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Carolyn at Corners

Uncle Joe, clearing his throat. "If it's going to do you any good, Carolyn May, I suppose I can take a walk with you."

It was a crisp day—one of those autumn days when the rays of frost remains in the air, in spite of all the efforts of the sun to warm it.

Here and there they stopped to pick up the glossy brown chestnuts that had burst from their burrs. That is, Carolyn May and her uncle did. Prince, after a single attempt to nose one of the prickly burrs, left them strictly alone.

"You might just as well try to eat Auntie Rose's strawberry needle cushion, Princey," the little girl said wisely. "You'll have a sore nose than Amos Bartlett had when he tried to file it down with a wood rasp."

"Hum!" ejaculated Mr. Staggs, "whatever possessed that Bartlett child to do such a fool trick?"

"Why, you know his nose is awfully big," said Carolyn May. "And his mother is always worried about it. She must have worried Amos, too, for one day last week he went over to Mr. Parlow's shop, borrowed a wood rasp and tried to file his nose down to a proper size. And now he has to go with his nose all greased and shiny till the new skin grows back on it."

"Bless me, what these kids will do!" muttered Mr. Staggs. It was just at that moment that the little girl and the man, becoming really good comrades on this walk, met with an adventure. At least to Carolyn May it was a real adventure and one she was not to forget for a long, long time.

Prince suddenly bounded away, barking, down a pleasant glade, through the bottom of which flowed a brook. Carolyn May caught a glimpse of something brown moving down there and she called shrilly to the dog to come back.

"But that's somebody, Uncle Joe," Carolyn May said with assurance, as the dog slowly returned. "Prince never barks like that unless it's a person. And I saw something move."

"Somebody taking a walk, like us. Couldn't be a deer," said Mr. Staggs. "Oh," cried Carolyn May later, "I see it again. That's a skirt I see. Why, it's a lady!"

Mr. Staggs suddenly grew very stern-looking, as well as silent. All the beauty of the day and of the glade they had entered seemed lost on him. He went on stubbornly, yet as though loath to proceed.

"Why," murmured Carolyn May, "it's Miss Amanda Parlow! That's what it is!"

The carpenter's daughter was sitting on a bare brown log by the brook. She was dressed very prettily, all in brown.

Carolyn May wanted awfully to speak to Miss Amanda. The brown lady with the pretty roses in her cheeks sat on a log by the brook, her face turned from the path Joseph Staggs and his little niece were coming along.

And Uncle Joe was quite stammering. He stared straight ahead down the path without letting the figure on the log get into the focus of his vision.

Hanging to Uncle Joe's hand but looking longingly at the silent figure on the log, Carolyn May was going down to the stepping stones by which they were to cross the brook, when suddenly Prince came to a halt right at the upper end of the log and his body stiffened.

"What is it, Prince?" whispered his little mistress. "Come here."

But the dog did not move. He even growled—not at Miss Amanda, of course, but at something on the log. And it was just then that Carolyn May wanted to scream—and she could not!

For there on the log, raising its flat, wicked head out of an aperture, was a snake, a horrid, silent, writhing creature, the look of which held the little girl horror-stricken and speechless.

Uncle Joe glanced down impatiently, to see what made her hold back so. The child's feet seemed glued to the earth. She could not take another step.

Writhing out of the hole in the log and coiling, as it did so, into an attitude to strike, the snake looked to be dangerous indeed. The fact that it was only a large blacksnake and non-poisonous made no difference at that moment to the dog or to the little girl—nor to Joseph Staggs when he saw it.

It was coiled right at Miss Amanda's back. She did not see it, for she was quite as intent upon keeping her face turned from Mr. Staggs as he had been determined to ignore her presence.

was awfully frightened. Joseph Staggs dropped Carolyn May's hand and leaped forward with his walking stick raised to strike. But



Leaped Forward With His Walking Stick to Strike.

the mongrel dog was there first. He wisely caught the blacksnake behind the head, his strong, sharp teeth severing its vertebrae.

"Good dog!" shouted Mr. Staggs excitedly. "Fine dog!"

"Oh, Miss Amanda!" shrieked Carolyn May. "I—I thought he was going to sting you—I did!"

She ran to the startled woman and clung to her hand. Prince nosed the dead snake. Mr. Staggs looked exceedingly foolish. Miss Amanda recovered her color and her voice simultaneously.

"What a brave dog yours is, little girl," she said to Carolyn May. "And I do so despise snakes!" Then she looked directly at Mr. Staggs and bowed gravely. "I thank you," she said, but so coldly, so Carolyn May thought, that her voice might have come "just off an iceberg."

"Oh, I didn't do anything—really I didn't," stammered the man. "It was the dog."

