A SON OF COURAGE

BY ARCHIE P. McKISHNIE

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CHAPTER XXIV.—(Cont'd.)

"A boat in trouble? Where is she?" asked Stanhope.

"Out in the middle of the bay. There's two men in her; she must be shippin' water, 'cause she's low down. She's one of Swanson's boats. He ought 'a know better than let a couple of greenies out on that sea."

Billy had thrown off his shooting-coat and was climbing out of the blind.

"What are you going to do?" asked Stanhope.

"Goin 'out to give a hand," shouted Billy. "No, teacher, you best stay right here; you can't help me any an' I may have to bring them two shooters ashore in the punt."

His last words were drowned in the wind. Already he was dragging the punt from the reeds. A moment later Stanhope heard the dip of his oars as he rounded the point and put the tiny craft into the seas and his cheerful hail, "I'll be back soon, teacher."

With broadening day the gale had strengthened. Stanhope felt a few stinging snow-pellets on his face, as he gazed, unseeing outward and waited with tense nerves for the hail of his young friend. Half an hour passed—it seemed like hours to the man waiting, hoping, fearing—and still Billy did not come. He replenished the fire and, his hand coming in contact with the coat which Billy had discarded, he held it on his knees, close to the little stove. Slowly the minutes dragged past and a cold dread of what might have happened grew in the blind man's heart. Billy had likely reached the boat only in time to see it founder and in striving to save its exhausted occupants——

Unable to endure the thought, Stanhope sprang to his feet and lifting his arms high, shouted with all his strength, "Billy, Billy boy!"

"Ho, teacher!" came an answering voice. "We're comin' straight in with the wind. I've got 'em both."

Stanhope sank back on his box, his relaxed nerves throbbing and his lips forming the words: "Thank God!"

A few minutes later Billy tumbled into the blind. "Quick," he cried, as he drew on his coat. "They're nigh done fer. We've gotta kep 'em movin'. Good! I see you've heated the tea; I'll jest take it along. We'll leave gun an' decoys right here with Moll to watch 'em, 'cause we're likely to have our hands full. Are you ready, teacher?"

"All set" cried Stanhope. "Leave your belt loose so I can hang to it and I'm with you. That's right. Who were they, Billy?"

"Couple of shooters from Cleveland. One of 'em's a big, strong feller, an' he ain't as near done up as the other. I started 'em to shore along the rush-track. They'll be hunky so long as they keep goin'. We best get 'em to the nearest house."

"Well, that's my place," answered Stanhope. "How am I navigating, Billy?"

"Fine; keepin' up as well as though you saw right where you're goin,' They're only a little ahead now."

As the wooded shore was reached they came up with the rescued men. Billy passed the chilled and wretched two the hot tea and after they had drunk he and Stanhope took the lead through the stumpy fields.

Half an hour later, seated about the roaring fire in Stanhope's cottage, huge cups of hot coffee on their knees, the venturesome strangers seemed none the worse for their trying experience. The larger of the two, a powerfully-built man with pleasant clean shaven face and keen blue eyes, turned now to Stanhope.

"Where did the boy go?" he asked. "He must have been wet to the skin."

"He went back to take up the decoys and bring in the boats," answered Stanhope. "Oh, Billy's used to roughing it. He'll be back directly."

"By George!" cried the big man, slapping his friend's knee. "There's a boy for you, Doctor. Why, sir," addressing Stanhope, "not one youngster in a thousand could have done what he did. When he came to us our boat was all but swamped. We had given up. My friend here was utterly helpless with the cold and I was little better. And then he came riding close in like a mere straw on the waves and something flashed past me and fell with a bump against our boat-seat. 'Bale,' he screeched, and I picked up the can he had thrown us and bale I did for all I was worth. Then he came shooting back. 'You got to get out of that trough,' he shouted. 'Throw your painter loose, so's I can grab it as I pass, and I'll straighten your bow to take the seas.' "

The speaker paused, his face aglow. "I managed to cast that painter loose and the boy caught it as he shot past us. Then I felt the skiff straighten and I heard him shout again, 'Bale! bale like fury!' So I baled and baled and by and by we shipped less water than I managed to throw out. All this time that youngster was hauling us in to safety. I don't know who the boy is, but let me tell you this, my friend, if I was his daddy I'd be the proudest man on the face of the earth."

His companion, a slight, stooped man, the sallowness of whose face was accentuated by a short black moustache, who had remained almost silent from the time he had entered the house, looked up at these words and smiled. "We owe that boy and this gentleman our lives," he said briefly.

