Mikky nodded.

"Where can I find them, do you think?"

"Buck, he won't go fur, till he knows what's comed o' me," said the boy with shining confidence in his friend. "He'd know I'd do that fur him."

Then it seemed there was such a thing as honor and loyalty among the lower ranks of men—at least among the boys. The man of the world was learning a great many things. Meekly he descended the two flights of stairs and went out to his own front doorsteps.

There were no crowds any more. The police were still on duty, but curious passersby dared not linger long. The workmen had finished the windows and gone. The man felt little hope of finding the boys, but somehow he had a strange desire to do so. He wanted to see that face light up once more. Also, he had a curious desire to see these youngsters from the street who could provoke such loving anxiety from the hero upstairs.

Micky was right, Buck would not go far away until he knew how it was with his comrade. He had indeed moved off at the officer's word when the doctor promised to bring him word later, but in his heart he did not intend to let a soul pass in or out of that house all day that he did not see, and so he set his young pickets here and there about the block, each with his bunch of papers, and arranged a judicious change occasionally, to avoid trouble with the officers.

Buck was standing across the street on the corner by the church steps, making a lively show of business now and then and keeping one eye on the house that had swallowed up his partner. He was not slow to perceive that he was being summoned by a man upon the steps, and ran eagerly up with his papers, expecting to receive his coin, and maybe a glimpse inside the door.

"All about der shootin' of der bank millionaire's baby!" he yelled in his most finished voice of trade, and the father, thinking of what might have been, felt a pang of horror at the careless words from the gruff little voice.

"Do you know a boy named Buck?" he questioned as he deliberately paid for the paper that was held up to him, and searched the unpromising little face before him. Then marvelled at the sullen, sly change upon the dirty face.

The black brows drew down forbodingly, the dark eyes reminded Mm of a caged lion ready to spring if an opportunity offered. The child had become a man with a criminal's face. There was something frightful about the defiant look with which the boy drew himself up.

"What if I does?"

"Only that there's a boy in here," motioning toward the door, "would like very much to see him for a few minutes. If you know where he is, I wish you'd tell him."

Then there came a change more marvelous than before. It was as if the divine in the soul had suddenly been revealed through a rift in the sinful humanity. The whole defiant face became eager, the black eyes danced with question, the brows settled into straight pleasant lines, and the mouth sweetened as with pleasant thoughts.

"Is't Mikky?" He asked in earnest voice. "Kin we get in? I'll call de kids. He'll want 'em. He allus wants der kids." He placed his fingers in his mouth, stretching it into a curious shape, and there issued forth a shriek that might have come from the mouth of an exulting fiend, so long and shrill and sharp it was. The man on the steps, his nerves already wrought to the snapping point, started angrily. Then suddenly around the corner at a swift trot emerged three ragged youngsters who came at their leader's command swiftly and eagerly.

"Mikky wants us!" explained Buck. "Now youse foller me, 'n don't you say nothin' less I tell you."

They fell in line, behind the bank president, and followed awed within the portal that unlocked a palace more wonderful than Aladdin's to their astonished gaze.

Up the stairs they slunk, single file, the bare feet and the illy-shod alike going silently and sleuth-like over the polished stairs. They skulked past open doors with frightened defiant glances, the defiance of the very poor for the very rich, the defiance that is born and bred in the soul from a face to face

existence with hunger and cold and need of every kind. They were defiant but they took it all in, and for many a day gave details highly embellished of the palace where Mikky lay. It seemed to them that heaven itself could show no grander sights.

In a stricken row against the wall, with sudden consciousness of their own delinquencies of attire, ragged caps in hands, grimy hands behind them, they stood and gazed upon their fallen hero-comrade.

Clean, they had never perhaps seen his face before. The white robe that was upon him seemed a robe of unearthly whiteness. It dazzled their gaze. The shining of his newly-washed hair was a glory crown upon his head. They saw him gathered into another world than any they knew. It could have seemed no worse to them if the far heaven above the narrow city streets had opened its grim clouds and received their comrade from their sight. They were appalled. How could he ever be theirs again? How could it all have happened in the few short hours since Mikky flashed past them and fell a martyr to his kindly heart and saved the wicked rich man his child? The brows of Buck drew together in his densest frown. He felt that Mikky, their Mikky was having some terrible change come upon him.

Then Mikky turned and smiled upon them all, and in his dear familiar voice shouted, "Say, kids, ain't this grand? Say, I jes' wish you was all in it! Ef you,

Buck, an' the kids was here in this yer grand bed I'd be havin' the time o' me life!"

