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Carolyn of the Corners

By RUTH BELMORE ENDICOTT

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Her father and mother reported lost when the Dunraven was destroyed by a submarine, Carolyn May goes to live with her bachelor uncle, Joseph Stagg, at The Corners. The reception of herself and her mongrel cur by her uncle and his housekeeper, Auntie Rose Kennedy, is not very enthusiastic.

CHAPTER II—Auntie Rose rules the home with an iron hand, but is not unkind to the child.

CHAPTER III—Stagg learns from a letter from a New York lawyer that the child has been left practically penniless. Carolyn's sunny disposition begins to make an impression on the stern housekeeper.

CHAPTER IV—Carolyn makes the acquaintance of Jeddiah Parlow, with whom her uncle has not been on speaking terms for years.

CHAPTER V—She learns of the estrangement between her uncle and his one-time sweetheart, Amanda Parlow, and the cause of the bitterness between the two families.

CHAPTER VI.

Prince Awakens The Corners. Camp-meeting time was over, and the church at The Corners was to open for its regular Sunday services.

"Both Satan and the parson have had a vacation," said Mr. Stagg, "and now they can tackle each other again and see which'll get the strange hold 'twixt now and revival time."

"You should not say such things, especially before the child, Joseph Stagg," admonished Auntie Rose.

Carolyn May, however, seemed not to have heard Uncle Joe's pessimistic remark; she was too greatly excited by the prospect of Sunday school. And the very next week-day school would begin.

By this first week in September the little girl was quite settled in her new home at The Corners. Prince was still a doubtful addition to the family, both Uncle Joe and Auntie Rose plainly having misgivings about him. But in regard to the little girl herself, the hardware merchant and the housekeeper were of one opinion, even though they did not admit it to each other.

Auntie Rose remained, apparently, as austere as ever, while Joseph Stagg was quite as much immersed in business as formerly. Yet there were times, when she and the child were alone, that Mrs. Kennedy unbent, in a greater or less degree. And on the part of Joseph Stagg, he found himself thinking of sunny-haired, blue-eyed "Hannah's Carolyn" with increasing frequency.

"Didn't you ever have any little girls, Auntie Rose?" Carolyn May asked the housekeeper on one of these intimate occasions. "Or little boys? I mean of your very own."

"Yes," said Auntie Rose in a matter-of-fact tone. "Three. But only to have them in my arms for a very little while. Each died soon after coming to me. There was something quite wrong with them all, so the doctors said."

"Oh, my dear! All three of them?" sighed Carolyn May. "Two girls and a boy. Only one lived to be three months old. They are all buried behind the church yonder."

The next morning early Carolyn May, with Prince, went over into the churchyard and found the three little stones in a row. She knew they must be the right ones, for there was a bigger stone, with the inscription, "Frank Kennedy, beloved spouse of Ross Kennedy," upon it.

The names on the three little stones were Emeline, Frank, Jr., and Clarissa. Weeds and tall grass had begun to sprout about the little, lozenge-shaped stones and about the taller one.

While she was thus engaged, a tall man in black—looking rather "weedy" himself, if the truth were told—came across the graveyard and stood beside her. He wore a broad band of crepe

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around his hat and on his arm, and was very grave and serious-looking. "Who are you, little girl?" he asked, his voice being quite agreeable and his tone kindly.

"I'm Carolyn May, if you please," she replied, looking up at him frankly. "Carolyn May Stagg?" he asked. "You're Mr. Stagg's little girl? I've heard of you."

"Carolyn May Cameron," she corrected seriously. "I'm only staying with Uncle Joe. He is my guardian, and he had to take me, of course, when my papa and mamma were lost at sea."

"Indeed?" returned the gentleman. "Do you know who I am?"

"I—I think," said Carolyn May, doubtfully, "that you must be the undertaker."

"For a moment the gentleman looked startled. Then he dashed a little, but his eyes twinkled. "The undertaker?" he murmured. "Do I look like that?"

"Excuse me, sir," said Carolyn May. "I don't really know you, you know. Maybe you're not the undertaker."

"No, I am not. Though our undertaker, Mr. Snivvins, is a very good man."

"Yes, sir," said the little girl, politely. "I am the pastor here—your pastor, I hope," he said, putting a kind hand upon her head.

"Oh, I know you now!" said Carolyn May brightly. "You're the man Uncle Joe says is going to get a strange hold on Satan now that vacation is over."

Rev. Afton Driggs looked rather odd again. The shocking frankness of the child came pretty near to flooring him.

"I—ahem! Your uncle compliments me," he said drily. "You don't know that he is ready to do his share, do you?"

"His share?" repeated the puzzled little girl.

