

MICHAEL O'HALLORAN

By Gene Stratton-Porter

SYNOPSIS.
Michael O'Halloran, an orphaned newsboy, finds a little girl who is blind and deaf and who is the daughter of a man who has been killed. He takes her home and she stays with him until she is old enough to go to school.

Mickey took both the small bony hands reaching for him. He was so frightened with their hot, tremulous clutch that he tried to pull away, dragging the tiny figure half to light and bringing from it means of pain.

"Oh, my back! Oh, you're hurting me! Oh, don't leave me! Oh, boy, oh, dear boy, please don't leave me!"

When she said "Oh dear boy" Mickey heard the voice of his mother in an hourly phrase. He crept closer, enduring the touch of the grimy claws.

"My name's Mickey," he said.

"What's yours?"

"Peaches," she answered. "Peaches, when I'm good. Crippled brat, when I'm bad."

"Believe if you had your chance you could look the peaches," said Mickey, "but what were you bad for?"

"So's she'd hit me," answered Peaches.

"But if me just pulling a little hurt you so, what happened when she hit you?" asked Mickey.

"Like knives stuck into me," said Peaches.

"Then what did you be bad for?" marveled Mickey.

"Didn't you ever get so tired of one thing you'd take something that hurt just for a change?"

"My eye!" said Mickey. "I don't know one fellow who'd do that, Peaches."

"Mickey, hide me. Oh, hide me! Don't let them 'get me!' she begged.

"Why, kid, you're crazy," said Mickey. "Now, lemme tell you, where they'll take you looks like a nice place. Honest it does. I've seen lots of them. You get a clean, soft bed all by yourself, three big, hot meals a day, things to read, things to play with. Honest, Peaches, you do! I wouldn't tell you if it wasn't so. If I'll stay with you till they come, see how nice it is, will you be good and go?"

She burrowed in the covers, screaming again.

"You're scared past all reason," said Mickey. "You don't know anything. But maybe the orphings homes ain't so good as they look. If they are, why was mother frightened silly about them getting me? Always she said she just had to live until I got so big they wouldn't 'get' me. And I kept them from getting me by doing what she told me. Wonder if I could keep them from getting you? There's nothing of you. If I could move you there I bet I could feed you more than your granny did. While I know I can't keep you there, you could have my bed, a window to look from, and clean clothes." Mickey was thinking aloud. "Having you to come home to would be lots nicer than nothing. You'd hear your dog all hollow, 'cause you can talk. If I could get you there I believe I could be making it. Yes, I believe I could do a lot better than this, and I believe I'd like you, Peaches; you are such a game little kid."

"She could lift me with one hand," she panted. "Oh, Mickey, take me, hurry!"

"I can't see if I can manage you," said Mickey. "Have you got to be such a particular way?"

"Mickey, ain't you got folks that beat you?" she asked.

"I ain't got folks now," said Mickey, "and they didn't beat me when I had them. I'm all for myself—and if you say I guess from now on I'm for you. Want to go?"

Her arms wound tightly around his neck. Her hot little face pressed against his.

"Put one arm 'cross my shoulders and the other round my legs," she said.

"I'll get to go down a lot of stairs; it's miles and miles," said Mickey. "And I ain't got but 5 cents. I spent it all for grub. Peaches, are you hungry?"

"No!" she said stoutly. "Mickey, hurry!"

"But honest, I can't carry you all that way. I would if I could, Peaches; honest I would."

"Oh, Mickey, dear Mickey, hurry!" she begged.

"Get down and cover up till I think," he ordered. "Say, you look here! If I tackle this job do you want a change had enough to be meat for me?"

"Just a little bit, maybe," said Peaches.

"But I won't hit you," explained Mickey.

"You can if you want to," she said. "I won't cry. Give me a good crack now an' see if I do."

"You make me sick at my stomach," said Mickey. "Lord, kid! Snuggle down till I see. I'm going to get you there some way."

Mickey went back to the room where she helped deliver the clothes basket. "How much can you earn the rest of the night?" he asked the woman.

