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A SON OF COURAGE

BY ARCHIE P. McKISHNIE

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CHAPTER I.

Billy Wilson's Strategy.

Mrs. Wilson lit the coal-oil lamp and placed it in the centre of the kitchen table; then she turned toward the door, her head half bent in a listening attitude.

A brown water-spaniel waddled from the woodshed into the room, four bright-eyed puppies at her heels, and stood half in the glow, half in the shadow, short tail ingratiatingly awag.

"Scoot you!" commanded the woman, and with a wild scurry mother dog and puppies turned and fled to the friendly darkness of their retreat.

Mrs. Wilson stood with frowning gaze fastened on the door. She was a tall, angular woman of some forty years, heavy of features, as she was, when occasion demanded it, heavy of hand. Tiny fret-lines marred a face which under less trying conditions of life might have been winsome, but tonight the lips of the generous mouth were tightly compressed and the rise and fall of the bosom beneath the low cut flannel gown hinted of a volcano that would ere long erupt to the confusion of somebody.

As a quick step sounded outside, she lowered herself slowly to a high-backed chair and waited, hands locked closely upon her lap.

The door opened and her husband entered. He cast a quick, apprehensive glance at his wife, and the low whistle died on his lips as he passed over to the long roller towel hanging above the wash-bench and proceeded to dry his hands.

He was a medium sized man with brown wavy hair and a beard which failed to conceal the glad boyishness of a face that would never quite be old. The eyes he turned upon the woman when she sharply spoke his name were blue and tranquil.

"Yes, Mary?" he responded gently.

"I want'a tell you that I'm tired of bein' the slave of you an' your son," she burst out. "One of these days I'll be packin' up and goin' to my home folks in Nova Scotia."

Wilson averted his face and proceeded to straighten the towel on the roller. His action seemed to infuriate the woman.

Her lips tightened. Her hands unclenched and gripped the table as she slowly arose.

"You—" she commenced, her voice tense with passion, "you—" she checked herself. Unconsciously one of the groping hands had come in contact with the soft leather cover of a book which lay on the table.

It was the family Bible. She had placed it there after reading her son Anson his evening chapter. Slowly she mastered herself and sank back into her chair.

Wilson came over and laid a work-hardened hand gently on her heaving shoulder.

"Mary," he said, "what is it? What have I done?"

"Oh," she cried miserably, "what haven't you done, Tom Wilson? Didn't you bring me here to this lonesome spot when I was happy with my son, happy an' contented?"

"But I told you you'd like find it some lonesome, Mary, you remember?"

"Yes, but did you so much as hint at what awful things I'd have to live through here? Not you! Did you tell me that an old miser 'ud die and his ghost ha'nt this neighborhood? Did you tell me that blindness 'ud strike one of the best and most useful young men low? Did you tell me," she ran wildly on, "that the sweetest girl in the world 'ud be dyin' of a heartbreak? Did you tell me, anythin', Tom Wilson, that a woman who was leavin' her own home folks, to work for you and your son, should a' been told?"

Wilson sighed. "How was I to know these things would happen, Mary? It's been hard haulin', I know, but some day it won't be so hard. Maybe now, you'd find it easier if you didn't shoulder everybody else's trouble, like you do—"

"Shut right up!" she flared, "I'm a Christian woman, Tom Wilson. Do you think I could face God on my knees if I failed in my duty to the sick as calls fer me? Why, I couldn't sleep if I didn't do what little I'm able to do fer them in trial; I'd hear weak voices acallin' me, I'd see pain-wild eyes watchin' fer me to come an' help their first-born into the world."

"But, Mary, there's a doctor at Bridgetown now and—"

"Doctors!" she cried scornfully. "Little enough they know the needs of a woman at such a time. A doctor may be all right in his place, but his place ain't here among us woods folk. I tell yon now I know my duty an' I'll do it because they need me."

"We all need you, Mary," spoke her husband quickly. "Didn't I tell you that when I persuaded you to come? I need you; Billy needs you."

She looked at him, tears filming the fire of anger in her eyes.

"No," she said in low tense tones, "your son don't need me. I'm nuthin' to him. Sometimes I think—I think he cares—'cause I'm longin' fer it, I guess. But somehow he seems to be lookin' beyond me to someone else."

