

DARREL of THE BLESSED ISLES

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"Dri and I," Etc.

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The young man was deeply troubled. Polly and her mother sat well into the night with him, hearing the story of his life, which he told in full, saving only the sin of his father. Of that he had neither the right nor the heart to tell.

"God only knows what is the next chapter," said he at last. "It may rob me of all that I love in this world."

"But not of me," said Polly, whispering in his ear.

"I wish I were sure of that," he answered.

Among those who got off the train at Hillsborough one day was a big, handsome crowd of some twenty years. In all the crowd there were none had ever seen him before. Dressed in the height of fashion, he was a figure so extraordinary that all eyes observed him as he made his way to the tavern. Trove and Polly and Mrs. Vaughn were in that curious throng on the platform, where a depot was being built.

"My! What a splendid looking fellow!" said Polly as the stranger passed. Trove had a swift pang of jealousy that moment. Turning, he saw Riley Brooke standing near them in a group of villagers.

"I tell you, he's a thief," the boy heard him saying, and the words seemed to bluster as they fell, and ever after when he thought of them a great sternness lay like a shadow on his brow.

"I must go," said he, calmly turning to Polly. "Let me help you into the wagon."

When they were gone he stood a moment thinking. He felt as if he were friendless and alone.

"You're a giant today," said a friend, passing him, but Trove made no answer. Roused incomprehensibly, his heavy muscles had become tense, and he had an odd consciousness of their power. The people were scattering, and he walked slowly down the street. The sun was low, but he thought not of home, or where he should spend the night. It was now the third day after his arrest. Since noon he had been looking for Darrel, but the tinker's door had been locked for days, according to the carpenter who was at work below. For an hour Trove walked, passing up and down before that familiar stairway, in the hope of seeing his friend. Daylight was dim when the tinker stopped by the stairs and began to feel for his key. The young man was quickly at the side of Darrel.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

Trove had been reciting the history of his trouble and had finished with bitter words.

"Shame on thee, boy," said the tinker as Trove sat before him with tears of anger in his eyes. "Watch yonder pendulum and say not a word until it has ticked forty times. For what are thy learning an' thy mighty thews if they do not bear thee up in time o' trouble? Now is thy trial come before the Judge of all. Up with thy head, boy, an' be acquitted o' weakness an' fear an' evil passion."

"We deserve better of him," said Trove, speaking of Riley Brooke. When all others hated him we were kind to the old sinner, and it has done him no good."

"Ah, but has it done thee good? There's the question," said Darrel, his hand upon the boy's arm.

"I believe it has," said Trove, with a look of surprise.

"It was thee I thought of, boy. I had never much thought o' him."

That moment Trove saw farther into the depth of Darrel's heart than ever before. It startled him. Surely here was a man that passed all understanding.

Darrel crossed to his bench and began to wind the clocks.

"Put away thy unhappiness," said he gently. "No harm shall come to thee. 'Tis only a passing cloud."

"You're right, and I'm not going to be a fool," said Trove. "It has brought me one item of good fortune."

"An' that is?"

"I have discovered who is my father."

"An' know ye where he is now?" the tinker inquired.

"No; but I know it is he to whom you gave the boots at Christmas time."

"Hush, boy," said Darrel in a whisper, his hand raised.

He crossed to the bench, returning quickly and drawing his chair in front of the young man.

"Once upon a time," he whispered, sitting down and touching the palm of his open hand with the index finger of the other, "a youth held in his hand a cup, rare an' costly, an' it was full o' happiness, an' he was tempted to drink."

"Ho, there, me youth," said one who saw him, "that is the happiness of another." But he tasted the cup, an' it was bitter, an' he let it fall, an' the other lost his great possession. Now, that bitter taste was ever on the tongue of the youth, so that his own cup had always the flavor o' woe."

The tinker paused a moment, looking sternly into the face of the young man.

"I adjure thee, boy, touch not the cup of another's happiness, or it may imbruit thy tongue. But if thou be foolish an' take it up, mind ye do not drop it."

"I shall be careful—I shall neither taste nor drop it," said Trove.

"God bless thee, boy! Thou'rt come to a great law—who drains the cup of another's happiness shall find it bitter, but who drains the cup of another's bitterness shall find it sweet."

A silence followed, in which Trove sat looking at the old man whose words were like those of a prophet. "I have no longer any right to seek my father," he thought. "And, though I meet him face to face, I must let him go his way."

Suddenly there came a rap at the door, and when Darrel opened it they saw only a letter hanging to the latch. It contained these words, but no signature:

"There'll be a bonfire and some fun tonight at 12 in the middle of Cook's field. Messrs. Trove and Darrel are invited."

"Curious," said Darrel. "It has the look o' mischief."

"Oh, it's only the boys and a bit of skylarking," said Trove. "Let's go and see what's up. It's near the time."

The streets were dark and silent as they left the shop. They went up a street beyond the village limits and looked off in Cook's field, but saw no

"Down to your knees, man."

light there. While they stood looking a flame rose and spread. Soon they could see figures in the light, and, climbing the fence, they hastened across an open pasture. Coming near, they saw a score of men with masks upon their faces.

"Give him the tar and feathers," said a strange voice.