"Nebby 10 cents," she said.

"Well, if you will loan me that basket and 10 cents, and come with me an hour, there's that back and just a dollar in it for you, lady," he offered.

She turned from him with a sneering laugh.

"Honest, lady," said Mickey. "This is how it is: That crying got me so I went 'Anthony Comstockin'. There's a kid with a lame back all alone up there, half starved and scared fighting wild. We could put her in that basket—she's just a handful—and take her to a place she wants to go. We could ride most of the way on the cars and then a little walk, and get her to a cleaner, better room, where she'd be taken care of, and in an hour you'd be back with enough nickels in your pocket to make a great, big, round, shining, full-moon car wheel. Dearest lady, don't the prospect please you?"

"It would," she said, "if I had the cartwheel now."

"In which case you wouldn't go," said Mickey. "Dearest lady, it isn't business to pay for undue work."

"And it isn't business to pay your employer's fare to get to your job, either," she retorted.

"No, that beats business a mile," said Mickey. "That's an investment. You invest 10 cents and an hour's time on a gamble. Now look what you get, lady. A nice, restful ride on the cars. Your 10 cents back, a whole, big, shining, round, lady-liberty bird, if you trust in God, and the coin says the bird does, and more'n that, dearest lady, you go to

bed feeling your pink fingers sprouting, 'cause you've done a kind deed to a poor crippled orphan."

"If I thought you really had the money—" she said.

"Honest, lady, I got the money," said Mickey, "and sides, I got a surprise for you. When you get back you may go to that room and take every scrap that's in it. Now come on; you're going to be enough of a sporting lady to try a chance like that, ain't you? May be a gold mine up there, for all I know. Put something soft in the bottom of the basket while I fetch the kind."

Mickey ran up the stairs.

"Now, Peaches," he said, "I guess I got it fixed. I'm going to carry you down; a nice lady is going to put you in a big basket, then we'll take you to the cars and so get you to my house; but you got to promise, 'cross your heart, you won't squeal, nor say a word, 'cause the police will 'get' you sure if you do. They'll think the woman is your ma, so it will be all right. See?"

"Peaches nodded. Mickey wrapped her in the remnants of a blanket, carried her downstairs and laid her in the basket. By turning on her side and drawing up her feet she had more room than she needed.

"They won't let us on the cars," said the woman.

"Dearest lady, wait and see," said Mickey. "Now, Peaches, shut your eyes, also your mouth. Don't you take a chance at saying a word. If they won't stand the basket, we'll carry you, but it would hurt you less, while it would come in handy when we run out of cars. You needn't take coin only for going, dearest lady; you'll be silver plated coming back."

"You little fool," said the woman, but she stooped to her end of the basket.

"Ready," Peaches said. Mickey, "and if it hurts 'member it will soon be over, and you'll be where nobody will ever hurt you again."

"Hurry!" begged the child.

"Down the long stairs they went, and to the car line. Crowded car after car whirled past. Finally one came not so full; it stopped to let off passengers. Mickey was at the conductor's elbow.

"Please, mister, a lame kid," he pleaded. "We want to move her. Please, please help us on."

"Can't!" said the conductor. "Take a taxi."

One reason he hid Peaches on the floor was because he couldn't reach the bed. After a second's pause he made a light and opened the milk bottle.

"Connect with that," he said. "I got to take the lady back to the cars."

"Oh!" cried the connected child.

"Oh, Mickey, how good!"

"Go slow," said Mickey. "You better save half to have with some bread for your supper. Now I got to leave you a little bit, but you needn't be afraid, 'cause I'll lock you in. Nobody will 'get' you here."

"Now for the cars," said Mickey to his helper.

"What did them folks say?" she asked.

"Ticked all over," answered Mickey promptly.

"That bundle of dirty rags!" she scoffed.

"They are going to throw away the rags and wash her," said Mickey.

"She's getting her supper now."

