

Butler Ellis Parker

Red Head and Whistle Breeches



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Содержание

I	5
II	8
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	9

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Red Head and Whistle Breeches

It is believed that this little story by a master story teller, may, through its human interest and homely suggestion, exert a wholesome influence and warrant its publication in permanent form.

The Publishers.

I

When Tim Murphy let his enthusiasm get the better of his judgment and, in the excitement of that disastrous night, joined the front rank of the strikers in a general mix-up and cracked the head of a deputy sheriff, the result was what he might have expected – two years in the penitentiary. That was all right. The peace of the commonwealth must be preserved, and that is why laws and penitentiaries exist, but it sometimes goes hard with the mothers and wives. That is also to be expected, and the boy should have thought of it before he crowded to the front of the angry mob or struck the deputy.

It went very hard with the boy's mother and wife. It went hard with his old man, too. It is a cruel thing to have one's only boy in the penitentiary, even if one is only a village hod carrier.

Maggie Murphy, the boy's wife, did not suffer for food or shelter after the boy went to wear stripes, for old Mike had a handy little roll in the bank and a shanty of his own, and he took Maggie into his home and made a daughter of her; but the girl grew thin and had no spirits. She cried a good part of the time, quite as if Tim had been a law abiding citizen, instead of a law breaking rowdy. Then the baby came, and after that she cried more than ever.

As for the boy's mother, it was to be expected that she would weep also. Mothers have a way of weeping over the son they love,

even if he has gone wrong. It is not logical, but it is a fact. It is one of the grand facts of human life.

When Maggie's baby came the boy's mother could stand it no longer. It had been urged – and there was some evidence to support it – that the boy had acted in self-defense. He said so himself, but he admitted he had been in the front rank. The strikers had carried things with a high hand all along, and the jury had decided against him.

Night and day the boy's mother begged the old man to try for a pardon, but Mike knew it was not worth a trial. The Governor was an old man and a strong man, and not one to forgive an injury done to the State or to himself. He had never been known to forget a wrong, or to leave a debt unpaid.

He was a just man, as the ancient Jews were just. It was this that had made him Governor; his righteousness and fearlessness were greater than cliques and bosses.

Old Mrs. Murphy, however, was only a woman, and the boy was her boy, and she pardoned him. She knew he was innocent, for he was her boy. Mike refused a thousand times to ask the Governor for a pardon, but as Mrs. Murphy was the boy's mother and had a valiant tongue, the old man changed his mind. One day he put on his old silk hat, and with Father Maurice, the good gray priest, went up to the capital.

A strange pair they were to sit in the Governor's richly furnished reception room – Mike with his smoothly shaven face, red as the sunset, his snowy eye brows, his white flecked red hair,

and the shiny black of his baggy Sunday suit; Father Maurice with his long gray beard that had been his before the days of the smoothly shaven priests, his kindly eyes, and the jolly rotundity of his well fed stomach. The father's gentle heart was hopeful, but Mike sat sadly with his eyes on the toe of his boot, for he knew the errand was folly; not alone because the Governor had never pardoned a condemned man, but because it was he, Mike Murphy, who came.

He remembered an incident of his boyhood, and he frowned as he recalled it. Think of it! He, Mike Murphy, had bullied the Governor – had drubbed him and chased him and worried the life out of him. That was why he had told the old woman it was no use to try it.

Who was he to come asking pardons when, years ago, he had done his best to make life miserable for the quaking schoolboy who was now the stern faced Governor – the Governor who never forgot or forgave, or left a debt unpaid?

II

When the Governor entered the reception room he came in unexpectedly, as Father Maurice was leaning forward with one of Mike's red hands clasped in his two white ones. Mike was wiping his eyes with his coat sleeve.

The Governor paused in the doorway and coughed. His visitors started in surprise, and then arose.

It was Father Maurice who stated their errand, his seamed face turned upward to the serious eyes of the Governor; and as he proceeded, choosing his quaint Frenchified English carefully, the Governor's face became grave. He motioned them to their chairs.

He was a gray haired man, and his face was the face of a nobleman. Clear, gray eyes were set deep under his brows, and his mouth was a straight line of uncompromising honesty. He sat with one knee thrown over the other. With one hand he fingered a pen on the desk at his side; the other he ran again and again through the hair that stood in masses on his head. His face was long, and the cheekbones protruded. His nose was power, and his chin was resistance.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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