

FILLMORE PARKER

THE ROSIE
WORLD

Parker Fillmore
The Rosie World

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CHAPTER I

THE CHIN-CHOPPER

Mrs. O'Brien raised helpless distracted hands. "Off wid yez to school!" she shouted. "All of yez! Make room for George!" What Mrs. O'Brien really called her boarder is best represented by spelling his name Jarge.

"Maybe I didn't have a dandy fight on my last trip down," George announced as he took off his coat and began washing his hands at the sink.

The young O'Briens clustered about him eagerly.

"Did you lick him, Jarge?" Terry asked.

"Tell us about it!" Rosie begged.

"Will yez be off to school!" Mrs. O'Brien again shouted.

No one heeded her in the least. George by this time was seated at the table and Rosie was hanging over his shoulder. Terence and small Jack stood facing him at the other side of the table and Miss Ellen O'Brien, with the baby in her arms, lingered near the door.

"Your cabbage'll be stone cold," Mrs. O'Brien scolded, "and they'll all be late for school if they don't be off wid 'em!"

"Was he drunk, Jarge?" Rosie asked.

"No, but he'd been taking too much." George spoke through a mouthful of corned beef and cabbage.

"Aw, go on," Terry pleaded, "tell us all about it."

"They ain't much to tell," George declared, with a complacency that belied his words. "He was nuthin' but a big stiff about nine feet high and built double across the shoulders." George sighed and cocked his eye as though bored at the necessity of recounting his adventure. Then, just to humour them, as it were, he continued: "I see trouble as soon as he got on. They was plenty of empty seats on one side, but the first thing I knew he was hanging on a strap on the crowded side insultin' a poor little lady. He wasn't sayin' nuthin' but he was just hangin' over her face, lookin' at her and grinnin' until she was ready to cry out for shame."

"The brute!" snapped Mrs. O'Brien as she slopped down a big cup of coffee.

"Did you throw him off?" Terence asked.

George took an exasperating time to swallow, then complained: "You mustn't hurry me so. 'Tain't healthy to hurry when you eat."

Ellen O'Brien tossed her head disdainfully. "If that's all you've got to say, Mr. Riley, I guess I'll be going."

Rosie turned on her big sister scornfully. "Aw, why don't you call him Jarge? Ain't he been boarding with us a whole week now?" To show the degree of intimacy she herself felt, Rosie slipped an arm about George's neck.

Ellen sniffed audibly.

George had not been looking at the elder Miss O'Brien but, from the haste with which now he finished his story, it was evident that he wished her to hear it.

"When I see he was looking for trouble, I went right up to him and says: 'If you can't sit down and act ladylike, just get off this car.' And then he looks down at me and grins like a jackass and says: 'Who do you think you are?' 'Who do I think I am?' I says; 'I'm the conductor of this car and

my number's eight-twenty and, if I get any more jawin' from you, I'll throw you off.' He'd make two of me in size but I could see from the look of him he was nuthin' to be afraid of. So, when he grins down at the little lady again and then drops his strap to turn clean around to me and poke out his jaw, I up and gives him a good chin-chopper."

George stopped as if this were the end and his auditors grumbled in balked expectancy:

"Aw, go on, Jarge, tell us what you did."

"Well, if that's the end of your story, Mr. Riley, I'm going."

"The brute, insultin' a lady!"

It was Rosie who demanded in desperation: "But, Jarge, what is a chin-chopper?"

"Chin-chopper? Why, don't you know what a chin-chopper is?" George paused in his eating to explain. "A chin-chopper is when a big stiff pokes out his jaw at you and then, before he knows what you're doing, you up and push him one under the chin with the inside of your hand. It tips him over just like a ninepin."

"Oh, Jarge, do you mean you knocked him down on the floor of the car?" By this time Rosie was skipping and hopping in excitement.

"Sure that's what I mean."

"And then, Jarge, when you had him down, what did you do?"

"What did I do? Why, then I danced on him, of course."

George jumped up from his chair and, indicating a prostrate form on the kitchen floor, proceeded to execute a series of wild jig steps over limbs and chest.

Rosie clapped her hands. "Good, good, good, Jarge! And then what did you do?"

"What did I do? Why, then I snatches off the stiff's hat and throws it out the window. As luck went, it landed in a fine big mud-puddle. Then I pulls the bell and says to him, 'Now, you big bully, if you've had enough, get off this car and go home and tell your wife she wants you.'"

"And, Jarge, did he get off?"

"Did he? I wonder! He couldn't get off quick enough!"

George glanced timidly toward Ellen in hopes, apparently, that his prowess would meet the same favour from her as from the others.

Ellen caught his look and instantly tightened her lips in disgust. "I think it's perfectly disgraceful to get in fights!"

Under the scorn of her words George withered into silence. Terence rallied instantly to his defence. He turned on his older sister angrily. "Aw, go dry up, you old school-teacher!"

"I'm not an old school-teacher!" Ellen cried. "And you just stop calling me names! Ma, Terence is calling me an old school-teacher and you don't say a thing!"

Mrs. O'Brien looked at her son reprovingly. "Why, Terry lad, I'm surprised at you callin' your poor sister Ellen a thing like that! You know as well as I that she's not an old school-teacher."

"Well, anyway," Terence growled, "she talks like one."

Rosie's wild spirits, meantime, had vanished. She sighed heavily. "Say, Jarge, wisht I was a boy."

George looked at her kindly. "What makes you say that, Rosie?"

"Oh, nuthin'. Only I know some stiff's I'd like to try a chin-chopper on."

George eyed her a little uneasily. "Aw, now, Rosie, you oughtn't to talk that way. You're a girl and 'tain't ladylike for girls to fight."

"I know, Jarge. That's why I say I wisht I was a boy."

George grew thoughtful. "Of course, though, Rosie, I wouldn't have blamed the little lady in the car if she had poked her hatpin into that fellow. It's all right for a lady to do anything in self-defence."

In Rosie's face a sudden interest gathered. "Ain't it unladylike, Jarge, if it's in self-defence?"

George answered emphatically: "Of course not – not if it's in self-defence."

He would have said more but Terence interrupted: "What's the matter, Rosie? Any one been teasing you?"

Rosie answered quickly, almost too quickly: "Oh, no, no! I was just a-talkin' to Jarge – "
"Well, just stop yir talkin' and be off wid yez to school! Do ye hear me now, all o' yez!" Mrs. O'Brien opened the kitchen door and, raising her apron aloft, drove them out with a "Shoo!" as though they were so many chickens.

CHAPTER II

THE SCHNITZER

"Tell me now, Rosie, are you having any trouble with your papers?" Terence asked this as he and Rosie and little Jack started off for school.

Terence had a regular newspaper business which kept him busy every day from the close of school until dark. His route had grown so large that recently he had been forced to engage the services of one or two subordinates. Rosie had begged to be given a job as paper-carrier, to deliver the papers in their own immediate neighbourhood, and Terence was at last allowing her a week's trial. If she could be a newsgirl without attracting undue attention, he would be as willing to pay her twenty cents a week as to pay any ordinary small boy a quarter.

Twenty cents seemed a princely wage to one handicapped by the limitation of sex, and Rosie was determined to make good. So, when Terence inquired whether she were having any trouble, she declared at once:

"No, Terry, honest I'm not. Every one's just as nice and kind to me as they can be. Those two nice Miss Grey ladies always give me a cookie, and nice old Danny Agin nearly always has an apple for me."

"Well," said Terence, severely – besides being Rosie's brother, fourteen years old and nearly two years her senior, he was her employer and so simply had to be severe – "Well, just see that you don't eat too many apples!"

Terence and Jack turned into the boys' school-yard and Rosie pursued her way down to the girls' gate. Just before she reached it, a boy, biggish and overgrown, with a large flat face and loosely hung joints, ran up behind her and shouted:

"Oh, look at the paper-girl, paper-girl, paper-girl! Rosie O'Brien, O'Brien, O'Brien!"

He seemed to think there was something funny in the name O'Brien, and his own name, mind you, was Schnitzer!

Rosie marched on with unhearing ears, unseeing eyes. Other people, however, heard, for in a moment, one of the little girls clustered about the school-yard gate rushed over to her, jerking her head about like an indignant little hen.

"Don't you care what that old Schnitzer says, Rosie! Just treat him like he's beneath your contempt!"

Whereupon she herself turned upon the Schnitzer and, with most withering sarcasm, called out: "Dutch!"

Rosie's friend's name was McFadden, Janet McFadden.

"Why don't you just tell Terry on him?" Janet said, when they were safe within the crowded school-yard and able to discuss at length the cowardice of the attack. "It wouldn't take Terry two minutes to punch his face into pie-crust!"

"I know, Janet, but don't you see if I was to tell Terry, then he'd think I was getting bothered on my paper route and take it away from me. He's not quite sure, anyhow, whether girls ought to carry papers."

Janet clucked her tongue in sympathy and understanding. "Does that Schnitzer bother you every afternoon, Rosie?"

"Yes, and he's getting worse. Yesterday he tried to grab my papers and he tore one of them. I'm just scared to death when I get near his house, honest, I am."

Janet clenched her hands and drew a long shivering breath. "Do you know, Rosie, boys like him – they just make me so mad that I almost – I almost *bust!*"

Black care sat behind Rosie O'Brien's desk that afternoon. It was her fifth day as paper-carrier and, but for Otto Schnitzer, she knew that she would be able to complete satisfactorily her week of probation. Was he to cause her failure? Her heart was heavy with fear but, after school, when she met Terry, she smiled as she took her papers and marched off with so brave a show of confidence that Terry, she felt sure, suspected nothing.

As usual, she had no trouble whatever on the first part of her route. At sight of her papers a few people smiled but they all greeted her pleasantly enough, so that was all right. One boy called out, "How's business, old gal?" but his tone was so jolly that Rosie was able to sing back, "Fine and dandy, old hoss!" So that was all right, too.

The Schnitzer place was toward the end of her route, a few doors before she reached Danny Agin's cottage. As she passed it, no Otto was in sight, and she wondered if for once she was to be allowed to go her way unmolested. A sudden yell from the Schnitzers' garden disclosed Otto's whereabouts and also his disappointment not to be on the sidewalk to meet her. He came pounding out in all haste but she was able to make Danny Agin's gate in safety.

Rosie always delivered Danny's paper in the kitchen.

"Come in!" said Danny's voice in answer to her knock.

Rosie opened the door and Danny received her with a friendly, "Ah now, and is it yourself, Rosie? I've been waiting for you this half-hour."

He was a little apple-cheeked old man who wheezed with asthma and was half-crippled with rheumatism. "Mary!" he called to some one in another room. "It's Rosie O'Brien. Have you something for Rosie?"

A voice, as serious in tone as Danny's was gay, came back in answer: "Tell Rosie to look on the second shelf of the panthry."

Rosie went to the pantry – it was a little game they had been playing every afternoon – and on the second shelf found a shiny red apple.

"Thanks, Danny. I do love apples."

Danny shook his head lugubriously. "I'm afeared there won't be many more, Rosie. We're gettin' to the bottom of the barrel and summer's comin'. But can't you sit down for a minute and talk to a body?"

Rosie sat down. As she had only two more papers to deliver, she had plenty of time. But she had nothing to say.

Danny, watching her, drew a long face. "What's the matter, Rosie dear? Somebody dead?"

Rosie shook her head and sighed. "That old Otto Schnitzer's waiting for me outside."

Danny exploded angrily. "The Schnitzer, indeed! I'd like to give that lad a crack wid me stick!"

"Danny," Rosie said solemnly, "do you know what I'd do if I was a boy?"

