

In the Honors of the Class.

(By Jean K. Baird, in 'Christian Advocate.')

"Friends, Romans, Countrymen"—O bother that doesn't sound at all well. Doesn't my voice sound weak, Hal? Is this better? "Friends, Romans, Countrymen." The voice rang out pure and clear, and the morning air vibrated with the time-worn oration.

"I came to bury Caesar"—The sentence ended with a loud boyish laugh.

'You seem to consider Caesar's burial little less than a circus,' said a second voice. 'Get more feeling into that, Carl. This way: "I came to bury Caesar, not to praise him."' The voice was full and deliberate, and under its influence the sentence was rich with feeling.

Carl stood straight on the stump again, and once more began. "'The evil that men do lives after them.'" He seemed to have caught the inspiration now. His boyish form was drawn to its utmost. His eyes flashed, and his voice was free and clear. An Antony worthy of the name he seemed, carried away by the inspiration of his own words.

Suddenly, a bell rang in the distance. The would-be orator sprang down from his stump nostrum, and the critic got up from the grass and gathered together the books.

'I'm not going back now,' said Carl. 'We might have no classes this morning. That's what it is to be a grave old senior. I'm going to take a cut across the fields. There's a fellow down here I must see.'

'Give me the books, then, I'll take them back to school. When will you try again? Why not after the tests this afternoon?'

'All right, if you'll listen to me. But I must have an audience. I'm willing to put in plenty of time at it. The greatest trouble with me is that when I'm worked up to a subject my voice goes up like a rocket. I need drilling until I can control myself.'

'You need practice. A high, shrill voice in an oration is—' Hal shrugged his shoulders in a way that suggested all manner of disagreeable things.

The boys jumped the fence that bounded the fields and entered the public road. Carl, the enthusiast, still kept up his rapid, excited talk, while Harold, deliberate and thoughtful, threw in a word now and then as his share of the conversation.

'It isn't the money that I care for, Hal. When it comes to a couple of hundred a year, that's nothing to mamma. But it's the honor of the affair. I wouldn't consider the money, would you, Hal?'

'No; not for the sake of money alone.'

'And even the honor doesn't influence me so much. Yet I do think it's a good bit of satisfaction to know you can do something well. But mamma would be delighted if I'd be first. You know, there isn't any of her family left; only she and I. And I do believe she hasn't a plan that doesn't concern me. And it's more on her account than my own that I wish to take the scholarship. She wouldn't think whether it meant five cents or five millions. It would be the honor. That's why I'm working so hard. It's for her sake. Wouldn't you, Hal?'

'Yes.'

'And I've made up my mind that I'm going to take it. Dr. Dixon said last fall that I was the 'stuff that orators were made of.' I really love it, Hal. When I stand before a chapel filled with people I forget them, myself, and everything but my talk; and I have a picture of it before me—what the real orator thought and did. If I could but

keep my voice from scale running. But do you think I'm getting better in that?'

'Yes; you're improving. But you mustn't give up your practice for a single day.'

'There's only one fellow that I'm the least afraid of. That's young Munson. He's not apt to say much about what he does, but he's a worker. He's good at an oration, and he controls his voice beautifully; but I can get more spirit than he. So we are about an even balance. Don't you think so?'

'I don't know Munson. He's not a boarding student. And I don't know any day students out of my own class. Where does he live?'

'Down here at the corner of the square. Do you remember the little cottage that stands there? He and his mother live there alone. He hasn't been at school for a week. I'm going there now for a library book he has. He's a first class sort of fellow.'

'Yes, so I've heard. But if you're going on, I'll leave you here, or I'll be late for class again.' They had reached the low fence that skirted the campus. Harold placed his hand on the rail and lightly vaulted over, and started on a run toward the school.

Carl went on his way until he reached the small one-story cottage at the corner. A small porch ran before the front of the house, on which the hall opened, the door of which was standing ajar; and Carl, as he stood on the porch, could see through the small, square hall, into the room beyond. Just a glimpse was given him, but with a boy's keen eye, he took in the scene clearly and rapidly, and concluded that the Munsons were poor, very poor, and that they had not always been so. The draperies were of handsome material, but patched and darned. The hall floor was not guilty of any finish, except what the scrub brush had given it; but the rug that extended from door to door in its best days, had been an expensive Turkish affair. Everywhere his eyes rested there were darns and mends and patches, while carpets, draperies, and bric-a-brac, suggested dainty, refined tastes and previous means. He raised his hand to the bell, when voices from the room beyond reached him. His hand fell, and, all unconscious of his action, he stood still and listened. He recognized Levi Munson's voice at once. The other was a woman's voice, particularly sweet-toned and well-modulated.