The big man laid a hand on Stanhope's arm. "My good friend," he said, "will you allow me to introduce you to the grateful chaps you have helped save. This gentleman with me is the famous specialist, Doctor Cavinalt of Cleveland; and yours truly is plain Bill Maddoc of the same city, lawyer by profession."

"My friend has forgotten to mention that he is state's attorney and a noted bugbear to all evil-doers," smiled the doctor. "In other words he's known as Trail Down Maddoc and—if he will permit of my so stating—is far more famous in his own particular line than am I in mine."

"Tut, tut," cried Maddoc, "what matter such trifles as these at this time? And now," turning to their host, "if you will honor us?"

"My name is Stanhope; Frank Stanhope."

"What?" The lawyer was on his feet and had his hands on Frank's shoulders.

"You say Stanhope? Why, man alive! I've been looking high and low for you. What do you think of that, Doctor, I've found him at last!"

"Young man," said Maddock, turning again to Frank, "will you please answer a few questions? Did you ever know a queer old man by the name of Scroggie?"

"Why, yes," Frank answered, somewhat puzzled. "He lived next farm to me."

"And," Maddoc resumed, "do you happen to know that he made a will, leaving all he possessed to you?"

"Yes, sir, so he said; but the will was never found."

"And for a very good reason, by George," cried Maddoc. "How could it be found when it lay safely locked in a deposit box in my vault?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand—" commenced the amazed Stanhope.

"Of course not, how could you?" cried the lawyer. "But there now, I'll explain.

"One morning something over a year ago a queer little man came to my office. He told me his name, Scroggie, but refused to give me any address. He said he wished to make his will and insisted that I draw it up. It was a simple will, as I remember it, merely stating that 'I something-or-other, Scroggie, hereby bequeath all my belongings, including land and money, to Frank Stanhope.' I made it out exactly as he worded it, had it sealed and witnessed and handed it to him. But the old fellow refused to take it. I asked him why, and he said: 'You keep it safe until I send for it. I'm willin' to pay for your trouble."

" 'But listen, old man,' I said, 'supposing you should die suddenly. Life is very uncertain, you know. This will should be left where it can be easily found, don't you see?'

" 'That's just where I don't want it left,' he says. 'I want it kept safe. I'll take a chance on dying suddenly.' And by George! the old fellow got up and shambled out, leaving a twenty-dollar gold piece on the table."

"Then," said Frank, moistening his dry lips, "you have the will Mr. Maddoc?"

"I have!" cried the delighted lawyer, "and whether he left you much or little nobody can dispute your claim. Young man, shake hands again!"

But Stanhope had sunk on a chair, his face in his hands. Doctor Cavinalt went softly over and stood beside him. "My friend," he said gently, "good news often bowls us over, but perhaps there's even better news in store for you. Fortune is a good thing, but with fortune and your eye-sight restored——"

Frank lifted a wan face. "You mean——?" his dry lips formed the words.

The slender sensitive fingers of the specialist lifted the lids of the unseeing eyes. Intently he examined them, then with a quick smile that transformed his grave face to almost boyish gladness, he spoke.

"It is as I thought, Mr. Stanhope. Your sight is quite unimpaired and can be restored to you by a simple operation. Your blindness was caused either from a blow or a fall, was it not?"

Frank nodded. "A beam struck me," he whispered, "I thought—I thought—"

"To-morrow," said the doctor, retiring once more into his professional shell, "I shall remove the pressure that obstructs your vision. The operation, which will be most simple, can be performed here. We have but to remove all pressure on the nerve centres that refuse their function now—and you will see."

He motioned to his friend, and the two went over to the window and talked together in low tones.

Stanhope, hands clasped together, sat staring into a vista of shadows that were all but dissolved. Above them lifted a face that smiled—and down across sleeping, darkening waters a long ray of light swept to touch his unseeing eyes and whisper her message of hope.

It was nearly noon when Billy, bending beneath a load of wild ducks, came up the path to the cottage. Stanhope, reading his step, groped his way out to meet him. "Ho, Billy Boy," he cried, holding out his hands.

Billy placed his wet, cold ones in Stanhope's. "I simply had to stay an' shoot," he explained. "The ducks were fair poundin' into the decoys. How are the Cleveland fellers?"

Good as ever, Billy, dried out—and gone. Come into the house. I've got great news."

Billy turned puzzled eyes on his friend, reading a wonderful happiness in the glowing face. He dropped his ducks and followed Stanhope inside. The table was set for dinner and Billy sniffed hungrily.

"Now, teacher," he said, dropping into a seat by the fire, "give us the news."

But Stanhope shook his head. "Not yet, Billy. Wait until you've eaten. You're hungry—as all hunters are bound to be. There now," as his housekeeper brought in the meat and potatoes, "sit down and eat—and eat fast, because I can't keep my good news back much longer."