"Not if he will confess an' seek forgiveness," another answered.

"Down to your knees, man, an' make no outcry, an' see you repeat the words carefully as I speak them or you go home in tar and feathers."

They could hear the sound of a scuffle and shortly the phrases of a prayer spoken by one voice and repeated by another.

They were far back in the gloom, but could hear each word of that which follows: "O God, forgive me—I am a liar and a hypocrite—I have the tongue

of scandal and deceit—I have robbed the poor—I have defamed the good—and, Lord, I am sick—with the rottenness of my own heart. And hereafter—I will cheat no more—and speak no evil of any one. Amen."

"Now go to your home, Riley Brooke," said the voice, "an' hereafter mind your tongue or you shall ride a rail in tar and feathers."

They could see the crowd scatter, and some passed near them, running away in the darkness.

"Stoop there an' say not a word," the tinker whispered, crouching in the grass.

When all were out of hearing they started for the little shop.

"Hereafter," said Darrel as they walked along, "God send he be more careful with the happiness of other men. I do assure thee, boy, it is bitter, bitter, bitter!"

CHAPTER XXV.

Trove had much to help him—youth, a cheerful temperament, a counselor of unfailing wisdom. Long after they were gone he recalled the sadness and worry of those days with satisfaction, for thereafter the shock of trouble was never able to surprise and overthrow him.

After due examination he had been kept in jail to await the action of the grand jury, soon to meet. Now, there were none thought him guilty save one or two afflicted with the evil tongue. It seemed to him a dead issue and gave him no worry. One thing, however, preyed upon his peace—the knowledge that his father was a thief. A conviction was ever boring in upon him that he had no right to love Polly. A base injustice it would be, he thought, to marry her without telling what he had no right to tell. But he was ever hoping for some word of his father—news that might set him free. He had planned to visit Polly, and on a certain day Darrel was to meet him at Robin's Inn. The young man waited in some doubt of his duty, and that day came, one of the late summer, when he and Darrel went afoot to the Inn, crossing hill and valley as the crow flies, stopping here and there at isles of shadow in a hot amber sea of light. They sat long to hear the droning in the stubble and let their thought drift slowly as the ship becalmed.

"Some days," said Darrel, "the soul in me is like a toy skiff, tossing in the ripples of a duck pond an' mayhap stranding on a reed or lily. An' then," he added, with kindling eye and voice, "she is a great ship, her sails league long an' high, her masthead raking the stars, her hull in the infinite sea."

"Well," said Trove, sighing, "I'm still in the ripples of the duck pond."

"An' see they do not swamp thee," said Darrel, with a smile that seemed to say, "Poor weakling, your trouble is only as the ripples of a tiny pool."

They went on slowly, over green pastures, halting at a brook in the woods. There again they rested in a cool shade of pines, Darrel lighting his pipe.

"I envy thee, boy," said the tinker, "entering on thy life work in this great land—a country blest o' God. To thee all high things are possible. Where I was born, let a poor lad have great hope in him, an' all—aye, all—even those he loved, rose up to cry him down. Here in this land all cheer an' bid him godspeed. An' here is to be the great theater o' the world's action. Many of high hope in the broad earth shall come, an' here they shall do their work. An' its spirit shall spread like the rising waters, aye, it shall flood the world, boy, it shall flood the world."

Trove made no reply, but he thought much and deeply of what the tinker said. They lay back awhile on the needle carpet, thinking. They could hear the murmur of the brook and a woodpecker drumming on a dead tree.

"Me head is busy as you woodpeckers," Darrel went on. "It's the soul fire in this great, free garden o' God—it's America. Have ye felt it, boy?"

"Yes; it is in your eyes and on your tongue," said Trove.

"Ah, boy, 'tis only God's oxygen. Think o' the poor fools withering on cracker barrels in Hillsborough an' wearing away 'the lag end o' their lewdness.' I have no patience with the like o' them. I'd rather be a butcher's clerk an' carry with me the redolence o' ham."

In Hillsborough, where all spoke of him as an odd man of great learning, there were none, saying Trove and two or three others, that knew the tinker well, for he took no part in the roaring gossip of shop and store.

"Hath it ever occurred to thee," said Darrel as they walked along, "that a fool is blind to his folly, a wise man to his wisdom?"

When they were through the edge of the wilderness and came out on Cedar hill and saw below them the great round shadow of Robin's Inn they began to hasten their steps. They could see Polly reading a book under the big tree.

"What ho, the little queen," said Darrel as they came near. "Now, put upon her brow 'an' odorous chaplet o' sweet summer buds.'"

She came to meet them in a pretty pink dress and slippers and white stockings.

"Fair lady, I bring thee flowers," said Darrel, handing her a bouquet. "They are from the great garden o' the fields."

"And I bring a crown," said Trove as he kissed her and put a wreath of clover and wild roses on her brow.

"I thought something dreadful had happened," said Polly, with tears in her eyes. "For three days I've been dressed up waiting."

"An' a grand dress it is," said Darrel, surveying her pretty figure.

"I've nearly worn it out waiting," said she, looking down, her voice trembling.

"Tut, tut, girl—'tis a lovely dress," the tinker insisted.

"It is one my mother wore when she was a girl," said