



THE STORY

CHAPTER I.—Prudence Schuyler comes from New York to Prosperity Farm, inherited from her uncle, to make a new life for herself and her brother, David, whose health has been broken by tragedy.

CHAPTER II.—The second day on her farm Prue adventures into the barn loft after eggs. She slips on the hay and falls to the ground—would have been badly hurt had not strong young arms been there to catch her. The arms are those of Rodney Gerard, rich young man, who lives at High Ledges on the neighboring farm. There is at once a mutual attraction between the two. Rod decides to stay at his home throughout the fall and winter, "looking after the timber." But Prudence decides to maintain a cool attitude toward him. She suspects men since her sister's husband ran away with her brother's wife.

CHAPTER III.—Len Calloway, a rival of Rod Gerard, tries to buy the timber off Prue's land, but she dislikes his conceited attitude and contracts with Rod to dispose of the trees. On the evening Prue is expecting David from New York she is visited by Mrs. Walter Gerard and her thirteen-year-old daughter, Jean. They are hateful, curious persons and leave Prue alone.

CHAPTER IV.—A few days later Prudence comes in contact with them again when she accompanies Rod to his place. A clown comes, advertising a circus in a nearby town. Prue promises to accompany Rod and Jean to the circus.

CHAPTER V

Jean Gerard regarded the desk in the gun room at High Ledges with pursed lips and angry eyes.

"Gee, but you make me mad!"

She addressed the piece of furniture as if it were maliciously responsible for her frustration. She wriggled a hairpin in the loch of the top drawer. Then with teeth set, she grasped the handles, jerked with all her strength. The drawer came out with a suddenness which sent her sprawling and scattered three letters from the desk onto the floor.

Ruefully she rubbed the back of her head. She knelt beside the drawer and eagerly examined its contents. There were several photographs of a pretty girl. One showed her in bouffant tulle on the back of a horse. Jean's eyes dilated.

"Circus rider!" she crooned. "Goody, I'll see one like her tomorrow." She turned the photograph over. On the back was scrawled:

"Miraculous escape. From calico and Calloway to liberty and lo— Fondly, Milly."

"She's a cutie all right." Jean gulped as a shadow fell across the photograph.

"Where's your uncle?"

The photograph fell from her hand and lay with piquant, smiling face upward as Jean stared at the scowling man who loomed over her.

"I—I—don't know. Shall I try to find him, Mr. Calloway?"

Len Calloway removed his glance from the pictures and letters on the floor long enough to glare at her.

"Tell him I want to talk with him. Scram!"

Frightened at the grayness of his face, Jean fled. She scurried through the different rooms. Called. No answer. She had better go back and tell Mr. Calloway.

As she entered the gun room, one of the long French windows banged.

"He's gone. I guess that's that."

She dropped to her knees beside the drawer. Better put it back before anyone saw it. She scrambled up the contents. Where was the picture of the cutie circus rider? Gone. Had Mr. Calloway taken it? Why should he want it? Would her uncle be mad with her for having touched the desk?

"I'd better get a move on."

She hurriedly replaced the drawer, picked up the letters. Only two! There had been three when they fell. Had Mr. Calloway snatched one? What would he do with it? "Gee, have I started something?" she thought.

In the library after dinner, Rodney Gerard glanced at Jean speculatively as she bent demurely over a book. Her absorption was out of character. She was too quiet. She had been prying with rather frightening results; he recognized the symptoms.

He glanced about the room as he refilled his pipe. Good room. Big, yet not too full of things, mellow, dignified. Not too bad a place in which to spend part of a winter. He glanced at his sister-in-law knitting rapidly in the light of one of the softly shaded lamps. Not so restful. He was in for battle. He'd better go to it.

Mrs. Walter Gerard looked up. She laid down her knitting.

"I have planned to close the house on Thursday, if that suits you, Rodney. The days are getting so short."

"You needn't bother to do that, Annie. I shall remain here for part of the winter. I have decided to thin about a thousand acres of woodland and it will require my personal oversight. You and Jean toddle along to New York as you planned."

MADEMOISELLE MILLEE

"Why, there's my cutie!"

Gerard looked at her sharply as she bit off the next word.

"What do you mean, K. K.? You—"

"Buy the kid a balloon! Buy the kid a balloon! Say, listen! What's a circus to a kid without a balloon?"

The hatless man with an unkempt mane of black hair and a flock of colored balloons straining at their leashes, blocked the way. Jean's eyes were like dancing stars.