"Toward strangling the Evil One," pursued the minister, a wry smile curling the corners of his lips.

"Has he got a share in it, too?" asked Carolyn May.

"I think we all should have," said the minister, looking down at her with returning kindness in his glance. "Even little girls like you."

Carolyn May looked at him quite seriously. "Do you s'pose," she asked him confidentially, "that Satan is really wicked enough to trouble little girls?"

It was a startling bit of new philosophy thus suggested, and Mr. Driggs shook his head in grave doubt. But it gave him something to think of all that day, and the first sermon preached in The Corners church that autumn seemed rather different from most of those soiled, indigestible discourses that the good man was wont to drone out to his parishioners.

"Dunno but it is worth while to give the parson a vacation," pronounced Uncle Joe at the dinner table. "Seems to me his sermon this morning seemed to have a new snap to it. Mebbe he'll give old Satan a hard rub this winter, after all."

"Joseph Stagg!" said Auntie Rose admonishingly.

"I think he's a very nice man," said Carolyn May suddenly. "And I kep' awake most of the time—you see, I heard poor Princey howling for me here, where he was tied up."

"Hum!" ejaculated Mr. Stagg. "Which kept you awake—the dog or the minister?"

"Oh, I like Mr. Driggs very much," the little girl assured him. "And he's in great 'flection, too, I am sure. He—he wears crepe on his hat and sleeve."

"Huh, so he does," grunted Mr. Stagg. "He's 'most always in mourning for somebody or something."

"Do you s'pose, Uncle Joe, that he looks up enough? It does just seem to me as though poor Mr. Driggs must always be looking down instead of looking up to see the sunshine and the blue sky and—the mountains, like my papa said you should."

Uncle Joe was silent. Auntie Rose said, very briskly for her: "And your papa was right, Carolyn May. He was a very sensible man, I have no doubt."

"Oh, he was quite a wonderful man," said the little girl with full assurance.

It was on the following morning that the school opened. The Corners district school was a red building, with a squat bell tower and two front doors, standing not far up the road beyond the church.

Miss Minnie Lester taught the school, and although Miss Minnie looked very sharply through her glasses at one, Carolyn May thought she was going to love the teacher very much.

Indeed, that was Carolyn May's attitude toward almost everybody whom she met. She expected to love and to be loved. Was it any wonder she made so many friends?

There proved, however, at the start, to be a little difficulty with Miss Minnie. Prince would not remain at home. He howled and whined for the first half of Monday morning's session—as Auntie Rose confessed, almost driving her mad. Then he slipped his collar and tore away on Carolyn May's cold trail.

also, the school marched the dog, having drawn the staple with which his chain had been fastened to the bole of the tree in Mr. Stagg's back yard.

Miss Minnie was both alarmed and angry. Some of the little girls shrieked and wept when Prince pranced over to Carolyn May's seat.

"If you do not shut that awful dog up so that he cannot follow you here, Carolyn May, I shall speak to your uncle, Mr. Stagg, about it. Ugh, the ugly beast! Take him away at once!"

So Carolyn May's holidays at The Corners did not begin very happily, after all. She had always been loved by every one, and had never had before. But she was now seemed prejudiced against her because of Prince.

The little girl felt badly about this, but she was of too cheerful a temperament to drop for long under the pressure of any trouble. The school children liked her, and Carolyn May found plenty of playmates.

It was on the last Friday in the month that something happened which quite changed Miss Minnie's attitude towards "that mongrel." Incidentally, The Corners, as a community, was fully awakened from its lethargy, and, as it chanced, like the Sleeping Beauty and all her retinue, by a Prince.

The school session on Friday afternoon, was always shortened. This day Mr. Brady, one of the school trustees, came to review the school and, before he left, to pay Miss Minnie her salary for the month.

Carolyn May had permission from Auntie Rose to go calling that afternoon. Freda Payne, whom she liked very much, lived up the road beyond the schoolhouse, and she had invited the little city girl to come to see her. Of course, Prince had to be included in the invitation. Freda fully understood that, and Carolyn May took him on his leash.

They saw Miss Minnie at her desk when they went past the schoolhouse. She was correcting written exercises. Carolyn May secretly hoped that her own was much better than she feared it was.

Not far beyond the schoolhouse Prince began to growl, and the hairs stiffened on his neck.

"Whatever is the matter with you, Prince?" demanded Carolyn May.

In a moment she saw the cause of the dog's continued agitation. A roughly dressed, bewhiskered man sat beside the road eating a lunch out of a newspaper. He leered at Carolyn May, and said:

"I guess you got a bad dog there, ain't he, little girl?"