"What?"

"I'd try a chin-chopper on Otto Schnitzer. That'd fix him!"

"It would that!" said Danny, heartily. He paused and meditated. "But what's a chin-chopper, darlint?"

Rosie explained. "And Jarge says," she concluded, "they tumble right over like ninepins."

"Who's Jarge?"

"Jarge Riley, our boarder. He's little but he's a dandy scrapper. Terry says so, too."

Danny wagged his head. "Jarge is right. I've turned the same thrick meself in me younger days, many's the time."

"It would just serve that Otto Schnitzer right, don't you think so, Danny?"

"I do!" Danny declared. He looked at Rosie with a sudden light in his little blue eyes. "Say, Rosie, why don't you try it on him? He's nuthin' but a bag o' wind anyhow. One good blow and he'll bust."

Rosie cried out in protest: "But, Danny, he's so big and I'm so scared! I don't want to fight! I'm glad it's not ladylike to fight, it scares me so!"

"Whisht, darlint!" Danny raised a quieting hand. "Mind now what I'm sayin': Almost everybody's got to fight sometime. I don't mean to pick a fight but to fight in plain self-protection. Now it's me own opinion that young hound of a lad'll never let up on ye, Rosie, till ye larn him a good lesson. I could give him a crack wid me stick if ever he'd come nigh enough, but he'd be at you just the same the next time I wasn't around. Now, Rosie, if you ask me, I'd advise you to farce yirself to give that young bully a good chin-chopper once and for all. And, what's more, I'll take me oath ye'll never be feared of him again... Come here and I'll show you how to go at him. Palm up now with yir fingers bent making a little cup of the inside of your hand. Do ye see? Now the thrick is here: Run at him hard and catch his chin in the little cup. One good blow and you'll push him over. Oh, you can't miss it, Rosie."

Rosie's breath was coming fast and her hand was cold and shaky. "But I don't want to do it, Danny, honest I don't! I can't tell you how scared I am!"

Danny wagged his head. "Of course you don't want to do it, Rosie. Because why? Because ye're a little lady. But I know one thing: ye'll make yirself do it! And them that makes theirselves do it, not because they want to do it but because it's the right thing to do, I tell ye, Rosie, them's the best fighters! Come, come, I'll crawl out to the gate wid ye and hold yir apple for you while ye do the business."

Fixing his bright little eyes upon her, Danny waited until Rosie had, perforce, to consent. Then, with her help, he stood up and slowly hobbled to the door.

"We won't mintion the matther to the ould woman," he whispered with a wink. "She mightn't understand."

Rosie almost hoped that old Mary would catch them and haul Danny back, but she could not, of course, give the alarm.

As she had expected, the Schnitzer was there waiting for her. At sight of Danny he moved off a little.

"Now then, Rosie dear," Danny whispered, after Rosie had propped him securely against the gate-post; "at him and may luck be wid ye! It's high time that young cock crowed his last!"

As Danny spoke, the Schnitzer's taunting cry rang out: "Look at the paper-girl, paper-girl, paper-girl!"

Rosie started up the street and the Schnitzer cavorted and pranced some little distance in the front of her, making playful pounces at her papers, threatening to clutch her hair, her arms, her dress. Then, suddenly, he stood still, stretching himself across the middle of the walk to bar her passage.

Rosie's heart pounded so hard she could scarcely breathe. She wanted to dodge to the side and run, she wanted to turn back, she wanted to do anything rather than go straight on. But she felt Danny's presence behind her, she heard the click-clack he was making with his stick to encourage her, and she pushed herself forward.

Then her mood changed. What had she ever done to this great lout of a boy that he should be annoying her thus? He was not only terrorizing her daily with no provocation whatever but, in addition, he was doing his best to beat her out of her job. Yes, if she lost this well-paying job tomorrow, it would be his fault, for he was the one thing on the route that caused her trouble... Oh, for the fist of a Jarge to give him the chin-chopper he deserved!

She was close on to him now, looking him full in the eye. "Otto Schnitzer, you let me go by!" The words came so naturally that she was not conscious of speaking. "I guess I got as much right to this sidewalk as you have!"

"You have, have you? Well, who do you think you are, anyway?" The Schnitzer pushed out his jaw at her and grinned mockingly.

Who do you think you are? Where had Rosie heard those insulting words before? Ah, she remembered and, as she remembered, all fear seemed instantly to leave her heart and she cried out in ringing tones:

"Who do I think I am? I'm the conductor of this car and if you – "

Rosie made for the Schnitzer and, with all her strength, sent the cup of her hand straight at his chin. You have seen a ninepin wobble uncertainly for a moment, then go down. The comparison is inevitable. A yell of rage and fright from the sidewalk at her feet brought Rosie to her senses. Glory be, she had chin-choppered him good and proper!

But what to do next? What next? In her mind's eye Rosie saw the interior of a street-car with George Riley dancing a jig on the prostrate form of a giant. Thereupon Danny Agin and Mary, his wife, who by this time had joined him, and the woman next door, with a baby in her arms, saw Rosie O'Brien perform a similar jig over the squirming members of the Schnitzer.

That trampled creature was sending forth a terrific bellow of, "Murder! Murder! Mommer! Help! I'm gettin' killed!"

"And just good for him, too!" the woman with the baby shouted over to Mary and Danny. "I've been watching the way he's been teasing the life out of that little girl!"

"Good wur-r-rk, Rosie, good wur-r-rk!" old Danny kept wheezing as he pounded his stick in enthusiastic applause.

As the jig ended, Rosie stooped and snatched off the Schnitzer's cap. For a moment she hesitated, for there was no mud-puddle on the street into which to throw it. Then she noticed a tree. Good! That would give him some trouble. She twisted the cap in her hand and tossed it up into a high branch where it lodged securely.

Then she leaned over the Schnitzer for the last time. He was moaning and groaning and whimpering with no least little spark of fight left in him. And was this the thing she used to be afraid of? Danny was right: never again would she fear him. She gazed at him long and scornfully. Then she gave him one last stir with her foot and brought the episode to a close.

"Now then, you big bully, if you've had enough, get off this car – I mean, *sidewalk*, and go home and tell your – your *mother*, I mean, that she wants you!"

And, as Rosie said that evening in relating the adventure to George Riley: "And, oh, Jarge, you just ought ha' seen how that stiff got up and went!"

CHAPTER III

THE PAPER-GIRL

On Saturday night as soon as supper was cleared away, Terence was accustomed to make out his weekly accounts. He had a small account-book with crisscross rulings and two fascinating little canvas money-bags, one for coppers, the other for nickels and silver. After his book accounts were finished, he would gravely open his money-bags and, with banker-like precision, pile up together coins of the same denomination – pennies by themselves, nickels by themselves, dimes, and so on.

Though oft repeated, it was an impressive performance and one that Rosie and little Jack surveyed with untiring gravity and respect. With a frown between his eyes and his lips working silently, Terence would estimate the totals of the various piles, then the sum total. He would very deliberately compare this with the amount his book showed and then – it always happened just this way – with a sigh of relief, he would murmur to himself: "All right this time!"

On this particular night, instead of sweeping the money piles back into their little bags at once, Terence paused and looked at Rosie with a questioning: "Well?"

"Well." Rosie used the same word with a different intonation.

"I suppose I owe you twenty cents."

"Yes, Terry, you do."

"Are you having any trouble?"

With a truthfulness that made her own heart glow with happiness, Rosie was able to answer: "No, I'm not having a bit of trouble, honest I'm not. You're going to let me have it now regular, aren't you?"

Before Terence could answer, Ellen O'Brien, who was seated on the far side of the table, presumably studying the pothooks of stenography, called out suddenly: "Ma! Ma! Come here! Quick!"

Mrs. O'Brien appeared at once. She was still nursing the baby to sleep, but no matter. Whenever her oldest child called, Mrs. O'Brien came.

"Say, Ma, I think it's disgraceful the way Terry's letting Rosie sell papers. If I was you I just wouldn't allow it! It's awful for a girl to sell papers!"

Rosie's heart sank. Was this comfortable income of twenty cents a week now, at the last moment, to be snatched from her?

"Aw now, Mama," she began; "it's only right around here where every one knows me, honest it is! This is the end of Terry's route and he gets here so late that if I don't help him he'll lose his customers, won't you, Terry?"

Rosie appealed to Terence, but Terence was busy scowling at his older sister. "Say, Ellen O'Brien, what do you think you are? You mind your own business or I'll give that pompadour of yours a frizzle!"

Ellen concentrated on her mother: "I don't care, Ma! You just mustn't let her! How do you think I'd feel going into a swell office some day, hunting a job, and have the man say, no, he didn't want any common newsgirls around!"

For a moment every one was silent, overcome by the splendour of that imagined office. Then Terence broke into a jeer:

"Aw, forget it! If Rosie was to make her living selling papers, who'd know about it downtown? And if some one from downtown did see her, how would they know she was your sister? Say, Sis, it's time for you to go shine your nails!"

"Now, Ma, just listen to that! I wish you'd make Terry stop always making fun of me! Haven't I got to keep my hands nice if ever I'm going to be a stenog?"

Mrs. O'Brien tried hard to restore a general peace: "Terry lad, you mustn't be talkin' that way to your sister. P'rhaps what Ellen says is right. I dunno. We'll see what himself says when he comes in."

The young O'Briens were used to having their mother refer to their father as one to decide all sorts of vexed questions. When he was out of the house he seemed the person to appeal to. When, however, Jamie O'Brien was at home, no one ever heeded him in the least. He would come in tired and silent from his run and, after sitting about in shirtsleeves and socks long enough to smoke a pipe, would slip quietly off to bed. So no one was deceived by Mrs. O'Brien's manoeuver of begging them to await their father's judgment in the matter. Rosie and Terence would have been willing to let it mark the close of the discussion, but not Ellen.

"I tell you, Ma," she insisted, "it's a perfect disgrace if you don't stop it right now!"

Terry regarded his sister grimly. "Listen here, Ellen O'Brien, I've got something to say to you: Who's been paying your carfare and your lunch money, too, ever since you been going to this fool business college?"

Mrs. O'Brien feebly interposed: "Ah now, Terry lad, Ellen's just borrowin' the money from you. She'll pay you back as soon as she gets a job, won't you, Ellen dear?"

Terence grunted impatiently. "Aw, don't go talkin' to me about borrowin'! I guess I know what borrowin' means in this house! But I tell you one thing, Ellen O'Brien: if you don't stop your jawin' about Rosie, it'll be the last cent of carfare and lunch money you ever get out o' me!"

More than two-thirds of Terence's weekly earnings went into the family coffers, so what he said carried weight. Ellen tossed her head but was careful not to speak.

Terence rumbled on disjointedly: "Business college! Business nuthin'! I bet all you do down there is look at yourself in a glass and fix your hair and shine your nails. Huh!"

Ellen shrugged her handsome shoulders and, tilting a scornful nose, returned to her pothooks.

Rosie was jubilant. She was sure Terry had intended letting her keep on, but Ellen's opposition had clinched the matter firmly.

"So it's all settled," she told her friend, Janet McFadden, the next day. "Just think of it, Janet – twenty cents a week!"

Janet sighed. "My, Rosie! What are you going to do with it all?"

Rosie hadn't quite decided.

Janet was ready with a good suggestion. "Why don't you save it and buy roller skates, Rosie? I don't mean old common sixty-cent ones, but a fine expensive pair with good ball-bearings. Then you could skate on Boulevard Place. Why, Rosie, is there anything in the world you'd rather do than go up to Boulevard Place with a pair of fine skates? And listen here, Rosie: if you lend them to me in the afternoon while you're on your paper route, I'll take good care of them, honest I will."

