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## CHAPTER I

## The Ray of Sunlight.

Just as the rays of the afternoon sun hesitated to enter the open door of Joseph Staggs' hardware store in Sunrise Cove and lingered on the sill, so the little girl in the black frock and hat, with twin braids of sunshiny hair on her shoulders, hovered at the entrance of the dim and dusty place.

She carried a satchel in one hand, while the fingers of the other were hooked into the rivet-studded collar of a mottled, homely mongrel dog. "Oh, dear me, Prince!" sighed the little girl, "this must be the place. We'll just have to go in. Of course I know he must be a nice man; but he's such a stranger."

Her feet faltered over the door sill and paced slowly down the shop between long counters. She saw no clerk.

At the back of the shop was a small office closed in with grimy windows. The uncertain visitor and her canine companion saw the shadowy figure of a man inside the office, sitting on a high stool and bent above a big ledger. The dog, however, scented something else.

In the half darkness of the shop he and his little mistress came unexpectedly upon what Prince considered his arch-enemy. There rose up on the end of the counter nearest the open office door a big, black tomcat whose arched back, swollen tail and yellow eyes blazed defiance.

"Pssst—ye-ow!" The rising yowl broke the silence of the shop like a trumpet call. The little girl dropped her bag and seized the dog's collar with both hands.

"Prince!" she cried, "don't you speak to that cat—don't you dare speak to it!"

"Bless me!" croaked a voice from the office.

The tomcat uttered a second "pssst—ye-ow!" and shot up a ladder to the top shelf.

"Bless me!" repeated Joseph Staggs, taking off his eyeglasses and leaving them in the ledger to mark his place. "What have you brought that dog in here for?"

He came to the office door. "I didn't have any place to leave him," was the hesitating reply.

"Hum! Did your mother send you for something?"

"No-o, sir," sighed the little visitor. At that moment a more daring ray of sunlight found its way through the transom over the store door and lit up the dusky place. It fell upon the slight, black-frocted figure and for an instant touched the pretty head as with an aureole.

"Bless me, child!" exclaimed Mr. Staggs. "Who are you?"

The flowerlike face of the little girl quivered, the blue eyes spilled big drops over her cheeks. She approached Mr. Staggs, stooping and squinting in the office doorway, and placed a timid hand upon the broad band of black crepe he wore on his coat-sleeve.

"You're not Hannah's Carlyn?" questioned the hardware dealer huskily.

"I'm Carlyn May Cameron," she confessed. "You're my Uncle Joe. I'm very glad to see you, Uncle Joe, and—and I hope—you're glad to see me—and Prince," she finished rather falteringly.

"Bless me!" murmured the man again.

Nothing so startling as this had entered Sunrise Cove's chief "hardware emporium" for many and many a year. Hannah Staggs, the hardware merchant's only sister, had gone away from home quite fifteen years previously. Mr. Staggs had never seen Hannah again; but this slight, blue-eyed, sunny-haired girl was a replica of his sister, and in some dusty corner of Mr. Staggs' heart there dwelt a very faithful memory of Hannah.

Nothing had served to estrange the brother save time and distance.

"Hannah's Carlyn," muttered Mr. Staggs again. "Bless me, child! how did you get here from New York?"

"On the cars, uncle. You see, Mr. Price thought I'd better come. He says you are my guardian—it's in papa's will, if she'd made one. Mr. Price put me on the train and the conductor took care of me."

"Who is Mr. Price?" the storekeeper asked.

"He's a lawyer. He's written you a long letter about it. It's in my bag. Didn't you get the telegram he sent you last evening, Uncle Joe?"

"Never got it," replied Mr. Staggs shortly.

"Well, you see, when papa and mamma had to go away so suddenly they left me with the Prices. I go to school with Edna Price and she slept with me at night in our flat—after the Dunravens sailed."

"But—what did this lawyer send you up here for?" asked Mr. Staggs.

The question was a poser and Carolyn May stammered: "I—I—Don't guardians always take their little girls home and look out for them?"

"Hum—I don't know." The hardware merchant mused grimly. "I—I guess we'd better go up to The Corners and see what Aunt Rose has to say about it. You understand, I couldn't really keep you if she says 'No.'"

"Oh, Uncle Joe, couldn't you?"

"No," he declared, wagging his head decidedly. "And what she'll say to that dog."

"Oh!" Carolyn May cried again, and put both arms suddenly about the neck of her canine friend. "Prince is just the best dog, Uncle Joe."