"Oh, no! He's usually very polite," answered Carolyn May. "You must be still, Prince! You see," she explained, "he doesn't like folks to wear old clothes. If—if you had on your Sunday suit, I'm quite sure he would not growl at you."

"He wouldn't, hey?" said the man hoarsely, licking his fingers of the last crumbs of his lunch. "An' s'pose a feller ain't got no Sunday suit?"

"Why then, I s'pose Prince wouldn't ever let you come into our yard—if he was loose."

"Don't let him loose now, little girl," said the fellow, getting up hurriedly and eyeing the angry dog askance.

"Oh, no, sir. We're going visiting up the road. Come away, Prince. I won't let him touch you," she assured the man.

The latter seemed rather doubtful of her ability to hold the dog long, and he hobbled away towards the schoolhouse.

Carolyn May had a very pleasant call—Freda's mother even approved of Prince—and it was an hour before the two started for home. In sight of the school house Prince gave evidence again of excitement.

"I wonder what is the matter with you now," Carolyn May began, when suddenly she sighted what had evidently so disturbed the dog.

A man was crouching under one of the schoolhouse windows, bobbing up now and then to peer in. It was the man whom they had previously seen beside the road.

"Hush, Prince!" whispered little Carolyn May, holding the dog by the collar.

She, too, could see through the open window. Miss Minnie was still at her desk. She had finished correcting the pupils' papers. Now she had her bag open and was counting the money Mr. Brady had given her.

"O-o-oh!" breathed Carolyn May, clinging to the eager dog's collar.

The man at the window suddenly left his position and slipped around to the door. In a moment he appeared in the schoolroom before the startled teacher.

Miss Minnie screamed. The man, with a rough threat, darted forward to seize her purse.

Just then Carolyn May unsnapped



But He Was Soon Baying the Fellow Past the Blacksmith Shop and the Store.

the leash from Prince's collar and let him go.

"Save Miss Minnie, Princey!" she cried after the charging dog.

Prince did not trouble about the door. The open window, through which the tramp had slipped upon the schoolhouse steps, was nearer. He went up the wall and scrambled over the sill with a savage determination that left no doubt whatever in the tramp's mind.

With a yell of terror the fellow bounded out of the door and tore along the road and through The Corners at a speed never before equaled in that locality by a knight of the road.

Prince lost a little time in recovering his footing and again getting on the trail of the fleeing tramp. But he was soon baying the fellow past the blacksmith shop and the store.

The incident called the entire population of The Corners, save the bedridden, to the windows and doors. For once the little, somnolent village awoke.

CHAPTER VII.

A Sunday Walk.

Really if Prince had been a vain dog his ego would certainly have become unduly developed because of this incident. The Corners, as a community, voted him an acquisition, whereas heretofore he had been looked upon as a good deal of a nuisance.

After she recovered from her fright Miss Minnie walked home with Carolyn May and allowed Prince's delighted little mistress to encourage the "hero" to "shake hands with teacher."

"Now, you see, he's acquainted with you, Miss Minnie," said Carolyn May. "He's an awful nice dog. You didn't know just how nice he was before, did you? Almost everybody went to church and all the children to Sunday school, which was held first."

The Rev. Afton Driggs, though serious-minded, was a loving man. He was fond of children and he and his childless wife gave much of their attention to the Sunday school. Mrs. Driggs taught Carolyn May's class of little girls. Mrs. Driggs did her very best, too, to get the children to stay to the preaching service, but Carolyn May had to confess that the pastor's discourses were usually hard to understand.

"And he is always reading about the 'Begats,'" she complained gently to Uncle Joe as they went home together on this particular Sunday, "and I can't keep interested when he does that. I s'pose the 'Begats' were very nice people, but I'm sure they weren't related to us—they've all got such funny names."

"Hum!" ejaculated Uncle Joe, smothering a desire to laugh. "Flow gently, sweet Afton, does select his passages of Scripture mostly from the 'valleys of dry bones.' I allow, you've got it about right there, Carolyn May."

"Uncle Joe," said the little girl, taking her courage in both hands, "will you do something for me?" Then, as he stared down at her from under his bushy brows, she added: "I don't mean that you aren't always doing something for me—letting me sleep here at your house and eat with you and all that. But something special."

"What is the 'something special?'" asked Mr. Stagg cautiously.

"Something I want you to do to-day. You always go off to your store after dinner and when you come home it's too dark."

"Too dark for what?"

"For us to take a walk," said the little girl very earnestly. "Oh, Uncle Joe, you don't know how dreadful I miss taking Sunday walks with my papa! Of course we took 'em in the morning, for he had to go to work on the paper in the afternoon, but we did just about go everywhere. If you would go with me," the little girl added wistfully, "just this afternoon, seems to me I wouldn't feel so—so empty."

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