H'm, roller skates. The longer Rosie thought about the idea, the better she liked it. She decided to talk it over with Danny Agin on Monday afternoon when she left him his paper.

Danny met her with a sly grin. "Have you been chin-chopperin' some more of them, Rosie?"

Rosie looked at her old friend reprovingly. "Aw now, Danny, why do you always talk about that? I don't like to fight boys, you know I don't. It was Otto Schnitzer's own fault. But, Danny, listen here: Bet you can't guess what I'm saving for."

Danny couldn't, so Rosie explained. Then she continued:

"You see it's this way, Danny: those old cheap skates are no good anyhow. They're always breaking. I'd give anything for a good pair and so would Janet. We just love to skate on Boulevard Place – the cement's so smooth and it's so shady and pretty. But do you know, Danny, last summer when we used to go up there on one old broken skate they called us 'muckers.' We're not muckers just because we're poor, are we, Danny?"

Danny Agin snorted with indignation. "As long as ye mind yir manners, ye're not to be called muckers! You don't fight 'em, Rosie, and call 'em names, do you?"

"No, Danny, I don't, honest I don't, but sometimes Janet does. She gets awful mad if any one calls her 'Cross-back!' You see, Danny, they're all Protestants and Jews on Boulevard Place."

"From their manners, Rosie, I'd know that!"

"But it seems to me, Danny, if we had a pair of ball-bearing skates we'd be just as good as they are."

"Betther!" said Danny.

"So you think I'm right to save for skates, do you, Danny?"

"Do I think so? I do. Why, Rosie dear, as soon as people find out that ye're savin' in earnest, they'll be givin' ye many an odd penny here and there. Let me see now... Go to the panthry, Rosie, and on the third shelf from the top ye'll see a cup turned upside down, and under the cup – well, I dunno what's under the cup."

Rosie went to the pantry and under the cup found two nice brown pennies. "Thanks, Danny. But do you think Mis' Agin would want me to take them?"

"Mary? Why, Mary'd be givin' ye a nickel – she's that proud of you for chin-chopperin' the young Schnitzer. He stones her cat, but if he does it again she'll be warnin' him that you'll take after him. Ha, ha, that'll stop him if anything will!"

CHAPTER IV

A LITTLE SAVINGS ACCOUNT

What Danny said proved right. As soon as Rosie's immediate family and friends heard of the project, they gave her every encouragement. Little Jack lent her his last Christmas money-box – one of those tin banks whose opening is supposed to be burglarproof against the seducing attractions of all hatpins and buttonhooks except those employed by its rightful owner – and Mrs. O'Brien suggested at once that the old wardrobe upstairs would be the place of greatest safety for the bank.

"You can get into it whenever you like, Rosie dear, for you know yourself where the key's to be found."

It might be argued that every one else in the family knew where the key was to be found, for it was an open secret that its hiding-place was under the foot of the washstand. Nevertheless, it was an accepted tradition that anything in the wardrobe was under lock and key and therefore safe. So, with unbounded confidence, Rosie slipped her first week's wages into Jack's money-box and carefully locked the old wardrobe.

George Riley, the boarder, was the first to make a handsome contribution.

"Do you know, Rosie," he said, "here you are carrying my supper up to the cars every night and I've never said anything more than 'Thank you.' I just tell you I'm ashamed of myself! After this I'm going to pay you a nickel a week regular."

"Aw now, Jarge, you won't do any such thing!" Rosie shook her head vigorously. "You can't afford it! And besides, Jarge, I just love to carry your supper up to the cars, honest I do!"

"Of course you do! And why? 'Cause you're my girl!" George turned Rosie's face up and gave her a hearty kiss. "Now you'll be making twenty-five cents a week regular. Here's a nickel for last week."

Twenty-five cents a week and two good sure jobs to one who, but a few days before, was nothing but a penniless creature dependent on any chance windfall! Rosie hugged herself in delighted amazement. She even bragged a little to her friend Janet McFadden.

"Why, Janet, once you know how to do it, making money's just as easy as falling off a log! Look at me: My papers don't take me more'n half an hour in the afternoon and carrying Jarge's supper-pail up to the cars is just fun. And every Saturday night twenty-five cents, if you please!"

Janet said "Oh!" with a rising inflection and "Oh!" with a falling inflection: "Oh! Oh!"

"And besides that, if I hadn't my paper route I'd have to take care of Geraldine all afternoon. Don't you see?"

"You would indeed, Rosie, I know you would."

Rosie looked at her friend thoughtfully. "Say, Janet, why don't you get a job? Of course, I'll lend you my skates, but if we both had a pair we could go to Boulevard Place together. Wouldn't that be fun?"

Janet cleared her throat apologetically. "Do you think Terry would give me a job, Rosie?"

Hardly. Though he did employ Rosie, Terence was scarcely in position to employ every needy female that might apply to him. Rosie spoke kindly but firmly:

"No, Janet, I don't believe Terry can take on any more girls. When I get my skates, though, I tell you what I'll do: I'll let you 'sub' for me sometimes. Yes. On the afternoons I go to skate on Boulevard Place, I'll let you deliver my papers. I'll pay you three cents a day. Three cents ain't much but, if you save 'em real hard, they count up – really they do. If you 'sub' for me eight different times then you'll have twenty-four cents. I told you, didn't I, that twenty-five cents is what's coming in to me now every week regular?"

Yes, Rosie had already specified the amount many times but Janet, being a devoted friend, exclaimed with unabated enthusiasm: "You don't say so, Rosie! Well, I think that's just grand!"

Janet was right. It is fine to have an income that permits one to enjoy the good things of life. Without a touch of envy Rosie could now view the rich Jews and Protestants as they skimmed the smooth surface of Boulevard Place. She, too, would soon be rolling along as well skated as the best of them. The time was not far distant when, hearing the soft whirr of the ball-bearings, they would look at her with a new respect and no longer call out "Mucker!" the moment her back was turned.

This was the happy side of saving. There was, however, another side, and to ignore it would be to ignore the effect upon character which any effort as conscious as saving must produce. In simple innocence Rosie had started out supposing that all that was necessary toward saving was to have something savable. She soon discovered her mistake. The prime essential in saving was not, after all, the possession of a tidy little sum coming in at regular intervals, so much as the ability to keep that sum intact. That is to say, for the sake of this one Big Thing, that looms up faint but powerfully attractive on the distant horizon, you must do without all the Little Things that make daily life so pleasant.

Alas, once you begin saving, you may no longer heedlessly sip the joys of the moment taking no thought for the morrow. Saving involves thought for the morrow first of all! In the old days when she hadn't a penny, Rosie had somehow managed to enjoy an occasional ice-cream cone, or a moving picture show, or a cent's worth of good candy. Now, on the other hand, with money in the bank, these and all like indulgences were forbidden. She was saving!

If for a moment she tried to forget the wearisome task to which she had publicly dedicated herself, some one was always at hand to remind her of it and to rescue her, as it were, from her weaker self. For instance, if she even hinted of thirst in the neighbourhood of a root-beer stand, Janet McFadden would turn pale with fright and hurriedly drag her off, imploring her to remember that, once she had her skates, she could have all the root-beer she wanted. Yes, of course, but Rosie sometimes felt that she wanted it when she wanted it and not at some far-off time when she would, no doubt, be too old and decrepit to enjoy it.

The experience began to give Rosie a clue to one of those mysteries of conduct which had long puzzled her. She had never stood in front of the glowing posters of a picture show, saying to herself or to any one that chanced to be with her: "I tell you what: If I had a nickel, I bet I know what I'd do with it!" nor paused before a bakery shop or a candy store, that she hadn't seen other people – men, women, and children – with eyes as full of desire as her own. What used to amaze her was that many of these people, she was absolutely sure, had money in their pockets. Heretofore, in her ignorance of life, she had supposed that, to possess yourself of anything you wanted, was a simple enough matter provided you had money in your pocket – or in your bank, which is the same thing. What a mistake she had made! How she had misjudged those poor creatures who, in spite of their jingling pockets, so often turned regretful backs upon the pleasures of life. Rosie understood now. Money in their pockets had nothing to do with it for – they were saving.

Unknown even to themselves they were all members of a mystic brotherhood, actuated by the same impulse, undergoing the same sacrifices for some ultimate benefit. Look where she would, she saw them plainly: Miss Hattie Graydon, Ellen's fashionable friend, saving for an outing in Jersey; Janet McFadden's poor mother always saving for a new wash-boiler; George Riley saving to give himself a good start on his father's farm; and now, the newest recruit to their ranks, Rosie herself, saving for ball-bearing roller skates.

"I'd just love to go with you! If there's anything I do enjoy, it's a matinée. But I can't. I got to have a new hat this spring."

"I'd like to lend it to you, Charley, the worst ever, but I don't see how I can. I got to save every cent this year for payments on the house."

"Waffles nuthin'! I ain't goin' a-spend a cent till I got enough money for a new baseball mitt!"

They were the things Rosie had been hearing all her life but never until now had she grasped what they meant. Think of it, oh, think of it – the heroic self-denial that masks itself in commonplaces like these! Rosie wondered if the others, too, had their moments of weakness. Weren't there perhaps times when George Riley sighed over the shabbiness of his clothes, realizing that, if only he were a little sportier, Ellen might not scorn him so utterly?

Theoretically practice makes easy, but Rosie found that the practice of self-denial, instead of growing easier, became harder as time went by. The week she had a dollar ninety-five in her bank, a Dog and Pony Show pitched its tent in a field which Rosie had to pass every afternoon on her paper route. She thought the sight of that tent would kill her before the week was over. The only things talked about at school were Skippo, the monkey that jumped the rope, Fifi, the dancing poodle, and Don, the pony, who shook hands with people in the front row. Afternoon admission was ten cents but, nevertheless, there were people who attended daily.

Even Janet McFadden, valiant soul that she was, grew pale and wan under the strain. "Of course, though, Rosie," she said, "you wouldn't have time to go even if some one was to give you a ticket."

This was Friday, so Rosie was able to answer: "I could go tomorrow afternoon, Janet. You know the Saturday matinée begins at two instead of half-past three. That'd get it over by four. I could ask you or somebody to get my papers for me and meet me at the tent at four o'clock. Then I'd be only a few minutes late."

Janet made hopeless assent. "Yes, I could get them for you all right. And if some one was to give me a ticket, Tom Sullivan would get them for you – I know he would. Tom would do anything for you, Rosie."

Tom was Janet's red-haired cousin and a flame of Rosie's.

"Yes, Janet, I suppose Tom would. But there's no use talking about it... Now if only I could just take – "

Rosie broke off and Janet, understanding her thought, murmured hastily: "No, no, Rosie! Of course you can't take any of that!"

Janet was right. Rosie could not possibly raid her own bank. Too many eyes were upon her. Yet all she needed was a quarter: ten cents for herself, ten for Janet, and five for her small brother. She couldn't go without Janet and Jack and, as she hadn't a cent anyhow, it was just as easy to plan the expenditure of a quarter as of a dime.

She wondered idly if there could by some happy chance be more in her bank than she supposed. She hadn't counted her savings for nearly a week. There wasn't much likelihood that a dime or a quarter or a nickel had escaped her count, but perhaps now – ... There was one chance in a thousand, for Rosie was not very strong in addition. At any rate, after supper she would slip up to the wardrobe and, with a bent hairpin, make investigations. A dollar ninety-five was all she was responsible for to the world at large. If her bank contained more, she could appropriate the surplus and no one be the wiser.