'But, Levi, I do not think it wise for you to study now. You might ruin your eyes forever. Be content to rest a few days.'

'I can rest, after commencement, mother. I must work now. Why, do you know that I have not started my oration yet, and it's less than three weeks from commencement? And I must get that scholarship if I—'

'Hush, hush, Levi! Do not count so much on it, dear. Remember how many other boys are working, and will do their best. And that one boy in particular—'

'Milligan? He's the only one I'm afraid of. He's fine! He's simply carried away by his oration. He does better before an audience than alone. But it doesn't mean much to him. He will go on through college if he doesn't get the scholarship. It means only "honor" to him, while to us a scholarship means "honor," "college," and "everything good."'

She laughed softly, but to the boy on the porch there was much sadness, and little mirth in the laugh.

'It does mean almost "everything," mother. If I get the scholarship, I will be less a burden to you. Do you know, mother, it seems wrong for me to be going to school

while you go about nursing and wearing yourself out to give me these advantages? I wish to go on, I want to be educated; but I don't feel like sacrificing my mother for my ambition. If I get the scholarship, I shall go on and finish; if I don't, I shall give up and go to work. I won't have you to struggle for me.'

'Yes, Levi, if you get the scholarship, we'll live as people do in fairyland. But do not count too much on it. Some way will be open before us. We shall never be forsaken. As to your going to school, do you not see that it is for the best? You must prepare yourself now, when I am able to work and able to help you. Then in a few years I shall depend on my great, sturdy son. It will not be long before your mother is an old woman for you to take care of.' Again she gave the laugh with sorrow in it, and to Carl's listening ear there was a quick movement, and a sound very much as though Levi's arm had been thrown about her neck, and he was repaying in tenderness the love she had bestowed on him.

Carl, remembering suddenly that he had been guilty of listening, raised his hand and rang the bell. The mother came to the door, but Levi, recognizing his classmate's voice, called to his mother to bring Carl in. The room into which Carl was ushered was shabbier than the hall. Levi lay on a couch, with a screen shading his eyes from the light, and the school books packed out of reach.

'Why, Munson, how's this? We didn't know you were sick!'

'I'm not. My eyes are weak, and cold has settled in them, and at just the wrong time for me to stop work, too.'

'Examinations and all that. But you'll get through on your class record if you're too sick to take the examinations.'

'It isn't the exams. I'm worrying about. I'm thinking of class day. I don't know my oration yet, and if my eyes don't get better soon, I shall have to give that up. Mother started reading it to me, but she's busy until late. So I have given up learning it that way. You will excuse mother, but she was just about to leave when you rang. So she felt compelled to hurry, it being so late.'

She had already left the house, and Carl, glancing from the window, saw her hurrying down the street, a delicate, sad-faced woman, dressed in widow's weeds.

'Is she away all day?'

'Until bedtime. She is companion to an old lady who is ill. They wanted her to stay there, to make her home; but she couldn't or wouldn't, leave me. It's lonely enough with her gone, especially when a fellow can't study or read.'

Carl sat silent. His mind was busy devising and working out an idea that had suddenly popped into his head. He recollected himself suddenly. 'I beg your pardon, old fellow,' he spoke at last, 'but my thoughts have gone wool-gathering all morning. I mustn't stay longer. I came after the book of orations from the library. You have it, haven't you?'

'Yes; you will get it from the rack, Carl? The third row. That's it. My oration's in that. I thought I would have learned it by this time. But I'm afraid its "good-bye" to that class day now.'

Carl took down the book and leaved it over thoughtfully. 'I must go,' he said, slowly. Yet he made no move toward the door. Evidently some weighty subject was bearing down upon him and making the excitable Carl more deliberate. 'If you're alone, Munson, and don't mind, I may come down this evening—if the doctor gives me permission.' And without another word Carl was gone.