"May I have one, Uncle Rod?"

"Sure. Choose the color. Have one, Prue?"

"Of course. I want that fat green one which looks as if it were about to burst from its own importance."

What fun she was! How friendly she had been on the drive over. Had she buried the hatchet she seemed always to have up her sleeve for him? She was so alive mentally and physically. Life never could get one by the throat if one had a girl like her with whom to travel through the years, Rodney thought.

"It's coming! The parade's coming!" Prudence gripped Gerard's arm. "Hear that bugle, Jean?"

Rodney pushed Jean in front of him. Crushed his arm against his side to keep Prue's hand there. Far down the street was a restless sea of waving plumes, shining helmets, brilliant flags. Music bellowed forward. Snare drums. Drums. Cornets. Clarinets. He said to Prudence:

"The thrill of the Big Top. It's got me. I'm as excited as any kid in the crowd."

The girl's brilliant eyes met his. "It's got me, too. I'm shaking with excitement. Here they come! I wonder if we'll see Chicot."

Music nearer now. A band in brilliant red coats, tall shakos on their heads, passed playing, "Stars and Stripes Forever." Countless feet tapping the rhythm. Countless throats humming the tune.

Everywhere the glitter of rhinestones among sequins. Everyone gay.



Elephants Are Coming! Hold Your Horses!

Everyone smiling. The parade was hitting on all cylinders.

"El-e-phants are coming! Hold your horses!"

A enormous elephant led the herd, the scarlet coated man on his head seemed like a midget, the keepers strutting at his side mere pygmies.

Gerard felt Jean's fingers tighten in his, heard her quick breath of relief as the unwieldy beast passed. Prudence caught her free hand and smiled. Had she sensed the child's fear?

A monkey-faced clown commenced to beat up a gigantic police-clown. Jean wailed:

"Chicot isn't there. He said he'd wink at me." Her eyes were deep wells of disappointment. Gerard squeezed the thin fingers sympathetically.

"Take it easy, K. K. He'll come. There he is now! See him? See him?" He caught her under the arms and lifted her for an instant. "He's on that funny little bicycle. See him?"

She nodded excited assent. He set on her feet. "See how the big fat-faced clown on the motorcycle behind him keeps butting into his hind wheel? Chicot has a balloon. A red balloon like yours, K. K. He'll see you in a minute."

Prudence laughed up at him. "Chicot must have a magic charm for attracting hearts. Jean is positively tearful over him, and I warmed to him at once."

"If he has touched your shellacked heart, I'll offer him a fortune for it—"

"You are missing the comedy," Prue reminded crisply.

As Chicot came abreast of Jean, his balloon popped. With heart-rending sobs he shook the bit of rubber toward the girl.

"Well of all people! If here isn't the new lumber firm of Schuyler and Gerard eating popcorn and watching the elephants!"

Calloway's taunting voice at his shoulder sent the blood in Rodney

Gerard's body rushing to his ears in blinding, black anger. His furious eyes met the mocking eyes on a level with his.

"Shut up, Calloway! You—"

"Take mine, Chicot! Take mine!"

Jean's excited voice cut into her uncle's. She darted forward. Rodney

grabbed for her. Missed. The motorcycle clown, looking back in a parting wisecrack, shot forward at full speed.

The crowd shrieked. Chicot caught the girl. Flung her back with all his force. The panic-stricken cyclist crashed into him.

Acrons after, it seemed to Rodney Gerard, the physician, bending over Jean's limp figure on the black haircloth sofa in a nearby house, straightened.

"She's coming out of it all right. Prolonged faint from shock. Better get her home as soon as she can sit up."

Prudence whispered:

"Don't look so agonized, Rodney. See, her eyelids are quivering."

"I'm all shot to pieces over this. I—I didn't know how much I cared for the Kurious—" Gerard choked on the words.

Across the room on the floor where they had dropped him lay the clown, Rodney Gerard bent over the twisted body, laid his hand on the dirt-streaked shoulder.

"You saved her, Chicot. Can you hear? You—"

"Let me in! Where's Grandpop? Let me in!"

A girl, in the cotton velvets and plumed hat of a circus rider on parade, burst into the room. Patches of rouge stood out like fever spots on her colorless face. Her black eyes were distended with fright. With a shriek she flung herself to her knees beside Chicot, put her arms under the old clown's shoulders, and lifted him until his head rested against her breast.