Mr. Staggs shook his head doubtfully. Then he went into the office and shut the big ledger into the safe. After locking the safe door, he slipped the key into his trousers pocket and glanced around the store.

"I'd like to know where that useless Gormley boy is now," muttered Mr. Staggs.

"Chet! Hey! you Chet!"

To Carolyn May's amazement and to the utter mystification of Prince, a section of the floor under their feet began to rise.

"Oh, mercy me!" squealed the little girl, and she hopped off the trapdoor; but the dog uttered a quick, threatening growl and put his muzzle to the widening aperture.

"Hey! call off that dog!" begged a muffled voice from under the trapdoor. "He'll eat me up, Mr. Staggs."

"Lie down, Prince!" commanded Carolyn May hastily. "It's only a boy. You know you like boys, Prince," she urged.

"Come on up out o' that cellar, Chet. I'm going up to The Corners with my little niece—Hannah's Carlyn. This is Chetwood Gormley. If he ever stops growling longitudinally maybe he'll be a man some day and not a giant. You stay right here and tend store while I'm gone, Chet."

Carolyn May could not help feeling some surprise at the finally revealed proportions of Chetwood Gormley. He was lathlike and gawky, with very prominent upper front teeth, which gave a sort of bow-window appearance to his wide mouth. But there was a good-humored twinkle in the overgrown boy's shallow eyes; and, if untruth, he was kind.

"I'm proud to know ye, Carlyn," he said. He stepped quickly out of the way of Prince when the latter started for the front of the store.

Once out of the shop in the sunlit street, the little girl breathed a sigh of relief. Mr. Staggs, peering down at her sharply, asked:

"What's the matter?"

"I—I—Your shop is awful dark, Uncle Joe," she confessed. "I can't seem to look up in there."

"Look up?" repeated the hardware dealer, puzzled.

"Yes, sir. My papa says never to get in any place where you can't look up and see something brighter and better ahead," said Carolyn May softly.

"He says that's what makes life worth living."

"Oh, he does, does he?" grunted Mr. Staggs.

He noticed the heavy bag in her hand and took it from her. Instantly her released fingers stole into his free hand. Mr. Staggs looked down at the little hand in his palm, somewhat startled and not a little dismayed.

The main street of Sunrise Cove on this warm afternoon was not thronged with shoppers. Not many people noticed the tall, shambling, round-shouldered man in rusty black, with the petite figure of the child and the man-

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"Oh! Who Is That Lady, Uncle Joe?"

grel dog passing that way, though a few idle shopkeepers looked after the trio in surprise. But when Mr. Staggs and his companions turned into the pleasantly shaded street that led out of town towards The Corners—where was the Staggs homestead—Carolyn May noticed her uncle become suddenly flustered. She saw the blood flood into his face and neck, and she felt his hand loosen as though to release her own. The little girl looked ahead curiously at the woman who was approaching.

She was not a young woman—that is, not what the child would call young. Carolyn May thought she was very nice looking—tall and robust. Her brown eyes flashed an inquiring glance upon Carolyn May, but she did not look at Mr. Staggs, nor did Mr. Staggs look at her.

"Oh! who is that lady, Uncle Joe?" asked the little girl when they were out of earshot.

"Hum!" Her uncle's throat seemed to need clearing. "That—that is Mandy Parlow—Miss Amanda Parlow," he corrected himself with dignity.

The flush did not soon fade out of his face as they went on in silence.

It was half a mile from Main street to The Corners. There was tall timber all about Sunrise Cove, which was built along the shore of a deep inlet cutting in from the great lake, whose blue waters sparkled as far as one might see towards the south and west.

Uncle Joe assured Carolyn May when she asked him, that from the highest hill in sight one could see only the lake and the forest—clothed hills and valleys.

"There's lumber camps all about. Maybe they'll interest you. Lots of building going on all the time, too."

He told her, as they went along, of the long trains of cars and of the strings of barges going out of the Cove, all laden with timber and sawed boards, millstuffs, ties and telegraph poles.

They came to the last house in the row of dwellings on this street, on the very edge of the town. Carolyn May saw that attached to the house was a smaller building, facing the roadway, with a wide-open door, through which she glimpsed benches and sawed lumber, while to her nostrils was wafted a most delicious smell of shavings.

"Oh, there's a carpenter shop!" exclaimed Carolyn May. "And is that the carpenter, Uncle Joe?"