Billy sat down at the table and without a word fell to.

Stanhope stood beside the window, humming a tune, a smile on his face. He roused himself from his musing, as Billy scraped back his chair. "Full up?" he asked.

"Full up, teacher. Now let's have the good news."

Stanhope told him, his voice not always steady, and Billy sat silent, his grey eyes growing bigger and bigger. And at the conclusion he did a very boyish thing. He lowered his head on the table and cried.

Stanhope groped his way to him, placed his hands gently on the heaving shoulders, and there they remained until Billy, with a long sigh, raised his swimming eyes.

"Teacher," he said. "She's gotta be told about this. You know how she always hoped——"

"Yes."

Billy stood up and reached for his cap. "If Anse comes over, you kin tell him where I've gone. I'll be back long afore dark."

"But, Billy, the wind! You'd better not go."

"The wind's gone down," said the boy. "Jest a fair sailin' breeze now."

"She'll come, you think?"

"She'll come," said Billy, and went out, closing the door softly behind him.

(To be continued.)

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And the best is none too good
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Be at his best
For the interest
Of himself and the multitude.

If you must confess
You find yourself less
Than your full capacity,
Don't blame your pedigree,
But start off to-day
In exactly the way
You know you ought to be.

Your past is a measure
Of possible failure,
Your future the range of success.
As long as a day you possess,
You still can make good
With due promptitude,
If the will you really possess.

—Paul Hayden.

Difficult Feat.

The school girl was sitting with her feet stretched far out into the aisle and was busily chewing gum, when the teacher espied her.

"Mary!" called the teacher, sharply.

"Yes, ma'am?" questioned the pupil.

"Take that gum out of your mouth and put your feet in!"

Minard's Liniment for Colds, etc.

Woman's Sphere

(Concluded from last week.)

This New Freedom Stuff.

One evening at the supper table Charles' father opened up his wallet, gravely selecting a folded bill.

"Now that Mother's getting into society she'll need a little more money, eh?" he said, twinkling, and passed the bill to her.

She fingered it eagerly. A sudden flush swept over her face.

"If I only had a share!" she said breathlessly, gripping the tablecloth. "Something I knew was mine! We need new curtains and a linoleum. I'd like to get them myself. John! you should just see some of the neighbors' kitchens. There are so many things I could get to make you all more comfortable, if I only could save them from a share that was mine."

It was a long speech for her. She waited anxiously. There was a pause and John cleared his throat. Charles was never so amazed as he was at the answer.

"I guess maybe you may have a third of the cream cheque, Mother, for the house if you wish it. The egg money is always yours, you know."

"Yes—for sugar and flour. Groceries eat eggs!" she answered. "But for myself—yes, I'll take the third. Now if Charles would only teach me to run the car—"

That was too much! Charles shoved back his chair.

"Mother," he said decidedly, "you aren't strong enough to drive a car! It takes a man. For ordinary driving, now," he continued, growing more fluent, "a woman can do very well, but emergencies—that's where it takes a man's skill."

"Fanny James drives a car," she said, with gentle persistence, "and so does Madge Halliday. Mr. Jamieson is teaching her."

He cursed under his breath and stalked out of the room.

The thought of Madge and the county representative was too much! Charles decided to take matters in hand. He would forgive and forget.

The young lady came to the door herself and her face lit up with pleasure.

"Good evening!" she said. "I am glad to see you."

His steel-gray eyes shone with responsive joy.

"There's a fine old moon," he said. "Shall we stay outside a bit?"

Together they walked through the garden in quiet companionship, and, one might have thought, in complete harmony. Madge hoped so. She trusted that her lover had seen the good sense of the proposition after all and was giving his consent graciously, though silently; Charles, on the other hand, thought that the girl he loved loved him, and that everything would adjust itself in the good old-fashioned way.

They sat down, finally, on the seat under the old oak, while the moonlight shone radiantly around them. The man regarded the sweet face near his and smiled.

"It's nice, isn't it, little girl?"

She smiled happily. He gently adjusted the folds of the scarf around her shoulders and drew her to him.

"Don't you know I'd be good to you, honey?" he said, his lips next to her hair. "I'd give you everything I thought I possibly could. It would be a pleasure to buy you shoes and hats and things. The other idea is only nonsense."

"Nonsense?" echoed Madge, unconsciously straightening up and away from him.

"And this club, too," he continued. "I'll admit it has been successful, and you've proved that you can do those things; that's what you wanted to show me, wasn't it? But I don't want a club woman—I want a wife."

Madge drew away from him.