That turned the tide. Buck swallowed hard and smiled his darker smile, and the rest grinned sheepishly. Grandeur and riches had not spoiled their prince. He was theirs still and he had wanted them. He had sent for them. They gained courage to look around on the spotlessly clean room, on the nurse in her crackling dignity; on the dish of oranges which she promptly handed to them and of which each in awe partook a golden sphere; on the handful of bright flowers that Morton had brought but a few minutes before and placed on a little stand by the bed; on the pictures that hung upon the walls, the like of which they had never seen, before, and then back to the white white bed that held their companion. They could not get used to the whiteness and the cleanness of his clean, clean face and hands, and bright gold hair. It burned like a flame against the pillow, and Mikky's blue eyes seemed darker and deeper than ever before. To Buck they had given their obedient following, and looked to him for protection, but after all he was one like themselves, only a little more fearless. To Mikky they all gave a kind of far-seeing adoration. He was fearless and brave like Buck, but he was something more. In their superstitious fear and ignorance he seemed to them almost supernatural.

They skulked, silently down the stairs like frightened rabbits when the interview was over, each

clutching his precious orange, and not until the great doors had closed upon them, did they utter a word. They had said very little. Mikky had done all the talking.

When they had filed down the street behind their leader, and rounded the corner out of sight of the house, Buck gathered them into a little knot and said solemnly: "Kids. I bet cher Mik don't be comin' out o' this no more. Didn't you take notice how he looked jes' like the angel top o' the monnemunt down to the cemetary?"

The little group took on a solemnity that was deep and real.

"Annyhow, he wanted us!" spoke up a curly-headed boy with old eyes and a thin face. He was one whom Mikky had been won't to defend. He bore a hump upon his ragged back.

"Aw! he's all right fer us, is Mik," said Buck, "but he's different nor us. Old Aunt Sal she said one day he were named fer a 'n'angel, an' like as not he'll go back where he b'longs some day, but he won't never fergit us. He ain't like rich folks what don't care. He's our pard allus. Come on, fellers."

Down the back alley went the solemn little procession, single file, till they reached the rear of the Endicott house, where they stood silent as before a shrine, till at a signal from their leader, each grimy right hand was raised, and gravely each ragged cap was taken off and held high in the air toward the

upper window, where they knew their hero-comrade lay. Then they turned and marched silently away.

They were all in place before the door whenever the doctor came thereafter, and always went around by the way of the alley afterward for their ceremonial good night, sometimes standing solemnly beneath the cold stars while the shrill wind blew through their thin garments, but always as long as the doctor brought them word, or as long as the light burned in the upper window, they felt their comrade had not gone yet.

Chapter III

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Heaven opened for Mikky on the day when Morton, with the doctor's permission, brought Baby Starr to see him.

The baby, in her nurse's arms, gazed down upon her rescuer with the unprejudiced eyes of childhood. Mikky's smile flashed upon her and forthwith she answered with a joyous laugh of glee. The beautiful boy pleased her ladyship. She reached out her roseleaf hands to greet him.

The nurse held her down to the bed:

"Kiss the wee b'y, that's a good baby. Kiss the wee b'y. He took care of baby and saved her life when the bad man tried to hurt her. Kiss the wee b'y and say 'I thank you,'" commanded Morton.

The saving of her life meant nothing to little Starr, but she obediently murmured 'I'ee tank oo!' as the nurse had drilled her to do before she brought her, and then laid her moist pink lips on cheeks, forehead, eyes and mouth in turn, and Mikky, in ecstasy, lay trembling with the pleasure of it. No one had ever kissed him before. Kissing was not in vogue in the street where he existed.

Thereafter, every day until he was convalescent, Starr came to visit him.

By degrees he grew accustomed to her gay presence enough to talk with her freely as child with

child. Her words were few and her tongue as yet quite unacquainted with the language of this world; but perhaps that was all the better, for their conversations were more of the spirit than of the tongue, Mikky's language, of circumstance, being quite unlike that of Madison Avenue.

Starr brought her wonderful electric toys and dolls, and Mikky looked at them with wonder, yet always with a kind of rare indifference, because the child herself was to him the wonder of all wonders, an angel spirit stooped to earth. And every day, when the nurse carried her small charge away after her frolic with the boy, she would always lift her up to the bed and say:

"Now kiss the wee b'y, Baby Starr, and thank him again fer savin' yer life."

And Starr would lay her soft sweet mouth on his as tenderly and gravely as if she understood the full import of her obligation. At such times Mikky would watch her bright face as it came close to his, and when her lips touched his he would close his eyes as if to shut out all things else from this sacred ceremony. After Starr and Morton were gone the nurse was wont to look furtively toward the bed and note the still, lovely face of the boy whose eyes were closed as if to hold the vision and memory the longer. At such times her heart would draw her strangely from her wonted formality and she would touch the boy with a tenderness that was not natural to her.