A tall old man, lean-faced and closely shaven, with a hawk's-beak nose straddled by a huge pair of silver-bowed spectacles, came out of the shop at that moment, a jackknife in his hand. He saw Mr. Staggs and, turning sharply on his heel, went indoors again.

"Who is he, Uncle Joe?" repeated the little girl. "And, if I asked him, do you suppose he'd give me some of those nice, long, curly shavings?"

"That's Jed Parlow—and he wouldn't give you any shavings; especially after having seen you with me," said the hardware merchant brusquely.

The pretty lady whose name was Parlow and the queer-looking old carpenter, whose name was likewise Parlow, would neither look at Uncle Joe! Even such a little girl as Carolyn May could see that her uncle and the Parlows were not friendly.

By and by they came in sight of The Corners—a place where another road crossed this one at right angles.

In one corner was a white church with a square tower and green blinds. In another of the four corners was set a big store, with a covered porch all across the front, on which were sheltered certain agricultural tools.

There was no sound of life at The Corners save a rhythmic "clank, clank, clank" from the blacksmith shop on the third corner.

On the fourth corner of the cross-roads stood the Staggs homestead—a wide, low-roofed house of ancient appearance, yet in good repair. Neatness was the keynote of all about the place.

"As this where you live, Uncle Joe?" asked Carolyn May breathlessly. "Oh, what a beautiful big place! It seems awful big for me to live in!"

Mr. Staggs had halted at the gate and now looked down upon Carolyn May with perplexed brow. "Well, we've got to see about that first," he muttered. "There's Aunt Rose."

A voice calling, "Chuck! Chuck! Chuck-a-chuck!" came from behind the old house. A few white-feathered fowls that had been in sight scurried wildly away in answer to the summons.

Mr. Staggs, still looking at the little girl, set down the bag and reached for the dog's leash. The loop of the latter he passed around the gatepost.

"I tell you what it is, Carlyn May. You'd better meet Aunt Rose first alone. I've my fears about this mongrel."

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" quivered his niece. "You go ahead and get acquainted with her," urged Mr. Staggs. "She don't like dogs. They chase her chickens and run over her flower beds. Aunt Rose is peculiar, I might say."

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" repeated the little girl faintly.

"You've got to make her like you, if you want to live here," the hardware dealer concluded firmly.

He gave Carolyn May a little shove up the path and then stood back and mopped his brow with his handkerchief. Prince strained at the leash and whined, wishing to follow his little mistress.

Mr. Staggs said: "You'd better keep mighty quiet, dog. If you want your home address to be The Corners, stay small!"

Carolyn May did not hear this, but disappeared after the fowls around the corner of the wide, vine-draped porch. The pleasant back yard was full of sunshine. On the gravel path beyond the old well, with its long sweep and bucket, half a hundred chickens, some guineas and a flock of turkeys scuffled for grain which was being thrown to them from an open pail.

That pan was held in the plump hand of a very dignified-looking woman, dressed in drab and with a sun-bonnet on her head.

Aunt Rose's appearance evoked the little girl with a feeling of awe.

There was no frown on her face; it was only calm, unruffled, unemotional. It simply seemed as though nothing, either material or spiritual, could ruffle the placidity of Aunt Rose Kennedy.

She came of Quaker stock and the serenity of body and spirit taught by

"Child, Who Are You?" Asked Aunt Rose With Some Curiosity.

the sect built a wall between her and everybody else.

"Child, who are you?" asked Aunt Rose with some curiosity.

The little girl told her name; but perhaps it was her black frock and hat that identified her in Aunt Rose's mind, after all.

"You are Hannah Staggs' little girl," she said.

"Yes'm—if you please," Carolyn May confessed faintly.

"And how came you here alone?"

"If you please, Uncle Joe said I'd better prob'ly come ahead and get acquainted with you first."

"First? What do you mean, 'first'?" asked Aunt Rose sternly.

"First—before you saw Prince," responded the perfectly frank little girl.

"Uncle Joe thought maybe you wouldn't care for dogs."

"Dogs!"

"No, ma'am. And of course where I live Prince has to live too. So—"

"So you brought your dog?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Of course," said Aunt Rose composedly, "I expected you to come here. I do not know what Joseph Staggs expected. But I did not suppose you would have a dog. Where is Joseph Staggs?"

"He—he's coming."

"With the dog?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Continued on next page.)