"I'm afraid you don't understand at all. The club is needed here, Charles. Woman's day of isolation is over. Co-operation is necessary. As for giving me things—why, a woman doesn't want to have to ask for things to be given her; she wants to feel that she is an earning partner in the business of life and that a fair share of all income is her very own to do with as she sees best."

Charles hastily rose.

"You won't give up this thing for me, Madge?"

Her face was pale but she stood her ground. "I'm afraid not, Charles," she said slowly. "I'm sorry, but our ideas of things seem to clash considerably.

"I suppose this Jamieson fellow approves of all these notions," he sneered and then—hated himself.

Madge's chin raised haughtily. She did not deign to answer. He stood a moment, irresolute, then turned on his heel, said an abrupt good-night and vanished.

There was no attempt at a conciliation after that. Charles sulked like Achilles in his tent, and left the field to his rival. He saw them together at times, as he took his mother out to her ever-increasing engagements here and there. When he could he shifted the duty on to his father. Mrs. Barnard demurred against the men folks spending so much time for her. She hated to trouble them, she said. But there was no horse fit for her to drive, so what else could they do?

The day of the big Club Picnic at Evon, however, his father flatly, stubbornly refused, and Charles had to be chauffeur himself. Leaving the car standing at the door a moment, he was surprised, when he returned, to see his mother bending over the wheel.

"I just thought I'd look it over," she said with a guilty smile. "I've been watching you drive and it doesn't seem so very hard. Give me a lesson, dear!" she coaxed.

Ungraciously he climbed in beside her and Mrs. Barnard's first lesson began.

She really did very well, he had to admit reluctantly. She had watched to some purpose, it would seem.

"I always thought if I only knew how to stop it and start it, I'd be all right." she said.

"Yes," growled her son. "If everybody knew how to stop and to start there would be fewer accidents."

"Let's see," she said, "you stop it like this?"

The car stood stock still, giving them a jolt.

"Now you've killed the engine. Better let me start it, mother!"

She chuckled like a delighted child and showed him she could start it, too. So they skimmed along in the morning sun.

As they approached Evon, he spoke again.

"This is a horrid hill before us. Those weeds ought to be cut out so we could see around the corner. There is a nasty bridge at the bottom—ah, look out!"

He had scarcely spoken when Mr. Jamieson's heavier car, driven by Madge, seemed to spring out of the weeds at the right. Charles leaned across quickly and grasped the wheel from his mother's hands. Madge shot ahead turning her automobile to the right to avoid the other. The Barnard car just grazed the back, then took a bound for the bridge. It lay choking and sputtering in the gully, with Mrs. Barnard pinned behind the wheel, while Charles was thrown against the heavy windshield.

Mr. Jamieson and Madge regarded each other breathlessly.

"You just saved us," he said. "That was a close call."

"Let's go back to them," cried the girl. 'They may be killed!"

The car's nose was in the ground and broken glass lay about. Mrs. Barnard, safe behind the wheel, was trying to help Charles, who was insensible, his face gashed, and his neck streaming with blood.

"Lay him on the grass, quick!" ordered Madge, and then, when she had helped, jerked off her white petticoat, tearing it into strips with her strong fingers. With pallid face, she tried to stem the flood of blood and draw the jagged wounds together.

"The bandage—doesn't seem to work very well," she gasped. "If I tie it tight, I am afraid I'll choke him. If you'll help me put him in the back of the car, I think I can hold it with my fingers."

"Better stay here until I can get the doctor," he responded and she agreed mutely. So he left her there, the man's head in her lap.

It was a week later that Madge, at the urgent request of his mother, stepped slowly into Charles' room. One shy glance showed her that the spirit of obstinacy no longer shone in his eyes. They were calm and open as a still pool of clear water.

He just lifted his hands from the covers, reaching out for hers, which he held close. Then he shut his eyes for a minute, as Madge knelt beside him.

His lips moved, and his voice came, hoarsely, so that she had to lean close to hear him.

"You—are a good driver, dear."

She swallowed hard, for a sob choked her, and she buried her face beside his.

"You aren't going to marry—Jamieson?"

A vigorous shake of the head answered him.

"Kiss me?"

She looked searchingly into his eyes, which promised her anything, everything; and then with flushing cheeks, she slowly complied.

"You may have just what you want, Sweetheart."

"It is not just for me," she whispered. "It's—principle!"

He nodded. "Yes, I've done a lot of thinking."

Later, her fingers, wandering down over his face, touched the bandage on his neck.

"Where did you learn first-aid, little girl?"

She smiled radiantly. "Our club had lessons!"

"God bless the Club!" said Charles fervently and kissed her lips again.

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