Wilson sighed and sank into a chair.

"I guess maybe it's your fancy playin' pranks on you, Mary," he suggested hesitatingly. "Two years of livin' in this lonesome spot has kinder got on your nerves."

"Nerves!" she cried indignantly, sitting bolt upright. "Don't you 'er anybody else accuse me of havin' nerves, Tom Wilson. If I wasn't the most sensible-minded person alive I'd be throwin' fits er goin' off into gallopin' hysterics every hour, with the things that William does to scare the life out of a body."

"What's Billy been doin' now?" asked Wilson anxiously.

She shivered. "Nothin' out'a the ordinary. What's that limb allars doin' to scare the daylights clean outa me an' the neighbors? If you'd spend a little more of your spare time in the house with your wife an' less in the barn with your precious stock you wouldn't need to be askin' what he's been adoin'. But I'll tell you what he did only his evenin' afore you come home from changin' words with Cobin Keeler.

"Missus Scraff—you know what a fidgety fly-off-the-handle she is, an' how she suffers from the asthma—well, she'd come over an' was stayin' to supper. I sent that Willium out on the back ridge to gather some wild thimble-berries fer dessert. He comes in just as I had the table all set, that wicked old coon he's made a pet of at his heels an' that evil-eyed crow, Croaker, on his shoulder. Afore I could get hold of he broom, he put the covered pail on the table an' went out ag'in. The coon follered him, but that crow jumped right onto the table an' grabbed a piece of cake. I made a dash at him an' he flopped to Missus Scraff's shoulder. She was chewin' a piece of slippery-ellum bark fer her asthma, an' when his claws gripped her shoulder she shrieked an' like to 'a' choked to death on it.

"It took me all of half an hour to get her quieted, an' hen I made to show her what nice berries we got from our back ridge. 'Jest hold your apron, Mrs. Scraff, an' I'll give you a glimpse of what we're goin' to top our supper off with,' I says, strivin' to get the poor soul's mind off herself.

"She held out her apron, an' I lifted the lid off the pail and pours what's in it into her lap.

"An' what d'ye 'spose was in that pail, Tom Wilson? Four garter snakes and a lizard; that's what your precious son had gone out and gathered fer our dessert. I spilled the whole caboodle of 'em into her apron afore I noticed, an' she give one screech an' fainted dead away. While I was busy bringin' her around, that Willium sneaked in and gathered them squirmin' reptiles off the floor. I couldn't do more jest then than look him a promise to settle with him ater, 'cause I had my hands full as it was. I found a pail of berries on the table when I got a chance to look about me, an' I ain't sayin' but that boy got them pails mixed, but that don't excuse him none."

Wilson, striving to keep his face grave, nodded. "That's how it's been, I guess, Mary. He kin no more help pickin' up every snake and animal he comes across then he kin help breathin'. But he don't mean any harm, Billy don't."

"That's neither here ner there," she snapped. "He doesn't seem to care what harm he does. An' the hard part of it is," she burst out, "I can't take no pleasure in whalin' him same as I might if I was his real mother; I jest can't, that's all. He has a way of lookin' at me out'a them big, grey eyes of his'n—"

The voice choked up and a tear splashed down on the hand clenched on her lap.

Comfortingly her husband's hand covered it from sight, as though he sought to achieve by this small token of understanding that which he could not hope to achieve by mere words.

She caught her breath quickly and a flush stole up beneath the sun and wind stain on her cheek. There was that in the pressure of the hand on hers, strong yet tender, which swept the feeling of loneliness from her heart.

"Mary," said the man, "I guess neither of us understand Billy and maybe we never will, quite. I've often tried to tell you how much your willin'ness to face this life here meant to him and me but I'm no good at that sort'a thing. I just hoped you'd understan', that's all."

"Well, I'm goin' to do my duty by you both, allars," Mrs. Wilson spoke in matter-of-fact ones, as she reached for her sewing-basket. "When I feel you need checkin' up, Tom Wilson, checked you're goin' to be, an' when Willium needs a hidin' he's goin' to get a hidin'. An," she added, as her husband got up from his chair, saying something about having to turn the horses out to pasture, "you needn't try to side-track me from my duty neither."

