

THE BRASS TACKS OF ADVENTURE

In Which Romance Lurks Around the Corner

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SUNSHINE WAS IN THE ROOM when Carrie awoke. Silently the bed exploded. A white flare of flying sheets went one way; Carrie herself went fluttering the other until she brought up against the window-sill; and there she stood, with the fresh morning air coming through her night-dress, leaning on the sill and looking and looking at the yard across the street. It was there, sure enough, with the grass all pale with dew in the shadows, all green and flashing in the sun. But it was only the yard across the street. It was not a bit different, after all. And:

"Oh, dear!" the little girl said to herself, "I wish it was real!" And again, as if Jim had been there: "Say, Jim, I do wish it was real."

It was only yesterday afternoon that she first saw Jim. She was halfway up one of the fancy porch-posts, and he came tearing across the road like a house-fire, chasing something very small and gray and lively, which he caught just as it was going under the porch. He stopped its squeaking with a stick and held it up by the tail.

"That's a mouse," he said grinning. "Was you scared?"

Carrie came down from the post with a bang and took the warm little body in her hand, saying that she was n't afraid, and that it was a rat, any way, not a mouse. But Jim was sure it was a mouse, and said he was going to bury it in his cemetery over in the yard; so Carrie went across the street with him to hold the funeral. She liked him right away; he had been playing escape from Libby Prison under his grandfather's porch, and he was the dirtiest little boy she had ever seen.

The cemetery was a black piece of ground under a thick-leaved little cherry-tree, where it was so dark that nothing would grow. Jim was minister and Carrie stood up and made believe sing *The Palms*, and they put apple-leaves and a big red tiger-lily on the grave. And all the rest of the afternoon he was showing her the things he had in the yard, and they played —

"Carrie-ee!"

Her mother's voice from the foot of the stairs brought her sharply out of her window-musings, and the little girl had to come back to the dreariness of dressing, and after that to breakfast and dish-washing. But the first instant she could slip away she went pelting over into that wonderful yard. Jim was not there. She found the little hidden grave just as they had left it, except that the leaves were curling at the edges and the tiger-lily was all wilted and bloody-looking. There was no fun in standing there looking at it, so she went on to the circus-ground Jim had shown her, where there were two big clothes-posts all ready for the tent and trapeze. Over by the high brick wall, Jim said he had laid out a city. The Public Gardens were all done, with a fountain that had real water in it and wooden fish with tin fins. Then, in the open ground behind there were great ranches and herds of wild steers and cowboys; and off the other way, toward the fence, were woods for hunting in; two clumps of snowball-bushes, some artichokes and thickets of high-grown asparagus.

Carrie looked at the water-logged little fish, and at the park lawns where new grass was coming up in patches like a funny green rash on the ground, and tried hard to believe in them. When Jim was there it was all real; she could make out the little city all around her with its long, straight streets and its speeding trolley-cars — elevators, too, in all the houses, Jim said. But now she knew it was a play city, only an ordinary dooryard like her own, and so she wanted Jim.

She heard him presently as he came clumping down the brick walk. He turned the corner quickly and leaned against the house and never saw her.

"Say, Jim!" she called gaily; then saw he was crying, and stopped.

"Wha-aw-aw?" he wailed, his head still against the wall.

"Say, what — what's the matter?"

"They're a-playin' circus," he got out, turning half-choked.

"An' I can't. Not even hold up the tent. Said I was a fresh kid. An' I got a rock, an' Pete Morrissey he basted me. Wif his fist! An' — Ow-wow —"

"Huh!" said Carrie, coming closer. "Bawlin' over playin' circus! Before I'd cry over that! Cry-baby! Say, Cry-baby!"

Jim whirled and faced her, his fists doubled up, water running off his round, dirty chin. He was more ashamed of crying before her than before any ordinary girl. Her face was longish and not very white; her nose was long; her hair was red-brown, and it hung down her back in a thick, solid pig-tail with an elastic at the end, so that she had no ribbons to bother with. She looked that same way all over; like a climbing-around kind of girl who would n't cry. So Jim felt cold inside, as if his tears were freezing up, and stopped.

"I ain't no cry-baby," he shouted.

"All right," said Carrie. "Now, let's us play sumpt'n'!"

"Let's play circus."

"I don't want to play circus. I want to play havin' adventures — an' now you're a-goin' to bawl."

That brought on a quarrel; but when they had made it up Jim said he would play adventures. Carrie didn't know what kind she wanted — just adventures.

"What's out there?" she asked suddenly, pointing.

"That's — well, I tell you," Jim said in a low voice, kicking one toe on the ground. "I — I don't go out there much. There's jungles an' — snakes. You see out beyond the ocean, where they's them steps up? Well, out there I play it's all foreign."

"Jungles?" said Carrie, skipping. "Oh, Goody! Come on, let's get into 'em."

They did, first crossing the ocean in the no-wheeled body of an express-wagon that lay at the top of the little bank. It was a stormy passage, and they found themselves shipwrecked at last on an unknown shore. Then, they prowled in between the grape trellis and the high brick wall, through a rank, wild growth of tomato-vines and hollyhocks and high-standing corn. Jim was afraid of the place; but he crawled ahead all the same, and showed Carrie the very hollow between the corn-stalks where he had seen the snake. When at last they came to the stable, the girl jumped to her feet and stood looking up at the garden-wall beside them.



Carrie looked at him dumbly, pitying him. She felt she ought to have made him sit down before