"I'm not going to be with my mother, so that's that."

"Getting back to normal fast, aren't you, K. K.?"

"Course I am, Uncle Rod. Let me stay with Miss Prue today, that's a peach. I'll wait on Mr. David. I love him."

"You should be with your mother, dear."

"I'm not going to be with my mother, so that's that."

"Getting back to normal fast, aren't you, K. K.?"

"No. I will go on to High Ledges. I won't leave Jean until I see her with her mother."

Jean opened her eyes and lifted her head from Prudence's shoulder.

"I'm not going home until Mother has gone. There's nothing the matter with me except that I feel kind of dizzy; it helps steady things to keep my eyes closed. You won't mind if I stay with Miss Prue for a while, will you, Uncle Rod?"

"You should be with your mother, dear."

"I'll drop you at your gate," he proposed curtly.

"No. I will go on to High Ledges. I won't leave Jean until I see her with her mother."

"I'll drop you at your gate," he proposed curtly.

"All right, Uncle Rod." She kissed him, and with a little curtsy said good-night to Armstrong. The two men rose and waited until she had left the room. Then the forester dropped a question.

"Has this man Calloway by any chance a sentimental interest in your neighbor?"

"He'd better not have."

"Why the growl?"

Rodney Gerard rose impetuously and stood back to the fire. "Here are my cards face up on the table. I'm mad about Prudence Schuyler. I will marry her if I have to move the world to do it. Get that straight?"

"I'll say I get it straight. I can read a 'No Trespassing' sign when I see one, believe me. Does the lady with the spangled eyes realize that she is posted, Rod?"

"It's no joke to me, Jim. I guess the old song's right, 'Love has a meaning all its own'—to different people. Mine is the one-woman brand. The first time I met Prue—I can't explain it to you, you will think I've gone goofy—I felt as if—as if the universe had been made over and I was reborn—with an ambition to grab the world by the tail and a determination to make the girl love me."

"Raring to go off the deep end, aren't you? Um, Pretty serious jam you're in, Roddy."

"It darn well is."

Armstrong laid his hand on Gerard's shoulder. His eyes were warm with affection.

"Buck up! I don't know how any girl could resist you. You generally get what you want. To return to our muttons. Contracts made to sell your lumber?"

"Not a contract. I have been so, what Si Puffer calls hot up, with this fight with Calloway that I hadn't thought where I would dispose of it."

"You'd better get busy on that end. I'll give you a list of going concerns; then you'd better hustle after business. Do we start our investigation of the timber tracts tomorrow?"

"Yes." Gerard glanced at the clock.

"You'll excuse me, Jim, if I break away?"

"Something important I've got to do tonight. To return to our muttons. Contracts made to sell your lumber?"

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Jim. Gorry-me, Rod, I'm plumb discouraged. Don't know we're goin' to need a forester."

"Why not? What has happened?"

"Now don't fly off the handle like that just because I hint we're in for trouble. Whatta mean is, I've been all over the village tryin' to hire men to cut for us tomorrow. They all had some fool excuse. I cornered one of 'em an' jest squeezed it out of him that Len Calloway had let it be known that none of them would get more work from him—ever—if they hired out to you. He's got 'em scared. He pointed out that you might start out big, Rod, but you wouldn't stick; that this was just a fad of yours, an' where would they be when you quit?"

"I Quit!" Gerard's blue eyes were black. "Go back and tell those men that there isn't room in this town for Len Calloway and me and that I am staying."

(Continued Next Week.)

her brother's health had broken down. Immediately the aforementioned Cal loway—"Hate him pretty much, don't you, Rod?"

"It isn't a chuckling matter, Jim. Si Puffer, who worked for the new owner's uncle and is a sort of handy man for her, told her not to let Len cut for her. I decided that I would cut for her and myself—that's when I sent for you. Calloway was furious as well, we've had trouble over another matter."

"Is Miss Schuyler—young?" Armstrong quizzed, as he lighted his pipe.

"Yes, and so pretty," Jean chirped eagerly. "Mother Puffer says that her eyes are like brown pansies and that her voice would coax the birds off the bushes. When she laughs her eyes are all gold spangles."

"K. K., you've been so quiet I had forgotten you were here. It's time you went upstairs. Toddle along now like a good girl."

"All right, Uncle Rod." She kissed him, and with a little curtsy said good-night to Armstrong. The two men rose and waited until she had left the room. Then the forester dropped a question.

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