Supper afforded one excitement.

"Oh, lookee!" Jack suddenly cried, pointing an excited finger at Ellen. It was the period of pompadour and false hair and Rosie and Terence, following Jack's finger, saw a new cluster of shiny black curls in Ellen's already elaborate coiffure.

"Get on to the curls, Rosie," Terence remarked facetiously. "Lord, ain't we stylish!"

Ellen made no remark but seemed a little flurried.

"Shame on you, Terry!" Mrs. O'Brien expostulated. "Talkin' so of your own sister! Don't you know if Ellen's to be a stenog, she's got to be careful of her appearance? All the young ladies at the college are wearing curls."

Terence answered shortly: "She can wear all the curls she wants as soon as she's able to pay for them. But I tell you one thing, Ma: you needn't think you're going to get me to pay for them, because I won't. She tried to work me for them last week and I told her I wouldn't."

Ellen regarded her brother distantly. "You make me tired, Terence O'Brien. When you're asked to pay for these curls it'll be time for you to squeal."

"Are they paid for already?"

"Of course they're paid for already. Do you think I can get curls on tick?"

Terence's incredulity changed to suspicion. Turning to his mother he demanded: "Did you give her the two dollars you begged from me for the baby's food?"

Mrs. O'Brien spread out distracted hands. "Why, Terry lad, of course I didn't! Rosie went to the drug-store herself with the money, didn't you, Rosie?"

Yes, Rosie had, but even this did not satisfy Terry.

"Well, anyhow, I bet she's playing crooked somewhere!"

Ellen disdained to answer and Rosie remarked: "I'd rather spend my money on skates than on old curls."

Ellen looked at her kindly. "They say skates are going out of style, Rosie."

Rosie folded her hands complacently. "I don't care whether they're going out or coming in. I don't like 'em because they're fashionable but because I like 'em. If the Boulevard Placers didn't have one pair I'd want to go up there by myself and skate by myself just the same. I love roller skates! And, what's more, by the time vacation comes I'll have the finest pair of ball-bearing skates in town! And vacation, mind you, comes at the end of next week!"

Terence nodded a cautious approval. "You're that close to the finish, are you, Rosie?"

"Sure I am. Tomorrow night when I get paid I'll have two twenty and, by the end of next week, if I can manage to scrape up an extra nickel, I'll have two fifty exact."

Mrs. O'Brien fluttered her hands nervously. "I dunno about all this skatin', Rosie dear. I dunno if it's healthy to jump around so."

Rosie smiled superiorly. "I don't jump around. I know how to skate."

A few moments later Ellen excused herself from her usual evening duties on the plea that her friend, Hattie Graydon, had invited her out. So Rosie had to wipe the supper dishes as well as wash them before she could slip upstairs for the purpose of counting her savings.

She found the wardrobe key in its usual place and the little bank where she had put it, hidden beneath her mother's Sunday hat. She reached for it and lifted it up and then, with a loud cry, she clutched it hard and shook it with all her might.

"Ma! Ma!" she screamed, flying wildly downstairs. "My money! Some one's taken all my money!"

"Ssh!" Mrs. O'Brien implored. "Ye'll be wakin' Geraldine!"

For once Rosie heeded not the warning. "I tell you my money's gone! Some one stole it! Listen here!" She was weeping distractedly and waving the empty bank aloft. "There's not a cent left! And, Terry, look here how they took it!"

The thief had not even had the grace to use a hairpin, but had calmly bent back the opening slit.

Terence looked at his mother sternly. "Ma, who took Rosie's money?"

Mrs. O'Brien squirmed uncomfortably. "Now, Terry lad, how do I know who took it? But I do know this: whoever it was that took it only borrowed it and Rosie'll get paid back."

"Paid back!" wept Rosie. "Don't talk to me about getting paid back in this house! I guess I know!"

With a determined eye Terence held his mother's wavering attention. "Now, Ma, you know very well who took that money and I want you to tell me."

"Why, Terry lad, how you talk!" Mrs. O'Brien turned her head to listen, in hopes, apparently, that the baby would require her presence. "But I will say one thing, Terry: Ye know yirself a young girl, if she goes out, has to keep up appearances."

Terence nodded grimly. "So it was Ellen, was it? I thought so."

"Ellen," Rosie repeated in a dazed tone. Then her body grew tense, her eyes blazed. "Terry, I know! Those curls! I bet anything it was those curls!"

Mrs. O'Brien made no denial and Rosie, dropping her head on the table, wept her heart out.

"Terry, Terry, what do you know about that! And after the way I been working hard and saving every cent for two whole months! Just think of it! And you know yourself the fuss she always made about my selling papers at all! It's disgraceful for me to sell papers because I'm a girl, but it ain't disgraceful for her to go steal all my money and buy curls!.. And I can't do nuthin'! If she was a nigger, I could have her arrested but, because she's my own sister, I can't do nuthin'! Oh, how I hate her, how I hate her!.."

Mrs. O'Brien sighed unhappily. "But, Rosie dear, Ellen'll be paying you back as soon as she gets a job. She promised me faithfully she would. You see, she'll soon be going around to them offices now and she feels she ought to be lookin' her best. Oh, you'll be gettin' back your money all right! Why, nowadays a good stenog gets ten dollars a week up!"

Terence cut his mother off sharply. "Aw, forget it! You can't fool Rosie with guff like that! I tell you, Ellen's nuthin' but a low-down crook and it's your fault, too, for encouraging her!"

"But, Terence lad, what could I do? I thried to dissuade her, but ye know yirself how set she is once she gets an idea into her head."

Yes, Terence and Rosie both knew and they knew, likewise, their mother's helplessness in her hands. With no further words they could easily imagine just what had taken place. Mrs. O'Brien had, no doubt, tried hard to protect Rosie's interests. She could always be depended on to protect the interests of an absent child. Her present attitude was an evidence of this, for now she was turned about seeking to defend Ellen because Ellen was absent.

A wail from upstairs brought her ineffectual excuses to a close and, with a "Whisht! The baby!" she fled.

Rosie, crushed and miserable, wept on. Terence put an awkward hand on her shoulder.

"Say, Rosie, I'm awful sorry, honest I am. I wish I could give you a quarter, but I can't this week. They've cleaned me out. Here's a nickel, though."

Rosie did not want the nickel; at that moment she did not want anything; she took it, however, because Terry wished her to.

"Thanks, Terry. It wasn't your fault. You're not a sneak and a thief. I – I'm glad some of my relations are honest."

Little Jack, who had been listening gravely, snuggled up with a sudden suggestion: "Say, Rosie, if you want me to, I'll kick her in the shins when she comes in."

Rosie wiped her eyes sadly. "No, Jackie, I don't see how that'll do any good."

"Do you want me to spit in her eye?"

Rosie gave Jack a tight hug, for his sympathy was sweet. Then she shook her head reprovingly. "You mustn't talk like that, Jackie, and you mustn't do things like that, either. You don't want to be a mucker, do you?"

For this once Jack thought that perhaps he did, but, when Rosie insisted, he promised to behave.

From babyhood he had been Rosie's special charge, so now, when the time came, she took him upstairs and saw him safely to bed. Then she herself slipped down to the front porch and there on the steps, in the dark electric shadow, she waited for her friend, George Riley.

CHAPTER V

GEORGE RILEY ON MUCKERS

Rosie had not long to wait, as George's run ended at nine o'clock.

"Sst! Jarge!" she called softly as he bounded up the steps and would have passed her in the dark.

"Is that you, Rosie?"

"Sit down a minute, Jarge. I want to ask you something."

George mopped his head with his handkerchief and drew a long breath. "Whew, but I'm tired, Rosie! I rang up over seventy-five fares three times tonight."

Rosie opened with no preliminary remarks. "Say, Jarge, can you lend me twenty-five cents until tomorrow night? You know I get paid tomorrow."

"Sure, Rosie. What for?"

"I want to go to the Dog Show matinée."

George paused a moment. "But, Rosie, you don't need twenty-five cents for that. You told me it was ten cents."

"I know, Jarge, but I want to take Jackie and Janet."

"Why, Rosie!"

"Well, if I don't, poor Janet'll never get there. She never gets anywhere. You know her father boozes every cent. And I just got to take Jackie if I go myself. Besides, he'll only cost me five cents and that will let me use the nickel Terry gave me for peanuts."

"But, Rosie," – George cleared his throat – "I thought you were saving every penny. You know you can't save and spend at the same time."

"I'm not saving any more." Rosie spoke quietly, evenly.

"Not saving any more! What do you mean, Rosie? What's happened?"

She could feel his kind jolly eyes looking at her through the dark but she knew that he could not see the tears which suddenly filled her own.

"N-nothing," she quavered.

"Rosie! Tell me!" He put his arm about her shoulder and drew her to him. At the tenderness in his voice and touch, all the sense of outrage and loss in Rosie's heart welled up afresh and broke in sobs which she could not control.

"I wasn't going to tell you, Jarge, honest I wasn't, because you're dead gone on her and, besides, she's my own sister."

For a few seconds Rosie could say no more and George, with a sudden tightening of the arm that encircled her, waited in silence.

"I – I was going up to count my money, Jarge, and what do you think? Some one had smashed open the bank and taken every cent! I tell you there wasn't even one cent left! And, Jarge, I've been saving so hard – you know I have!" She lay on his shoulder, her body shaking with sobs.

George spoke with an effort: "Why do you think it was Ellen?"

"Terry and me got it out o' ma. When we cornered her she told us... And she's gone and spent it on a bunch of curls! Think of that, Jarge – curls for her hair! Just because Hattie Graydon's got false curls, Ellen's got to have them, too! Now do you call that fair? I saved awful hard for that money, you know I did, and it was my own!"

George sighed. "Poor kiddo! Of course it was your own! But Ellen'll pay you back, I – I'm sure she will."

"That's what ma says. But, Jarge, even if she does, it won't be the same thing. Just tell me how you'd feel yourself if all your savings were snatched away from you!"

George's answer was unexpected. "They have been, Rosie, a good many times."

"What!" Rosie sat up in fright and astonishment. "Has she dared to go and break into your trunk?"

George laughed weakly. "No, Rosie, it ain't Ellen this time." He paused a moment. "I've told you about my father's farm. It's a good farm and I'd rather live on it and work it than do anything else on earth. But it's got run down, Rosie. The old man's had a mighty long spell of unluck. A few years ago he got a little mortgage piled up on it and for nearly two years now he hasn't kept it up like he ought to. In the country you've got to have ready money to wipe out mortgages and to start things goin' right. That's why I'm here in town railroading and that's why I'm saving every cent until people think I'm a tightwad."

"But, Jarge, how did they get it away from you so many times?"

"Well, just to show you: Two years ago one of the barns burned down. That cost me two hundred dollars. Last summer we lost a couple of our best cows worth sixty dollars apiece. This winter the old man was laid up with rheumatiz a couple o' months and it cost me a dollar a day to get the chores done, let alone the doctor bill. And each time I was just about ready to blow my job here and hike for home. I thought sure I'd be doing my own plowing this spring."

Weariness and discouragement sounded in his voice and Rosie, forgetting her own troubles, slipped her arms about his neck.

"I'm awful sorry, Jarge. Maybe if nothing happens this summer you'll be able to go back in the fall."

George shook himself doggedly. "Oh, I'll get there some time! I cleaned up the mortgage the first year I was here and now I'm working to pile up five hundred in the bank before I go. I'm getting there, too, but I hope to God I won't have any more setbacks!"

"And if you do, Jarge?.."