Both looked very uncomfortable. Joseph Staggs began to pick up the scattered chestnuts from the overturned basket. The lady stooped and whispered to Carolyn May:

"Come to see me, my dear. I want to know you better."

Then she kissed Carolyn May and slipped quietly away from the brook, disappearing quickly in the undergrowth.

Joseph Staggs and the little girl went on across the stepping stones, while Prince splashed through the water. Carolyn May was thinking about Miss Amanda Parlow and she believed her Uncle Joe was, too.

"Uncle Joe," she said, "would that bad old snake have stung Miss Amanda?"

"Huh? No; I reckon not," admitted Mr. Staggs absent-mindedly. "Black-snakes don't bite. A big one like that can squeeze some."

"But you were scared of it—like me and Prince. And for Miss Amanda," said Carolyn May very much in earnest.

"I guess 'most everybody is scared by the sight of a snake, Carolyn May."

"But you were scared for Miss Amanda's sake—just the same as I was," repeated the little girl decidedly.

"Well," he growled, looking away, troubled by her insistence.

"Then you don't hate her, do you?" the child pursued. "I'm glad of that, Uncle Joe, for I like her very much. I think she's a beautiful lady."

To this Uncle Joe said nothing. "I guess," thought Carolyn May wisely, "that when two folks love each other and get angry the love's there just the same. Getting mad doesn't kill it; it only makes 'em feel worse."

"Mandy! Mandy!" he murmured over and over again. "Oh, Mandy. Why? Why?"

He held the tintype for a long, long time in his hand, gazing on it with eyes that saw the vanished years rather than the portraits themselves. Finally he hid the picture away again, closed and locked the drawer with a sigh and with slow steps left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

Chet Gormley Tells Some News.

It was when she came in sight of the Parlow place on Monday afternoon, she and Prince, that Carolyn May bethought her of the very best person in the world with whom to advise upon the momentous question which so troubled her.

Who could be more interested in the happiness of Miss Amanda than Mr. Parlow himself?

The little girl had been going to call on Miss Amanda. Auntie Rose had said she might and Miss Amanda had invited her "specially."

But the thought of taking the old carpenter into her confidence and advising with him delayed that visit. Mr. Parlow was busy on some piece of cabinet work, but he nodded briskly to the little girl when she came to the door of the shop and looked in.

"Are you very busy, Mr. Parlow?" she asked him after a watchful minute or two.

"My hands be, Carolyn May," said the carpenter in his dry voice.

"Oh!"

"But I kin listen to ye—and I kin talk."

"Oh, that's nice! Did you hear about what happened yesterday?"

"Eh?" he queried, eying her quizzically. "Does anything ever happen on Sunday?"

"Something did on this Sunday," cried the little girl. "Didn't you hear about the snake?"

"What d'ye mean—snake?"

And then little Carolyn May explained. She told the story with such earnestness that he stopped working to listen.

"Humph!" was his grunted comment at the end. "Well!"

"Don't you think that was real exciting?" asked Carolyn May. "And just see how it almost brought my Uncle Joe and your Miss Amanda together. Don't you see?"

Mr. Parlow actually jumped. "What's that you say, child?" he rasped out grimly. "Bring Mandy and Joe Staggs together? Well, I guess not!"

"Oh, Mr. Parlow, don't you think that would be just be-a-you-tiful?" cried the little girl with a lingering emphasis upon the most important word. "Don't you see how happy they would be?"

"I don't know as anybody's particular anxious to see that daughter of mine and Joe Staggs friendly again. No good would come of it."

Carolyn May looked at him sorrowfully. Mr. Parlow had quite disappointed her. It was plain to be seen that he was not the right one to advise with about the matter. The little girl sighed.

"I really did s'pose you'd want to see Miss Amanda happy, Mr. Parlow," she whispered.

"Bappy? Bah!" snarled the old man, setting vigorously to work again. He acted as if he wished to say no more and let the little girl depart without another word.

Carolyn May really could not understand it—at least she could not immediately.

That Mr. Parlow might have a selfish reason for desiring to keep his daughter and Joseph Staggs apart did not enter the little girl's mind.

After that Sunday walk, however, Carolyn May was never so much afraid of her uncle as before. Why, he had even called Prince "good dog!" Truly Mr. Joseph Staggs was being transformed—it slowly.

He could not deny to himself that, to a certain extent, he was enjoying the presence of his little niece at The Corners. If he only could decide just what to do with the personal property of his sister Hannah and her husband down in the New York apartment. Never in his life had he been so long deciding a question.

He had really loved Hannah. He knew it now, did Joseph Staggs, every time he looked at the lovely little child who had come to live with him at The Corners. Why! just so had Hannah looked when she was a little thing. The same deep, violet eyes and sunny hair and laughing lips—

Mr. Staggs sometimes actually found a reflection of the cheerful figure of "Hannah's Carolyn" coming between him and the big ledger over which he spent so many of his waking hours.

