

Gene Byrnes Says:—"It's a Great Life If You Don't Weaken."



The Big Hearted Miser

By HAZEL SMITH

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A neatly apparelled girl walked slowly and sadly down a shady street in Creston. Ahead of her a wizened, bent old man was picking his careful way where the pavement was most shaded, for the sun was blistering hot. As the old man turned the corner the wind caught him like a cyclone. It sent his old-fashioned high hat rolling and tumbling behind him.

Immediately a crowd ofurchins playing in a vacant lot just off the street made a dive for the frayed, discolored headgear.

"Get it! Get it!" shouted jubilant voices. "Old Wilson's hat. Put it on the post and peg at it!"

"Boys, boys," chided the young lady, throwing up her veil and showing a face tear-stained but resolute enough even in its rare prettiness to daunt the lads. She managed to catch hold of a big boy who had secured the hat. "Give it to me," she said firmly. "The old gentleman is waiting for it."

"Humph, him!" cried the lad, contemptuously. "Why, he's only old Miser Wilson. Take it, though—just because you're so pretty, and are going to be our teacher."

The girl smiled brightly and went up to the old man.

"The wind blew your hat away," she said.

"And you rescued it from those young tormentors," broke in the old man sharply. "I saw it all, I suppose," and his keen eyes sparkled, and he chuckled, "they told you who I was."

"Yes—Mr. Wilson."

"And the old miser? Hey, did they say that? You don't want to go around doing favors for old misers, do you, young lady?"

"Why, if they deserve it, surely."

"You're the right sort, Miss Nellie Merrill," suddenly spoke out the old fellow. "You see, I know you. You are the young lady they sent for yesterday to teach the new school here. They pointed you out to me as you went to see the school trustees this morning. You'll make a good teacher, I can see that, and I'm going to tell the trustees so."

"They have given me my expenses and a trifle more for coming down here," said Nellie. "They were a little premature, you see. Under the law they cannot begin school until there are 50 possible scholars between the ages of six and eighteen in the district."

"I suppose you've just been studying yourself half to death to qualify for the wretched \$20 a month and board you were to get here?" he inquired with manifest interest.

"I am an orphan, and have no family dependence," said Nellie. "I feel pretty bad at missing this splendid position."

"Ar orphan, eh?" repeated old Gabriel thoughtfully. "So is my boy—that is, my adopted son, Sidney. He's away at college now, studying to be a lawyer. If I'm miserly, it's for him, dear boy. So, Miss," and the old man seemed stirred by a strong and sudden resolution, "you were to board with Miss Briggs, if everything went smooth, weren't you?"

"Why, yes, I believe that is the name of the lady."

"Well, I'm going to take you there now."

It was the next afternoon when old Gabriel appeared. He was sprightly and smiling.

"I guess there must be a genuine, warm spot somewhere in this hard old heart of mine," he said, "for old Wilson, the miser, feels about as happy as you will when I tell you that the full fifty quota of scholars has been provided for."

"Oh, Mr. Wilson, can it be true?" cried Nellie joyfully.

"Yes, you can start in tomorrow, and I hope you drive some respectability into that unruly mob of boys who wanted to peg my old hat. My hat—think of it. In the family since the 40's, Miss Merrill!"

"How did you ever influence the school trustees?" inquired Nellie.

"Just moved a squatter's family with eight children over the township line into a vacant house I own inside the school district," explained old Gabriel with a chuckle of satisfaction and pride.

Life became a dream of beauty to Nellie in the lovely little village. At the end of the term, the first exhibition day, Mr. Wilson marched proudly into the place with his adopted son, just home from college.

The young man decided that it was a relief to sit for two hours and take in the simple, yet interesting exercises of the graduation day of half a dozen proud children into class two. It charmed him to note the rare patience and kindness of the young girl fighting her first battle in the arena of life for her daily bread.

All this young Sidney told his adopted father.

The sly old man heard of skating and coasting parties after that. The day before the new term began he called Sidney to him.

"See here, young man," he observed. "I never find Nellie at home when I call now. I never find you at home at all. As a lonely old man, let me suggest that it would be a fine thing to get her into the family."

"Why," smiled Sidney, broadly and happily, "what a coincidence! I suggested the same thing to Nellie only last evening!"

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