The answer came sharp and quick: "I'll save all the harder!"

For a few moments both were silent. Then George spoke: "I'm sorry, Rosie, about this thing. I know how you feel. If you want to, after this you may hide your savings in my trunk. I've got two keys and I'll give you one."

"I – I didn't think I was going to save any more, Jarge."

"Not save? Of course you're going to save! You've got to save!"

"Why?"

"So's to have something to show for your work!"

"But it takes so awful long, Jarge, and even then maybe you lose it."

"I know, Rosie, but even so you got to do it. It's only muckers that never save."

"Why, Jarge!"

"Sure, Rosie. Only muckers. They blow in every cent they get as soon as they make it or before. That's why they can afford to go off on drunks and holler around and smash things up. They ain't got nuthin' to lose no matter what they do. Oh, I tell you, Rosie, just show me a loud-mouthed mucker and I'll show you a fellow that don't know the first thing about saving!"

"Really, Jarge?"

"Yes, really. And the same way, take decent hard-working people and what do you find? As sure as you're alive, you'll find them saving every cent to put the children through school, or pay for their home, or take care of the old folks. I tell you, Rosie, you got to save if ever you get anywhere in this world!"

"But, Jarge, I – I think I just got to go to that Dog Show now."

George laughed and gave her a little hug. "All right, kiddo. Here's the quarter. Have a good time and tell me about it afterwards. Next week, you know, you can begin saving in earnest. My trunk – "

"Please, Jarge," Rosie begged, "don't make me promise. Give me a week to think about it."

"Of course you can have a week to think about it." They were standing up now, ready to go into the house. "But I know all right what you'll decide."

"How do you know?"

George stooped and gave her a hearty country kiss, smack on the mouth. "Because I know there's nothing of the mucker about Rosie O'Brien!"

And Rosie, as she slipped upstairs, tying the quarter in the corner of her handkerchief, suddenly realized that she was no longer unhappy. How could any one be unhappy who had a friend as good and as kind as George Riley? And, in addition to him, she had nice old Terry – hadn't he given her a nickel and been sorry it wasn't a quarter? – and dear little Jackie and the faithful Janet and poor old Danny Agin, too! Thank goodness, neither Ellen nor any one else could steal them away from her!

CHAPTER VI

JACKIE

In declaring that Ellen would repay the money she had taken from Rosie's bank, Mrs. O'Brien had spoken in all sincerity. She was perfectly convinced in her own mind that every one of her children would always do exactly as he should do. She was willing to acknowledge that the poor dears might occasionally make mistakes, but such mistakes, she was certain, were mistakes of judgment, not of principle. Give them time, she begged, and in the end they would do the right thing. She'd stake her word on that!

Ellen's own attitude was one of annoyance, not to say resentment, that she had been forced to raise money for the curls in so troublesome a manner. Rosie's reproachful glances and Terry's revilings irritated but in no way touched her. In fact, she seemed to think that, in appropriating Rosie's savings, she had been acting entirely within her rights. She would never have been guilty of touching anything belonging to an outsider but, like many selfish people, she had as little respect for the property of the members of her own immediate family as she had for their feelings. It was quite as though she conscientiously believed that the rest of the O'Briens had been placed in this world for the sole purpose of adding to her comfort and convenience. It always surprised her, often it bored her, sometimes it even grieved her that they did not share this view. It seemed to her nothing less than stupidity on their part not to.

So, despite her mother's promises, despite George Riley's hopes, Rosie knew perfectly well that her savings would never be refunded. They were gone and that was to be the end of them. Thanks to kind George Riley, Rosie had weathered the first storm of disappointment and had learned that, notwithstanding a selfish unscrupulous sister, life was still worth living. Neither then nor later did she definitely forgive Ellen the theft – how could she forgive when Ellen, apparently, was conscious of no guilt? – but she tried resolutely not to spend her time in vain regrets and useless complainings. The days passed and life, like the great river that it is, flowed over the little tragedy and soon covered it from sight.

The school year slowly drew to a close and at last Mrs. O'Brien felt free to make a request about which she had been throwing out vague hints for some time.

"Rosie dear," she began with an imploring smile, "now that vacation's come and you don't have to go back any more to school, won't you, like a good child, help your poor ma and take care of your little sister Geraldine? Here, baby darlint, go to sister Rosie."

Mrs. O'Brien held out the baby, but Rosie backed resolutely away.

"Now see here, Ma, you just needn't begin on that, because I won't. I guess I do enough in this house without taking care of Geraldine: I wash all the dishes, and that old Ellen O'Brien hardly ever even wipes them; and I do the outside scrubbing; and I go to the grocery for you six times a day; and I help with the cooking, too; and I always carry up Jarge's supper to the cars; and I take care of Jackie. Besides all that, I got my paper route. I guess that's enough for any one person."

Mrs. O'Brien conceded this readily enough. "Of course it is, Rosie dear, and I'm not sayin' it ain't. You're a great worker, and a fine little manager, too. I used to be a manager meself, but after ye've been the mother of eight, and three of them dead and gone – God rest their souls! – things kind o' slip away from you, do ye see? What was it I was sayin' now? Ah, yes, this: now that summer's come, if only ye'd help me out with Geraldine, p'rhaps I could catch up with me work. Like a darlint, now."

Mrs. O'Brien, shifting Geraldine from one warm arm to the other, smiled ingratiatingly; but Rosie only shook her head more doggedly than before.

"No, Ma. The rest of the people in this house don't do things they don't want to do, and for once I'm not going to either. I tell you I'm not going to begin lugging Geraldine around!"

"You poor infant!" Mrs. O'Brien crooned tearfully, "and does nobody love you? Ah, now, don't cry! Your poor ma loves you even if your own sister Rosie don't!"

Responsive to the pity expressed in her mother's tones, Geraldine raised a fretful wail, but Rosie, though she felt something of a murderess, still held out.

"I tell you, Ma, Jackie's my baby. I've taken good care of him, and that's all you can ask."

Mrs. O'Brien sighed in patient exasperation. "But, Rosie dear, can't you see that Jackie's a big b'y now, well able to take care of himself?"

"Take care of himself! Why, Ma, how you talk! Don't I have to wash him and button his shoes and put him to bed?"

"Well, I must say, Rosie, it's high time he did such things for himself – a fine, healthy lad going on six! Why, yourself, Rosie, hadn't turned six when you began mothering Jackie!"

It was not a subject Rosie cared to argue, so she retired in dignified silence. But her mother's words troubled her. In her heart she knew that Jackie was a well-grown boy even if in many things he was still a baby. But why shouldn't he still be a baby? The truth was Rosie wanted him to be a baby; it delighted her to feel that he was dependent on her; it was her greatest pleasure in life to do things for him. And if she was willing to serve him, why, pray, should other people object?

Unfortunately, though, certain disturbing changes were coming over Jackie himself. Within a few months he had burst, as it were, the chrysalis of his babyhood and come forth a full-fledged small boy with all a small boy's keenness to be exactly like all other small boys. Rosie's interest in his welfare he had begun to resent as interference; her supervision of him he was openly repudiating; and, worst of all, he was showing unmistakable signs of becoming fast friends with Joe Slattery, youngest member of the family and neighbourhood gang of the same name. Rosie had done her best to check the growing intimacy, but in vain. So long as school continued, Jack could meet Joe in the school-yard, and Rosie had been helpless to interfere. But now, for the coming of vacation, she had a project carefully thought out. In her own mind she had already arranged picnics at the zoo, excursions to the woods, jaunts to the park, that would so occupy and divert the attention of Jack that he would soon forget Joe and the lure of the Slattery gang.

What time, may one ask, would Rosie have for this work if she burdened herself with Geraldine? None whatever. No. Geraldine was her mother's baby, and if her mother didn't insist on Ellen's relieving her a little, why, then she would have to go on alone as best she could. With her everlasting excuse of business college, Ellen did little enough about the house anyway. Rosie hardened her heart and, as the family gathered for midday meal, was ready with a plan for that very afternoon.

She broached the subject at the table. "Say, Jackie, do you want to come with me this afternoon? I'm going somewheres."

"Oh, I dunno."

Rosie's heart sank. But a short time ago he would have jumped down from his chair and rushed over to her with an eager: "Oh, Rosie, where you going? Where you going?" Now all he had to say was an indifferent, "I dunno."

Rosie made one more effort to arouse his old enthusiasm. "Me and Janet are going up to Boulevard Place."

She waited expectantly, and Jack finally grunted out in bored politeness: "That so?"

A moment later his indifference vanished at a vigorous shout from outside: "Hi, there, Jack! Where are you?" It was Joe Slattery's voice.

"I'm th'u," Jack announced, gulping down a last bite. "I got to go."

"Where you going, Jackie?" Rosie tried not to show in her voice the anxiety she felt.

"Oh, nowheres. Don't you take hold o' me, Rosie, 'cause I'm in a hurry."

Rosie went with him to the door, still keeping her hand on his shoulder. "Please tell me where you're going."

"You just let go my arm! I'll kick if you don't!"

Jack struggled violently, broke away, and, escaping to a safe distance, scowled back at Rosie angrily. "'Tain't none o' your business where I'm going! Guess I can go where I want to!"

"Oh, Jackie, Jackie! Is that the way to talk to your poor Rosie?"

Joe Slattery, who had, of course, instantly espoused his friend's cause, now spoke: "He's goin' in swimmin'! That's where he's goin' if you want to know it!"

"Swimmin'! You mustn't, Jackie, you mustn't! You'll get drownd-ed! Sure he will, Joe! He don't know how to swim one bit!"

Joe grinned mockingly. "Guess he can learn, can't he?"

Rosie paused distractedly, then clutched at the only straw that floated by. "See here, Jackie, you can go with Joe and you can look on, but listen: if you promise me you won't go in, I'll give you a whole nickel!"

Jack looked at Joe and Joe looked at Jack. Then with the eye farthest away from Rosie, Rosie thought she saw Joe screw out a small wink. Thereupon Jack turned to Rosie with a frank, guileless smile.

"All right, Rosie. You give me a nickel and I won't – honest I won't."

"You promise me faithfully you won't go in?"

"Sure I won't, Rosie! Cross my heart!"

Rosie drew out one of her hard-earned nickels and gave it to him. He and Joe promptly hurried off.

"Now, remember!" Rosie called after them, beseechingly; but they seemed not to hear, for they made her no answer.

Rosie went back to the table almost in tears. "Jackie's gone off with that Joe Slattery and they're goin' in swimmin' and I just know he'll get drownd-ed!"

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Mrs. O'Brien. "Why didn't you tell me, Rosie dear, before they got started?"

"Tell you!" Rosie's tears changed to scorn. "Why'd I tell you? You know very well how much you'd do! You always let every one do just what they want!"

Mrs. O'Brien blinked reproachful eyes. "Why, Rosie, how you talk! If you'd ha' told me that Jackie was goin' in swimmin' I'd ha' gone out to him and said: 'Now, Jackie dear, mind the water! Don't go in the deep places first!' I give you me word, Rosie, I'd ha' said it if it were me last breath!"

Rosie lost all patience. "I know very well that's exactly what you'd say! That's all the sense you got! That's all the sense that anybody in this house has got! And I suppose by this time Jackie's drownd-ed, and if he is I want to die, too!"

Mrs. O'Brien looked at her in amazement. "Why, Rosie dear, what a flutter ye do be puttin' yourself into! Ah, now I see. It's because Jackie's your first chick! Take me word for it, darlint, when ye're the mother of eight ye won't be carryin' on so. Come to think about it, I remember meself over Mickey – God rest his soul! – the first day he went swimmin'. Mickey was just turned seven, and Terry here was toddlin' about on the floor, and yourself was in me arms no bigger than poor wee Geraldine.