"All right, Mary," he agreed, his hand on the door-latch.

"An' if you're agoin' out to the barn do try'nd not carry any more of the barn-yard in on your big feet than you kin help. I jest finished moppin' the floors."

Wilson stepped out into the spicy summer darkness and went slowly down the path to the barn. As far as eye could reach, through the partially cleared forest, tiny clearing fires glowed up through the darkness, seeming to vie with big low hanging stars. The pungent smoke of burning log and sward mingled pleasantly with the scent of fern and wild blossoms.

Wilson lit his pipe and with arms folded on the top rail of the barnyard fence, gazed down across the partially-cleared, fire-dotted sweep to where, a mile distant, a long, densely timbered point of land stood darkly silhouetted against the sheen of a rising moon.

From the bay-waters came the lonely cry of a loon, from the marshes the booming of night-basking bullfrogs. The hoot of the owl sounded faintly from the forest beyond; the yap of a foraging fox drifted through the night's stillness from the uplands.

A long time Wilson stood pondering. When at length he bestirred himself a full moon swam above a transfigured world. A silvery sheen swept softly the open spaces; through the trees the white bay-waters shimmered; the clearing fires had receded to mere sparks with silvery smoke trails stretching straight up towards a starred infinity.

He sighed and turned to glance back at the cottage resting in the hardwood grove. It looked very homey, very restful to him, beneath its vines of clustering wild-grape and honeysuckle. It was home—home it must be always. And Mary loved it just as he loved it; this he knew. She was a fine woman, a great helpmate, a wonderful wife and mother. She was fair-minded too. She loved Billy quite as much as she loved her own son, Anson. Billy must be more careful, more thoughtful of her comfort. He would have a heart to heart talk with his son, he told himself as he went on to the barn.

(To be continued.)

Keep Minard's Liniment in the house.

Shadows.

A mosiac dancing and darting
Before the bright rays of the sun,
A shrouded, dark figure imparting,
What the powers of sunlight had done.
A rainbow of sweet hidden shadows
In the depths of a deep, blue lake!
The flittering, glittering, shadows
That only the sunshine can make!

At first it seemed only a phantom,
Of colors, deep down in the sea;
And then a bright Japanese lantern
Of lights, that were wondrous to see.
Again, in the depths of the water
I looked, 'twas a shadow, but faint,
What wonderful visions of rapture—
The dreams of my fancy can paint!

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Woman's Sphere

An Antique Bazaar.

A correspondent writes of a novel, practicable and instructive entertainment that those who originated it—two women members of a church organization—introduced to their townspeople under the title of an antique bazaar.

The women visited everyone whom they knew had old relics in their possession—household articles that had been in the family for years—and explained that they should lie to borrow the things, exhibit them and charge a small admission fee to the exhibition. The money was, of course, to go to further the particular church plan that was on foot. Those called upon were glad to lend whatever desirable articles they had; and since they referred their visitors to other persons who might like to contribute to the affair, it was not long before a considerable number of antiques had been collected.

The admission fee was twenty-five cents—a sum that no one felt was exorbitant. In addition to the stimulus in helping a worth while cause, there was the personal stimulus derived from the nature of the exhibition. Those who had lent relics were proud to have their heirlooms on exhibition, and those who had nothing to lend were eager to see the interesting collection of their neighbors' cherished possessions.

The exhibition was held in the town hall. The antiques were arranged to the best advantage; a card on which were clearly printed the age of the article and the name of its owner was tied to every contribution. At each table some one who had made himself familiar with the history of the various articles answered the many questions that were asked.

The collection contained old rugs and tapestries, spinning wheels, samplers, silver, brass, copper and pewter ware, pottery, an old leather fire bucket, a yellowed, hand-made dress in which some one's great-grandmother had been christened and a man's high hat that was two hundred and fifty years old. One table carried military relics of every Canadian struggle from the Indian wars to the Great War.

At the end of the evening girls dressed in historical costumes served coffee and doughnuts. The unpretentious refreshments tasted the better for being offered by waitresses in the picturesque dresses of the French regime, the flowered muslins and frilly kerchiefs of early Colonial days, or the quaint, high-waisted frocks of a later time.

Intellectual Honesty.

The chief need of to-day is intellectual honesty.

