

Uncle Jared's, for I'm afraid, from what little I heard mother say of him that he's a hard man to get along with, but I didn't know where else to go."

"Well, then, it's settled. Come in, it's getting sunny out here," and, rising, she went into the cool parlor, and sitting down at the piano ran her fingers over the white keys. "Shall I sing for you, or don't you care for music?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, if you please?"

Seeing an old favorite on the music-rack, she sang in a sweet voice to a plaintive accompaniment:

Some day I'll wander back again,  
To where the old home stands,  
Beneath the old tree down the lane,  
Afar in other lands.

Its humble cot shall shelter me  
From every care and pain,  
And life be sweet as sweet can be,  
When I am home again.

I'll wander back, yes, back again,  
Where childhood's home may be,  
For memory, in sweet refrain,  
Still sings its praise to me.

Pausing, he saw Ray's head was bowed on his hand, as the memory of the home which was his no more came over him, and, chiding herself for thoughtlessly bringing his sorrow up afresh, struck into the lively air of "Twickenham Ferry," whose merry notes soon banished the sadness from his eye. After a few more gay selections, she rose, and, taking her hat, said, as she passed out the door:

"Come and get acquainted with your new home."

Putting on his hat, he followed her down the path through the primly-kept garden to the fragrant orchard, where they succeeded in finding apples large, yellow and juicy, and more to Ray's liking than those with which he had endeavored to satisfy his appetite earlier in the day. From there they passed to the barn and outbuildings, Uncle Jim's especial domain, where Ray was introduced to that worthy, who eyed him with evident suspicion, as some "poo" white trash, who'd dun tuk in Miss Mabel, shua. One more mouf to find vittals fer," he muttered to Aunt Chloe, on his return to the house, which she answered with a vigorous, "Sho, now; guess he'll airn 'em all, ef you's gwine to boss him 'roun'."

And so, Ray Ventnor finds a home, and as the days pass away, seems to be perfectly content and happy.

He spends the days helping around the farm, and by his diligence and faithfulness wins golden opinions from Uncle Jim, who thinks him invaluable, and Aunt Chloe declares she "couldn't git along 'thout him, no way."

His evenings are all spent in study, and so diligent is he that Mabel says he will soon be beyond her help, which praise is music to his heart, coming from her. Her "well done" is a greater incentive to him to excel than anything else could be, and he would go to any trouble to win a sweet smile from the one being on earth whom he regards as a guardian angel.

And so swiftly sped away the happy days of three short years. During the months of winter and spring, Ray attends the village academy, where he wins the approbation of both teachers and schoolmates, and makes rapid strides forward in his favorite studies.

Mabel still retains her position as teacher in the country school near her home, as their income's by no means colossal, though, since Ray has added his assistance and suggestions, it has become visibly increased rather than diminished, as Uncle Jim had so persistently prophesied on his early coming.

To Mabel, Ray seems to fill the place of a brother, and as such she regards him.

One afternoon Mabel had dismissed her school earlier than usual, and coming home an hour or so in advance of the usual time, heard the sound of her piano as she came up the walk. "Who can be here?" she thought, as she stopped in the porch to listen a moment. The keys were touched by no unskillful hand, and a tenor voice of peculiar richness sang the sweet ballad of "Kathleen Aroon."

She listened, charmed, to the end, and stepping to the door, beheld Ray, who, hearing her step, looked around, and seeing her, rose quickly, while the rich blood colored his cheek.

"You bad boy," she said, "to be here all this time and not let me know you had such a delicious voice. Why, Ray, your voice is superb. It may make your fortune some day. Where did you ever learn to accompany it in that manner?"

"All my knowledge of instrumental music I owe to our old organist in the little church, but it is not much," he said.

"It is a considerable, and I shall expect you to do your share of making the music hereafter, sir. You throw all my poor efforts quite in the shade."

His heart beat rapidly. The words of praise were so sweet, coming from her, that it was all he could do to retain himself from expressing the love which filled his whole being. She would think it mere boyish admiration, perhaps, but it had in it the elements of endurance which would keep it intact through many long years of the future—years of sorrow for both.

(To be continued.)

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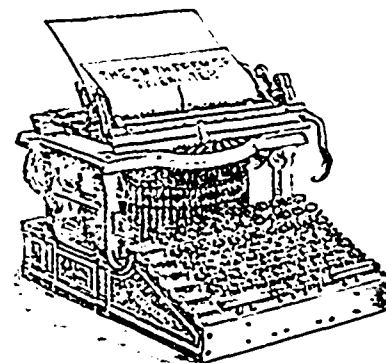
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