"'Where's Mickey?' says I to Mrs. Flaherty, who was livin' next door.

"'Mickey?' says she. 'Why, didn't I see Mickey start off with the b'ys? They be gone swimmin',' says she.

"'Swimmin'!' says I, and with that I lets out a yell. 'He'll be drownd-ed!' says I. 'Me poor Mickey'll be drownd-ed!'

"'Be aisy, Mrs. O'Brien,' says she; 'or ye'll be spoilin' yir milk and then what'll ye do?' And she was right, Rosie, was Mrs. Flaherty, for Mickey got back safe and sound, to be carried off two years later with scarlet fever!"

Mrs. O'Brien nodded her head complacently and poured herself another cup of tea.

Rosie, her face still tragic and woebegone, turned to her brother. "Will you do something for me, Terry?"

"What?"

"Follow Jackie out and see that he don't get into deep water."

Terry looked at her as if she were crazy. "Sorry, Rosie, but I got something more to do than trail Jack around. Besides, he's not going to get hurt. It'll be good for him."

Rosie washed the dinner dishes in silence, thinking to herself what a cold-blooded family she had. There was poor wee Jackie out there drowning, for all they knew, and not one of them willing to stretch forth a helping hand. She escaped as soon as she could to seek the sympathy of her friend, Janet McFadden.

Another blow was in store for her. Janet heard her out and then said: "But, Rosie, don't all boys go swimming?"

Rosie was ready to weep with vexation. "What do I care what all boys do? This is Jack!"

"Well," said Janet, with maddening logic, "even if it is Jack, I guess Jack's a boy."

Drawing herself up to her greatest height, Rosie looked her friend full in the face. "If that's all you got to say, Janet McFadden, I guess I had better be going. Good-bye."

"Don't you want me to help with your papers this afternoon?" Janet called after her.

"No!" Rosie spoke brusquely, then added lamely: "I'm in a hurry today."

"Oh, very well!" Janet lifted her head and tightened her lips. "I'm sure I don't want to go where I'm not wanted."

"So she's mad at me, too!" Rosie told herself as she hurried off, feeling more miserable than before.

She got her papers and went about delivering them, nursing her grief in her heart, till she came to old Danny Agin's cottage. Then she talked and Danny, as usual, listened quietly and sympathetically.

At first he had nothing to say. He screwed his head about thoughtfully, squinted at his pipe, tapped it several times on the porch rail, blew through the stem, then finally cleared his throat.

"It's just this way, Rosie: I know exactly how ye feel. Jack's yir own baby, as it were; but, whist, darlint, he can't be always taggin' after ye, don't ye see? He's a pretty big lump of a b'y now, and if I was you I'd just let him run and play by himself when the mood takes him. Then, when he comes back, just talk to him like nuthin' was the matther, and upon me word, Rosie, he'll love ye all the more for it."

"But, Danny," Rosie wailed, "what if he was to get drownd-ed?"

Danny reached over and patted her on the arm confidentially. "Ah, now, Rosie, what if we was all to get drownd-ed? You know it happened wance. Noah was the gintleman's name. From all accounts 'twas a fearful experience. But 'twas a long time ago, and since then any number of us have escaped. Why, Rosie dear, I've never yet been drownd-ed meself, and in me young days I was mighty fond of the wather. So cheer up, darlint, for the chances are that Jackie'll come out all right."

Rosie dried her eyes listlessly. It seemed to her they were all in conspiracy against her. Yes, she was sure of it.

CHAPTER VII

HOW TO KEEP A DUCK OUT OF WATER

Jack was home in good time for supper.

"Ah, now, do you see, Rosie?" Her mother pointed to him in triumph. "It's just as I told you. Here he is safe and sound. But, Jackie dear, mind now: the next time don't ye go into the deep water until ye know how to swim."

Ellen glanced at him amusedly. "Been in swimmin', kid?"

To Rosie the question seemed both stupid and inane, for Jack's face had a clean, varnished look that was unmistakable, and his hair had dried in stiff, shiny streaks close to his head.

He was hungry and ate with zest, but he said little and carefully avoided Rosie's eye. Very soon after supper he slipped off quietly to bed. Rosie did not pursue him. She was waiting for George Riley, upon whom she was pinning her last hope.

Presently he came but, before she had time to get his advice, she was hurried upstairs by Jackie himself, who called down in urgent, tearful tones:

"Rosie! Oh, Rosie! Come here! Please come! Come quick!"

The little front bedroom with its sloping walls and one dormer window was Ellen's room, theoretically. Actually, Rosie shared Ellen's bed, and Jack's little cot stood at the bottom of the bed between the door and the bureau.

Rosie felt hurriedly for matches and candle. "Now, Jackie dear, what's the matter? You're not sick, are you? Tell Rosie."

"It hurts! It hurts!" Jack was sitting up, wailing dolefully. He reached toward Rosie in a helpless, appealing way that warmed her heart. Whatever was the matter, it was bringing him back to her.

"What is it hurts, Jackie?"

"My back! It burns! I tell you it's just burnin' up!"

Rosie gently lifted off his nightshirt and held the candle close.

"Jackie! What's happened to your back and shoulders? They're all red and swollen! What did those Slattery boys do to you?"

"They didn't do nuthin', Rosie, honest they didn't. Ouch! Ouch! Can't you do something to make it stop hurting?"

"Wait a minute, Jackie, and I'll call Jarge Riley. Jarge'll know what to do."

George came at once and as quickly recognized Jack's ailment. "Ha, ha, Jack, old boy, how's your sunburn? Jiminy, you've got a good one this time!.. Say, how's the water?"

"Ugh-h-h!" moaned Jack. "It hurts!" Then with a change of voice he answered George enthusiastically: "Dandy! Just as warm and nice as anything!"

George sighed. "Golly! Wisht I was a kid again! There sure is no place like the old swimmin'-hole in the good old summer-time!"

Rosie glared indignantly. "Jarge Riley, ain't you ashamed of yourself! It's dangerous to go in swimming and you know it is! Jackie's never going in again, are you, Jackie?"

Jack snuffled tearfully: "My back hurts! Can't some o' you do something for it?"

Rosie turned stiffly to George. "What I called you up here for was to ask you what's good for a sunburnt back."

"Excuse me," murmured George meekly. "Let's see now: We ought to put on some oil or grease, then some powder or flour."

"Will lard do?" Rosie still spoke coldly.

"Yes, but vaseline would be better. There's a bottle of vaseline on my bureau. Do you want to get it, Rosie?"

Rosie hurried off and returned just in time to hear George say: "Oh, you can go in again in two or three days."

Rosie blazed on him furiously. "Jarge Riley, what are you telling Jackie?"

"I?" He spoke with an assumption of innocence and that look of guilelessness which Rosie was fast learning to associate with male deceit. "I was just telling him it would take a couple o' days for his back to peel. Then he'll be all right again."

Rosie looked at him in scorn, but made no comment. She resolved one thing: George Riley should have no more moments alone with Jack. When the time came, she made him go downstairs for the flour-shaker, then curtly dismissed him.

"I guess you can go now, Jarge. Jackie wants to go to sleep. Now, Jackie dear, just lie on your stummick and you'll be asleep in two minutes."

George hesitated a moment. "Didn't you say you wanted to see me about something, Rosie?"

Rosie looked at him steadily. "If ever I said that it was before I knew you as well as I know you now. Now they isn't anything I want to say to you."

George gasped helplessly and departed, and Rosie, after settling Jack comfortably, blew out the candle... So even George Riley had joined the conspiracy against her! Well, she was not done fighting yet.

She insisted upon making an invalid of Jack the next morning, keeping him in bed and carrying up his breakfast to him. All day long, she waited on him, hand and foot, loved, amused, coaxed, threatened, bribed him, until by evening she had him weak and helpless, ready to agree to anything she might suggest.

At supper Mrs. O'Brien beamed on him sympathetically and remarked to Ellen, who was just home from business college: "Ellen dear, do you know the awful back o' sunburn poor wee Jack's got on him? Rosie's been nursing him all day."

Ellen glanced at Terry and laughed. "Do you remember, Terry, how you used to come home after your first swim every summer?"

Jack looked up eagerly. "Oh, Terry, did you used to get sunburned, too?"

Terry nodded. "Sure I did. Every fella does."

Jack's face took on an expression of heavenly content.

"Is it peeling yet?" Terry asked.

"No, but it's cracking." Jack's tone was hopeful.

Rosie moved uneasily. "Terence O'Brien, I just wish you'd look out what you're saying, and you too, Ellen! It's dangerous to go in swimming, and Jackie's never going again, are you, Jackie?"

Jack hesitated a moment, then murmured a weak little "No."

Mrs. O'Brien nodded approvingly. "Ah, now, ain't Jack the good b'y to promise sister Rosie never to go in swimmin' again!"

Ellen chuckled. "At least until his back's well!"

Rosie flew at her sister like an angry little clucking hen. "Ellen O'Brien, you just mind your own business! Come on, Jackie, we're through. We're going out in front by ourselves, aren't we?"

Jack, apparently, wanted to remain where he was; but when Rosie whispered, "And I've got another penny for you," he slipped quietly down from his chair.

When you know that this was Jack's fifth penny for that day, you have some idea of what the struggle was costing Rosie. A week's wages seemed in a fair way of being eaten up in a few days. It was a fearful drain on her resources, but anything, Rosie told herself, to keep him out of the clutches of the Slattery gang!

By the third day his back was dry and peeling. After dinner, as Rosie was coming home from the grocery, she found him at the front gate boasting about it to Joe Slattery.

Rosie interrupted politely: "Jackie, will you come into the house a minute? I got something to ask you."

Jack looked at her kindly. "All right, Rosie. You go on in and I'll be in in a minute."

The dismissal was so friendly that Rosie could not gainsay it. She hurried around to the back door and then rushed through the house to the front door, which she slipped open wide enough to see and to hear what was going on at the gate. Joe Slattery's voice carried distinctly.

"Say, Jack, what do you say to goin' down now? Aw, come on! Let's."

Rosie did not have to ask herself what Joe Slattery was proposing; she knew only too well. Breathless, she awaited Jack's answer. It came with scarcely an instant's hesitation.

"All right. Let's."

Jack was out of the gate and off before Rosie could push open the front door.

"Jackie! Jackie! Where you going? Wait for Rosie!"

"Me and Joe got to go down and see a fella. We'll be back soon, won't we, Joe?"

"Sure we will, Rosie. We'll be back in ten minutes."

Rosie shook her head reproachfully. "Jackie, Jackie, you're telling Rosie a story, you know you are! You're going swimming and you promised me you wouldn't! Oh, Jackie, how can you, after the nickel I gave you this morning, and the seven cents yesterday, and the nickel the day before, and the nickel of the first day you went with Joe? Oh, Jackie, how can you take poor Rosie's money and then act that way?"

Jack had nothing to say, but Joe Slattery was able to answer for him.

"Aw, go on, Rosie O'Brien – Jack's goin' in swimmin' if he wants to! I guess you ain't his boss! Come on, Jack!"

Joe threw his arm about Jack's shoulder and together they marched off.

Rosie put forth one last effort: "Jackie O'Brien, you listen here: If you go swimming with Joe Slattery, I – " She searched about frantically for some threat sufficiently terrifying. She paused a moment, then hit upon something which, a few months earlier, would have worked like magic. "If you do, *I'll never button your shoes again! Never again!*"

Jack glanced back insolently over Joe's shoulder. "Aw, go on! What do I care? Anyway, it's summer-time and I'm goin' barefoot!"