Once he looked up from the ledger—it was on a Saturday morning—and really did see the bright figure of the little girl standing before him. It was no dream or fancy, for old Jimmy, the cat, suddenly shot to the topmost shelf, squalling with wild abandon. Prince was nosing along at Carolyn May's side.

"Bless me!" croaked Mr. Staggs. "That day of yours, Carolyn May, will give Jimmy a convulsion fit yet. What d'you want down here?"

Carolyn May told him. A man had come to the house to buy a cow and Auntie Rose had sent the little girl down to tell Mr. Staggs to come home and "drive his own bargain."

"Well, well," said Mr. Staggs, locking the ledger in the safe, "I'll hustle right out and tend to it. Don't see why the man couldn't have waited till noontime. Hey, you, Chet! Look out for the store. Don't have any fooling. And—"

"Oh, uncle! may I stay, too? Me and Prince?" cried Carolyn May. "We'll be good."

"Bah! Yes, if you want to," responded Mr. Staggs, hurrying away. "My! your uncle's changin' more and more, ain't he?" remarked Chet, the optimistic. "He does sometimes almost laugh, Carolyn. I never see the beat of it!"

"Oh, is he?" cried the little child. "Is he looking up more? Do you think he is, Chet?"

"I positively do," Chet assured her. "And he hasn't always got his nose in that old ledger?"

"Well—I wouldn't say that he neglected business, no, ma'am," said the boy honestly. "You see, we men have got to think of business mostly. But he sure is thinkin' of some other things too—ya-as, indeedy!"

"What things, Chet?" Carolyn May asked anxiously, hoping that Uncle Joe had shown some recovered interest in Miss Amanda and that Chet had noticed it.

"Why—well— Now, you see, there's that house you used to live in. You know about that?"

"What about it, Chet?" the little girl asked rather timidly.

"Well, Mr. Staggs ain't never done nothin' about it. He ain't sold it, nor sold the furniture, nor nothin'. You know, Carolyn May, your folks didn't leave you no money."

"Oh! Didn't they?" cried Carolyn May, greatly startled.

"No, you see, I heard all about it. Mr. Vickers, the lawyer, came in here one day and your uncle read a letter to him out loud. I couldn't help but hear. The letter was from another lawyer and 'twas all about you and your concerns. I heard it all," said the quite innocent Chet.

"And Mr. Vickers says: 'So the child hasn't anything of her own, Joe?' Chet went on. 'An' your uncle says: 'Not a dollar, 'cept what I might sell that furniture for.' And he hasn't sold it yet, I know. He just can't make up his mind to sell these things that was your mother's, Carolyn May. I added the boy, with a deeper insight into Mr. Staggs' character than one might have given him credit for possessing."

But Carolyn May had heard some news that made her suddenly quiet and she was glad a customer came into store just then to draw Chet Gormley's attention.

The child had never thought before about how the good things of life came to her—her food, clothes and lodging. But now Chet Gormley's chattering had given her a new view of the facts of the case. There had been no money left to spend for her needs. Uncle Joe was just keeping her out of charity!

"And Prince, too," thought the little girl with a lump in her throat. "He hasn't got any more home than a rab bit! And Uncle Joe don't really like dogs—not even now."

"Oh, dear me!" pursued Carolyn May. "It's awful hard to be an orphan. But to be a poor orphan—just a charity one—is a whole lot worse, I guess. I wonder if I ought to stay with Uncle Joe and Auntie Rose and make them so much trouble?"

The thought bit deep into the little girl's very impressionable mind. She wished to be alone and to think over this really tragic thing that faced her—the ugly fact that she was a "charity child."

"And you're a charity dog, Prince, Cameron," she said aloud, looking down at the mongrel who walked sedately beside her along the country road.

The little girl had loitered along the road until it was now dinner time. Indeed, Auntie Rose would have had the meal on the table twenty minutes earlier. Mr. Staggs had evidently remained at The Corners to sell the cow and eat dinner too—thus "killing two birds with one stone."

And here Carolyn May and Prince were at Mr. Parlow's carpenter shop, just as the old man was taking off his apron preparatory to going in to his dinner. When Miss Amanda was away nursing, the carpenter ate at a neighbor's table.

Now Miss Amanda appeared on the side porch.

"Where are you going, little girl?" she asked, smiling.

"Home to Auntie Rose," said Carolyn May bravely. "But I guess I'm late for dinner."

"Don't you want to come in and eat with us, Carolyn May? Your own dinner will be cold."

"Oh, may I?" cried the little girl. Somehow she did not feel that she

(Continued on next page.)