"Sounds like lying," said the woman, "but maybe it ain't. Save me, I can't see why anybody would want a kid at any time, let alone a reekin' bunch of skin and crooked bones."

"You've known folks to want a dog, ain't you?" said Mickey. "Sure some thing that can think and talk back must be a lot more amusing. I see the parks are full of the rich folks dolling up the dogs, feeding them candy and sending them out for an airing in their automobiles; so it's up to the poor people to look after the homeless children, isn't it?"

"Do you know the folks that took her?"

"Sure I do!" said Mickey.

"Do you live close?" she persisted.

(Continued in the Morning Bee Tomorrow.)

Adele Garrison
"My Husband's Love"

The Problems That Swiftly Descended on Madge.

I walked back to the farmhouse from the hidden wood road, not knowing whether to laugh or be angry at Harry Underwood's bizarre theatricalism.

I was also puzzled as to just what lay behind his request that I give Lillian my message about suing him for divorce. Was he anxious to marry again? Intuitively I denied this, and then, with a shrug, dismissed him from my mind. I had no idea when I should see Lillian, and until I did, there was no need for me to waste any time in conjec-

tures concerning him. I had enough problems of my own on hand.

There was no one in the kitchen when I entered, and with jumping pulses I flew upstairs, fearing that Junior was worse. The door of my mother-in-law's room was locked, and as I rattled the doorknob frantically, Katherine's voice, crisp and cheerful, came to me:

"Thank you, Madge?"

"Yes! Oh! What is—"

"Nothing. We're giving this young man of yours an alcohol rub and can't chance the door opening on him. Come back in 10 minutes and kiss him good morning."

"Good morning, mama," Junior called, his voice still hoarse from the cough we had fought so desperately, and I had hard work to make my voice steady as I answered him.

With unreasoning rebellion against being shut away from my little lad, I went to my own room. I told myself disgustedly that if it had not been for my silly curiosity in going to the wood road, I would have been helping to care for my child instead of being barred from him.

"See Dot Babee,"

Katie rescued me from the dol-drum 10 minutes later by knocking at the door and calling cheerily:

"Oh! Missis Graham, come and see dot babee. He so sweet shoot like candy."

Ten minutes later I was in my mother-in-law's room with Katherine professionally putting me to see if my clothing was not chilled. And then I was in a chair before the fire with an idolized little figure in my arms rapturously responding to his demand for a story.

"Just one, Junior," Katherine said decisively. "Poor mama and Aunt Kathie are so tired driving that nasty old croup away that they must have some sleep."

Junior considered the question, his head on one side like an adorable robin.

"Granzie go to sleep, too?" he asked at last, and his grandmother beamed.

"No, my precious," she said. "Granzie will stay right here with you."

"All right, then." He philosophically settled himself against my shoulder. "Make it a long story, ma-ma."

We all relaxed into laughter, in which Junior joined, though with puzzled eyes. I spun the story out as long as I dared, and when it was finished, Katherine swept me away to my own room with orders to "sleep the clock round," if I could.

This advice I took almost literally. It was far into the afternoon when I finally awoke, to find Katherine sitting in a chair beside my bed.

"I'm glad you awakened by your self," she said. "I was afraid I'd have to wake you, and I hated to."

"Junior?" I asked anxiously.

"Couldn't be better," she said, "but there is a telegram which just came for you."

I took the envelope and drew from it a long wire from Harriet Braithwaite, asking me to find a temporary apartment in New York during their stay, and saying that they would not come to the farm until after the operation. I handed the telegram to Katherine who read it and said:

"Dr. Braithwaite detests a hotel! 'Whatever am I to do?' I exclaimed. 'Temporary apartments aren't easy to find. There is one in my own building, but I know fastidious Harriet Braithwaite would scorn it.'

"But if it's like yours—you said yours was immaculately clean and convenient."

"Yes, but so plain and ugly, and in so unattractive a neighborhood—that—"

"You'll find that Mrs. Braithwaite cares for only one thing," Katherine interrupted. "That is the opportu-

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