CHAPTER VIII

A LITTLE MOTHER HEN

For Rosie this was the end. This was defeat and she accepted it as such. Slowly and tearfully she dragged herself into the house.

"Ma, Ma, after all I've done, there he's gone!"

Mrs. O'Brien looked up in concern. "Who did you say was gone, Rosie?"

"Jackie! He's gone off swimming again with that old Joe Slattery!"

"Is that all it is, Rosie?" Mrs. O'Brien seemed much relieved. "You gave me quite a turn."

"But, Ma, what am I going to do?"

"Well, Rosie dear, what do you want to do?"

"I want to save Jackie from those old Slatterys."

Mrs. O'Brien sighed sympathetically. "Ah, I'm afeared you can't do that, Rosie. Jack's a b'y and you know how it is: b'ys do like to run around with other b'ys."

"But what if he gets all sunburnt again and maybe drownd-ed?"

"Ah, now, but maybe he won't."

There were times when, to Rosie, her mother's easy-going optimism was maddening. Today it seemed to her the very sort of thing you might expect to find in a hot, untidy kitchen cluttered up with clothes-horses and steaming with fresh ironing. The rickety old baby-carriage, draped in mosquito-netting, stood near the ironing board, and Mrs. O'Brien, as she changed irons, would give it a push or two. Geraldine was whimpering miserably, and little wonder, Rosie felt.

Mrs. O'Brien, on the other hand, seemed surprised and grieved that she was not cooing herself comfortably to sleep. "Ah, now, baby, what can be ailin' ye? Can't you see your poor ma is working herself to death to get your nice clean clothes all ready for you? Now stop your cryin', darlint, or your poor ma won't be able to iron right, and then what'll sister Ellen say when she comes in? Ho, ho, Ellen's a Tartar, dear, she is that! Now you wouldn't want your poor ma to be scolded by Ellen, would you? Indeed and you wouldn't! So hush now like a good baby, and don't be always cryin'..."

Rosie stood it as long as she could, then her heart overflowed in indignant speech: "Of course she's crying in this horrible hot kitchen! Why wouldn't she? And they's flies in her mosquito-netting, too!"

Mrs. O'Brien paused in her ironing to shake her head in mournful reproach. "Why, Rosie, how you talk! Where else can I put the poor child but right here? Upstairs in Ellen's room and in my room it's just like an oven. Jarge's room, downstairs here, is cool enough, but I can't use that, for Jarge pays good money for it and besides lets Terry sleep with him. No, no, Rosie, I can't impose on Jarge."

Rosie's blue eyes snapped. "Well, why can't you put her in the front room? That's cool."

"Why, Rosie! You know very well why I can't. Ellen won't let me. When a girl's a young lady like Ellen, she's got to have a place for gintlemin callers, and how would she feel, she says, if her gintlemin friends was to smell Geraldine!"

"Smell Geraldine! Maggie O'Brien, I'd think you'd be ashamed o' yourself! Geraldine'd be all right if you changed her and washed her often enough! You can bet nobody ever smelled Jackie! It's just your own fault about Geraldine, and you know it is!"

"Rosie dear, why do you be so hard on your poor ma? I'm sure I wash her whenever I get the chance. I'm always washin' and ironin' somethin'!"

"Yes. You're always washing and ironing Ellen's things!"

"Why, Rosie, how you do be talkin'! When a girl's a young lady she's got to have a good supply of fresh skirts and clean shirt-waists. Men like to see their stenogs dressed clean and pretty."

"Aw, what do I care how men like their stenogs? All I want to say is this: If you got a baby, you ought to wash it!"

"Yes, Rosie dear, but what'd you do if you'd been like your poor ma and had had eight babies? Ah, you don't know how wearyin' it is, Rosie!"

Rosie rushed out of the kitchen, unable longer to endure the discussion. But she was back in a few moments, carrying towels and a large white basin.

"Why, Rosie dear, are you really goin' to give poor little Geraldine a nice – "

"Maggie O'Brien, if you say a single word to me I won't do a thing!" Rosie glared at her mother threateningly.

"Mercy on us, Rosie, how you talk! I won't say a word! I promise you on me oath I'll be as quiet as a mouse! You won't hear a sound out o' me, will she, baby darlint? I'll be like the deaf and dumb man at the Museum. He talks with his fingers, Rosie. You'd die laughin' to see him..."

At the cooling touch of water, little Geraldine quieted her whimpering and began to smile wanly. The sight of her neglected body made Rosie's anger blaze anew.

"Maggie O'Brien, I don't believe you've touched this baby for a week! You ought to be ashamed o' yourself! Just look at how chafed she is, and her body all over prickly heat, too!.. Where's the corn-starch?"

"Rosie dear, I'm awful sorry, but we're out o' corn-starch. I've been meanin' this two days to have you get some."

"Well, I'd like to know what I'm going to put on Geraldine!"

"Couldn't you run over to the grocery now?"

"No, I can't! It's almost time for my papers. I know what I'll do: I'll borrow Ellen's talcum."

"Oh, Rosie, Ellen wouldn't like that!"

"I don't care if she wouldn't! I guess she helps herself to other people's things. Besides, if she's so particular about her gentlemen friends, she ought to be glad to have Geraldine all powdered up with violet talc."

"Don't tell me, Rosie, that you mean to be puttin' Geraldine in the front room! Ellen'll be awful mad!"

"Let her be! When she begins to ramp around, you just *sick* her on to me! I'll be ready for her! Besides, I guess Geraldine's got some rights in this house!"

On the floor of the front room, between two chairs, Rosie made a cool little nest, protected with mosquito-netting. The tired baby sighed and turned and was asleep in two minutes.

"You poor little thing!" Rosie murmured as she stood a moment looking down at the dark circles under Geraldine's closed eyes and at the cruel prickly heat that was creeping up her neck. "You poor little thing!"

She went back slowly and thoughtfully to the kitchen. Before her mother she paused a moment, then looked up defiantly. "Ma, has Geraldine a clean dress to go out this afternoon in the baby-buggy?"

Mrs. O'Brien's face began to beam with delight. "Ah, now, do you mean to say – "

Rosie cut her off shortly. "Maggie O'Brien, if you say one word to me I'll drop the whole thing!"

Mrs. O'Brien stopped her ironing to stretch out a timid, conciliatory hand. "Rosie dear, why do you always be so sharp to your poor ma? I won't say a word, I promise I won't. Geraldine's things is at the bottom of the basket, and the moment I finish this waist of Ellen's I'll get at them."

Rosie felt a sudden pang of shame, but a foolish little pride made her keep on scolding.

"Well, I got my papers to attend to now, but see that you have those things ready by the time I get back."

"Indeed and I will!" Mrs. O'Brien declared with head-shaken emphasis.

All afternoon on her paper route Rosie thought of poor, neglected little Geraldine with her chafed body and sad, tired eyes. It wasn't her fault, poor baby, that she had come eighth in a family when every one was too busy and hard-worked to pay attention to her... But it was a shame – that's

what it was! I just tell you when there's a baby around, some one ought to take proper care of it!.. Rosie wanted dreadfully to fasten blame somewhere, and the person naturally responsible would seem to be her mother.

For some reason, though, she couldn't work up much of a case against Mrs. O'Brien. That poor soul had enough to do, and more than enough, without ever touching Geraldine. She was not, it is true, the best manager in the world, and she was dreadfully helpless in the hands of unscrupulous people like, say, her own daughter Ellen; but when all was said and done, she was fearfully hard driven, early and late, and never a day off. And yet how cheerful and uncomplaining she was! How loving and kind, too, never remembering the cross words you gave her nor the short, ill-natured answers. No matter how you had been acting, she would call you "dear" again, the moment you let her...

Moreover, even if she did not wash Geraldine as often as she should, Heaven knows it was not to save herself. Maggie O'Brien would have gone through fire and flood for the benefit of any of her children, living or dead, and Rosie knew this. No, no. The things slighted were not slighted because she was lazy and selfish, but because there were not hours in the day for her one pair of hands, willing but not very skilled, to do all there was to do in the crowded little household.

But if it was once granted that her mother was unable to give Geraldine proper care, was the child, Rosie asked herself, never to receive such care? In her heart Rosie knew the one way possible and at last forced herself to consider it. Could she take this baby and raise it as she had Jackie?.. To have Geraldine for a morning or an afternoon would be a pleasure; but all day and every day – that was another matter. Rosie knew how time-consuming it was to be a mother. She knew what it meant to look after a baby's food and its naps and its baths and its clothes. And such things were worse now than in Jackie's time. It would never do to raise another baby in the haphazard fashion Jackie had been raised. The care of babies was an exact science now. Out of curiosity Rosie and Janet had once attended a few meetings of the Little Mothers' Class at the Settlement, so Rosie knew. She sighed. Among other things, she supposed she would have to become a regular member of that class... Dear, dear, what time would be left for all those lovely vacation picnics which she had been planning for herself and Janet and Jackie?.. Jackie!.. She had forgotten: *there wasn't any Jackie now.*

Rosie stopped, expecting again to be swallowed up in that ancient grief. But it scarcely touched her. Instead, she found herself looking at Jackie with the critical eyes of an outsider. He was pretty big. Perhaps he did not need her any longer. George Riley and Danny Agin and Janet McFadden and Terry and her mother – hadn't each of them said the same thing? Rosie had wanted to make herself believe that they were all in league against her, but deep down in her heart she knew they were not and had always known it. Now at last she was ready to confess the truth: Jack did not need her any longer... And poor little Geraldine did.

Of course, though, she would never love Geraldine. All the love in her heart she had poured out upon Jackie, and there simply wasn't any left. How could there be? It was merely that, in any case, she must fill up the barren days remaining with something. Why not with Geraldine?

It would, however, be rather pleasant to see Geraldine grow plump and happy under her wise care. Ever since hot weather the poor birdie had not had half enough sleep. Rosie would not be long in remedying that. And it would surprise her much if she did not have the little chafed body well within a week...

When you take a baby to raise, it's a satisfaction to get a pretty one. Geraldine promised to be very pretty. Her hair was growing out in loose little ringlets like Rosie's own, and her eyes, too, were like Rosie's, only bluer. Perhaps, when Rosie fattened her, she would have a dimple. Rosie herself had a lovely dimple that was much admired. Let's see: was it in the right cheek or the left? Rosie made sure by smiling and feeling for it. Yes, she really hoped that Geraldine would develop a dimple. Was there anything on earth sweeter than a dimpled baby?.. The baby-buggy was a rickety old affair that had done service for Jackie and for little Tim that was gone. Rosie did wish they could afford a

nice new up-to-date go-cart. No matter, though. Having any sort of thing to push about, would give her and Janet all the excuse they needed to promenade for hours up and down Boulevard Place.

Not that Rosie was looking forward with any pleasure to her new undertaking. Heavens, no! She shook her head emphatically. Henceforth it was duty, not pleasure, to which she would devote her life. You know how it is in this world: though our hearts, alas, are breaking, we must all do our duty.

She found Geraldine refreshed and happy after her long nap. She dressed her carefully in the clean clothes that were waiting and settled her comfortably in the old carriage. Then, when they were ready to start, she turned to her mother.

"I want to tell you something, Ma: I'm going to take care of Geraldine this summer. Then maybe you won't have to work so hard."

Mrs. O'Brien laughed and cried and hugged Rosie to her bosom.