It is as essential to women as to men.

Some men can judge themselves without juggling the scales, but few women can.

It is easy to be truthful and fair to a neighbor, but hard to keep from deceiving and fibbing to one's self.

If Canadian girls are to be happy and contented as future wives and home-makers they must tell themselves the truth.

I cannot impress too earnestly upon our girls the importance of being honest toward themselves in little things as well as big ones. If you spoil a cake in the cooking don't say, "I didn't mean to do it that way" or "Something went wrong with it." Instead, say to yourself: "I made a failure of this cake. I am going to make a success of the next one."

When a garment you have made for yourself does not fit you or look as nice as you would like it, don't blame the material or the pattern or the sewing machine. Just confess that you made a poor job of it and try to do better.

Weigh yourself on the same scales, figuratively, that you would have your butcher weigh the meat you buy and which you seldom take the pains to look at while he is weighing it. See that you get your money's worth out of yourself. The worst cheated person is the self-cheated one.

Woman is destined to become a far greater factor in our economic life than she ever has been. Rouge won't cover a defect in character, nor will a wig keep hair from falling out or turning gray. Life is full of mistakes and those who make the fewest are those who realize and admit them as they make them.

The person who won't admit a fault is intellectually dishonest. He or she is handicapped at the start. The kitchen is the first fundamental of the home. The entire family usually has to suffer for the mistakes made by the cook. That is the reason why there is an increasing demand for training in scientific housekeeping, cooking especially.

Infallible laws of nature punish intellectual dishonesty in the home, and, unfortunately, as a rule, the innocent suffer along with the guilty.

In these trying times the housewife has a most important part. She should keep a budget. She should know exactly how much she has to cover every branch of her housekeeping and she should so conduct her affairs as to make her books balance. She should make her figures as well as herself tell the truth. She must be careful, cautious and accurate. The foundation of all happiness is honesty, and the cornerstone of all society is happiness.

The woman who refuses to cheat herself is not so likely to be cheated by others.

Good Habits.

"Whenever you see an adult who does not like vegetables you may depend upon it that it is because the mother did not use tact in forming the vegetable habit when that person was a child," says Elizabeth Townes. "Children who 'do not like' the things that are good for them, point straight to the fact that the mother is either careless or stupid in regard to diet and child phychology.

"Little children's habits of eating are wholly made by their mothers or others who have charge of their diet. Tactful suggestions and a little imagination will create the right habits in any child. There is not one on earth but is amenable to this sort of loving suggestion.

"Habits of right eating should be formed in childhood in such a way that a boy loves to eat only the things that will make him strong and healthy. Naturally a child has the milk habit and is naturally prejudiced against vegetables, because they are different. That is the time to appeal to the child's imagination and to make use of tactful suggestions.

"You can never get the right reaction from the child's mind by playing up 'duty.' You should idealize the process of right-doing until the child naturally wants to follow it."

Household Hints.

You have no idea how useful a piece of rubber tubing or hose is in the kitchen. I measured the distance from the faucets over the sink in my kitchen to the back of the range, and on my next trip to town bought a piece of rubber hose ten feet long and three-quarters of an inch in diameter. That is the size which would fit over my faucets.

The first use to which I put it was in filling my large clothes boiler. This had always been too heavy to lift when full, and necessitated numerous trips back and forth from sink to stove carrying water in a smaller vessel. Then I found that it also saved strength and time to use my rubber tube for filling the water kettle or my wash tubs.

It is easy to siphon the water out of the boiler or tubs by filling the tube with water and holding a thumb over each end until one end can be placed in the boiler and the other end in a small vessel of water in the sink, which must of course be lower than the boiler. Both ends of the tube must be under water and no air allowed to get in.

Add a sliced onion to a cupful of vinegar, put lamp burners in it and boil them twenty minutes. They will come out clean and bright

Where there are many children in the family a handy box for rubbers is made by taking up the boards in the top step leading to a side porch, hinging them and putting a strip of iron along the outer edge to hold the step in position. Under this lid put a box to hold the rubbers.

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Those who refuse to buy at the present time, because of a false impression regarding values, or for some frivolous reason, retard industry, and by so doing impair the prosperity of themselves, the community they live in and the country at large.

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