"Oh, you darlint, you darlint! What's this ye're tellin' me!.. Ah, Rosie, if I do say it, ye're the best child that ever stood in shoes! Geraldine darlint, do ye hear what sister Rosie says?"

Mrs. O'Brien paused a moment, then spoke more quietly: "And, Rosie dear, I've been sorry about this Jackie business – I have that. It's a turrrible thing when a little mother hen has only one chick, to have that chick turn out a goslin'! But take me word for it, Rosie, Geraldine'll niver disapp'int ye so. Ye'll niver take to water, will ye, baby dear?"

Rosie choked a little. "I – I guess we better be going. We got to stop for Janet."

They started off, and Mrs. O'Brien, in a fresh ecstasy of delight, called after them: "Ah, look at the blissed infant, as happy as a lamb with two mothers!"

CHAPTER IX

JANET'S AUNT KITTY

Janet McFadden, after one searching look in Rosie's face, rushed forward eagerly.

"I'm so glad to see you! Where have you been all this time?"

Rosie dimpled with pleasure. Wasn't it sweet of Janet not to refer to the coldness of their last meeting? That was Janet right straight through: always ready to be insulted on the first provocation, but just as ready, once she knew you still loved her, to let bygones be bygones.

"Well, you see, Janet, Jackie's been sick. No, not really sick, but sore. His back was all sunburnt. He'd been in swimming for the first time. You know boys always go in swimming and get sunburnt the first day. But he's all right now and I don't have to bother about him any more."

Janet blinked in surprise and started to say something when the expression on Rosie's face checked her. She paused, then exclaimed, rather fatuously: "How sweet Geraldine looks!"

"Doesn't she!" Rosie spoke enthusiastically. "Say, Janet, don't you think she's a nice baby?"

"I do indeed!" Janet wagged her head impressively. "You know yourself I always did think she was a nice baby and I never could make out why you didn't like her more."

"Janet McFadden, how you talk! Of course I like Geraldine! I love her!" Rosie bounced the baby-carriage vigorously and made direct appeal to Geraldine herself: "Doesn't sister Rosie love her own baby? Of course she does! And she's going to take care of her all summer, isn't she? because ma's too busy."

"Why, Rosie!" Janet began.

Rosie faced square about and with one look challenged Janet to show further surprise.

"Why – why, isn't that nice!" Janet murmured meekly.

"Of course it's nice and we're going to Boulevard Place every afternoon, aren't we, Geraldine? We're going there now and Janet can come with us if she wants to."

Janet wanted to, but she had to refuse. "I can't today, Rosie. I've got to help my mother. But tomorrow afternoon – will you stop for me then? I'll expect you."

In this way friendship was restored. Not having to bear the strain of an insistent questioning from Janet, its restoration was simple. Something had occurred to change Rosie's attitude in regard to her small brother and sister and upon this something she was not disposed, evidently, to be communicative. Well, Janet was not inquisitive. Besides, even if this subject of conversation was taboo, conversation was not in any danger of early extinction. When together, Janet and Rosie always talked – not perfunctorily, either, but with much emphasis and many headshakings. Goodness me, they never stopped talking! After only a few hours' separation, each had a hundred things to tell the other. By the very next day Janet had a bit of news, that was to furnish them an exciting topic for weeks to come.

When Rosie called for Janet the following afternoon, her knock was answered by Tom Sullivan, who instantly blushed a glowing crimson and with difficulty stammered: "Yes, Janet's home. Come on in."

Rosie found Janet and her mother entertaining Mrs. Sullivan, who was Dave McFadden's sister and therefore Janet's aunt.

At sight of Rosie, Mrs. Sullivan exclaimed gushingly: "If there ain't Rosie O'Brien! You sweet thing! Come right here and kiss me!"

Rosie had to submit to the caress although she knew it was intended as a slight to Janet. That was one of Aunt Kitty Sullivan's little ways. Aunt Kitty was a fat, smiling, middle-aged woman who was going through life under the delusion that her face still retained the empty prettiness of its youth.

"I was just a-saying to Janet," Aunt Kitty began, "that she ought to be making herself more attractive. As long as she goes about looking like a scarecrow, she never will have a beau! Ain't that right, Rosie?"

Aunt Kitty smiled upon Rosie that meaning smile with which one conscious beauty appeals to another. Rosie did not respond to it. From the bottom of her heart she despised Aunt Kitty for the persistence with which she tormented Janet. When Rosie came in her tirade must have been going on for some time, for Janet looked tense and angry and her mother badly flustered.

Mrs. McFadden, hard-worked and worn and shabby, could not openly resent her sister-in-law's little pleasantries, for Kitty Sullivan was the prosperous member of the family. The chance that had given her a sober, frugal, industrious husband had also given her a certain moral superiority over all women whose husbands were not sober or frugal or industrious. Mrs. McFadden did not question this superiority; she accepted it humbly. Far be it from her, poor drudge that she was, to dispute the words of a woman who could afford good clothes and a weekly ticket to the matinée. So all she said now in Janet's defence was:

"Kitty, I wish you wouldn't be putting such notions into Janet's head. She's too young to have beaux."

"Too young!" scoffed Mrs. Sullivan. "I guess I begun havin' beaux when I was a good deal younger than Janet is now! Why, nowadays a girl can't begin too young havin' beaux, or the first thing she knows she's an old maid! Ain't that right, Rosie?"

Rosie turned her head away, mumbling some unintelligible answer. Tom, blushing until his freckles were all hidden, came to her rescue.

"Aw, now, Ma, why can't you let up on Janet? She ain't done nuthin' to you!"

Mrs. Sullivan looked at her son reprovingly. "Tom Sullivan, you just mind your own business! What I'm saying is for Janet's own good. And I must say, Mary McFadden, it's your fault, too. You ought to be dressing Janet better now that she's getting big."

Mrs. McFadden sighed apologetically. "I'm sure I dress her as well as I can, Kitty."

"Well, then, all I got to say is you must be a mighty poor manager, with Dave making good money and you yourself working every day!" As she finished, Mrs. Sullivan smiled and dimpled with all the malicious triumph of a precocious child.

Rosie felt shamed and troubled. To Mrs. Sullivan's taunt there was one answer that everybody present knew, but that neither Mary McFadden nor Janet would ever give, and that Rosie, as an outsider, could not give. But even so, Mrs. Sullivan was not to go unanswered. Tom, blushing with mortification, jumped to his feet.

"Ma, you're the limit! You ought to be ashamed o' yourself! Uncle Dave makes good money, does he? Yes, and he boozes every cent of it, and Aunt Mary here has got to work like a nigger to pay the rent and keep herself and Janet, and you know it, too."

"Tom Sullivan, you shut up!" Mrs. Sullivan's voice rose to an angry scream. "How dare you interrupt me! You deserve a good thrashing, you do, and you're goin' to get it, too, as soon as your father comes home!.. Dave boozes, does he? Well, all I got to say is this: he never boozed before he got married, and if he boozes now it's a mighty queer thing!"

Rosie stood up to go. "Say, Janet, you promised to come with me this afternoon. Get your hat."

"Yes," advised Mrs. Sullivan; "put on that old black sailor hat that makes you look like a guy. Mary McFadden, if I had a girl I wouldn't let her out on the street in a hat like that!"

Rosie and Janet started off and Tom called after them: "Wait a minute! I'll come, too!"

"No, you don't!" his mother ordered. "You stay right where you are! You don't get out o' my sight till I hand you over to your dad!"

Once safe on the street, Rosie put a sympathetic arm about Janet's shoulder. "Even if she is your aunt, Janet, I think she's low-down and I hate her!"

"Pooh!" Janet tossed her head in fine scorn. "In my opinion she ain't worth hating! She ain't nuthin'! I consider her beneath my contempt! The truth is, Rosie, I don't mind her buzzin' around any more than I do a fly! She'd die if she didn't talk; so I say let her talk. If she couldn't she'd probably do something worse. My mother feels the same way. We get tired of her sometimes, but we stand her because she's my dad's own sister... Of course, though, some of the things she says is perfectly true. I ain't pretty. You are, Rosie, but I ain't and I know it, and that's all there is about it."

Janet spread out her hands in simple candour and glanced at her friend. Then, involuntarily, she gave a little sigh. It was not a sigh of envy. She really did accept as a matter of fact that she herself was not pretty and that Rosie was. Where Rosie was plump and rounded and graceful, Janet knew that she was flat and long and lanky. Her arms were long, her fingers were long, her face was long. Her dark hair, too, was long, but with nothing in texture or colour to recommend it. She wore it pulled straight from her forehead and hanging behind in two stiff plaits.

With her old black hat, her colourless face, her faded clothes, she gave the impression of a very shabby, serious little person. And she was both. Rosie, on the other hand, though as poorly dressed, seemed anything but shabby and serious, for she was all life and colour, like some little roadside flower, which, in spite of dusty leaves, raises aloft a bright, fresh bloom.

Janet might bravely dismiss her aunt with a wave of the hand, but Rosie insisted upon repeating herself.

"I don't care what you say, Janet, I think she's low-down the way she talks to you and your mother! Now Tom's nice. That was fine the way he spoke up. You don't think his father'll lick him, do you?"

"Uncle Matt?" Janet laughed. "Nev-er! Uncle Matt's just crazy about Tom. They're like two kids when they're together. And that reminds me, Rosie – goodness me, I was forgetting all about it!" Janet paused to give full flavour to her bit of news. "What Tom came over for this afternoon was to tell me that Uncle Matt has promised to give him and me tickets for the Traction Boys' Picnic – you know it's coming in two weeks now – and Tom says he's going to try to beg another ticket for you!"

"Is he really, Janet? Now isn't he just too kind!"

"Kind? I should say he is! He's bashful, of course, and people laugh at him because he's got red hair, but he's just as generous as he can be. You remember last year I went with him, too. Why, do you know, last year his father had six customers who bought their tickets and then turned right around and said: 'But we can't go, so you just give these tickets to some one who can.' Uncle Matt had enough tickets for the whole family and two more besides. He sold those two and give us all ice-cream sodas on them."

"Did he really, Janet! That just proves what I always say: in some ways I'd much rather have my father be a conductor than a motorman. A motorman never gets a chance at a ticket. I'm glad Jarge Riley's a conductor. I bet he sells a good many, don't you?"

"Of course he will, Rosie! I hadn't thought of Jarge. If a customer gives Jarge back a ticket, of course he'll pass it on to you – I know he will. Gee, Rosie, you're lucky to have a fella like Jarge Riley boarding with you. He sure is a dandy."

To this last Rosie agreed readily enough but on the priority of her claim to any tickets she set Janet right. "If he gets only a couple, he'll give Ellen first chance."

Janet sighed. "Say, Rosie, is he still dead gone on Ellen?"

Rosie sighed, too, and nodded. "Ain't it funny with a fella that's got so much sense about other things?"

Janet sighed again. "I don't like to say anything against Ellen, because she's your sister, but, as you say yourself, it certainly is funny."

CHAPTER X

ROSIE RECEIVES AN INVITATION

Rosie did not see George that night, but she brought up the subject next day at dinner. It was Sunday, so the whole family was assembled.

"Are you selling many tickets, Jarge?"

"Yes, a good many, and one of my customers give me back two."

"Oh, Jarge, did he really? What are you going to do with them?"

George glanced timidly in the direction of Ellen. It was plain at once what he wanted to do with them. It was also plain that Ellen was not going to give him much encouragement. To get the support of the family, George made his invitation public. "I was hoping that Ellen would like to go with me."

Ellen glanced up languidly. "Thanks, Mr. Riley, but I don't see how I can."

George, swallowing hard, forced out the question: "Why not?"

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