

MICHAEL O'HALLORAN

By Gene Stratton-Porter

SYNOPSIS
Mickey O'Halloran is a newsboy who finds and adopts a little lame girl, Lily Peaches. His life is once again a struggle to supply the comforts of life to the little girl.
Mickey, with a trip in the country finds a family who try to entertain some poor girl from the city for two weeks and Mickey makes arrangements to take Lily Peaches to the farm.
Bruce is engaged in an investigation of the city offices and is working hard changing over accounts. Leslie rents a cabin with her father and Bruce they move out of the city for the summer.

(Continued from Yesterday.)
Peter and Junior disappeared with thankfulness and speed. Mrs. Harding and Mickey wrapped Peaches in the sheet and took along a comfort for shelter from the air stirred by motion. Steadying his arm, which he wished she would not, they descended. Did she think he wanted Peaches to suppose he couldn't carry her? He ran down the last flight to show her, frightening her into protest, and had the reward of a giggle against his neck and the tightening of small arms clinging to him. He settled in the car and without heading Peter, wrapped Lily in the comfort until she had only a small peep of daylight.
Mickey knew from Peaches' labored breathing and the grip of her hands how agitated she was, but as the car glided smoothly along, driven skilfully by mentality, guided by the controlling thought of a tiny lame back she became easier and clutched less fanatically. He kept the comfort over her head. She had enough to make the change, to see so many

strangers all at once, without being excited by having her attention called to unfamiliar things that would bewilder and positively frighten her. Mickey stoutly clung to a load that soon grew noticeably heavy, while over and over he repeated in his heart with fortifying intent: "She is my family, I'll take care of her. I'll let them keep her a while because it is too hot for her there, but they shan't boss her, and they got to know it first off, and they shan't take her from me, and they got to understand it."

Right at that point Mickey's grip tightened until the child in his arms shivered with delight of being so enveloped in her old and only security. She turned her head to work her face level with the comfort and whisper in chortling glee: "Mickey, we are going just stylish like millingaire folks, ain't we?"
"You just bet we are!" he whispered back.
"You just bet we are!" he whispered back.
"Mickey, you wouldn't let them 'get me, would you?"
"Not on your life!" said Mickey, gripping her closer.
"And Peter wouldn't let them 'get me?"

"No, Peter would just wipe them clear off the slate if they tried to get you," comforted Mickey. "We're in the country now, Lily. Nobody will ever think of you away out here."
"Mickey, I want to see the country!" said Peaches.
"No, Miss! I'm scared now," replied Mickey. "It was awful hot there and it's lots cooler here, even slow and careful as Peter is driving. If you get all excitement and rearing around, and take a chill, and your back gets worse, just when we have such a grand good chance to make it better—you duck and lay low, and if you're good, and going out doesn't make you sick, after supper when you rest up, maybe I'll let you have a little peepy yellow chicken in your hand to hold a minute, and maybe I'll let you see a cow. I guess you'd like a good deal to see the cow that's going on your book, wouldn't you?"
Peaches snuggled down in pure content and proved her femininity as she did every day. "Yes, but when I see them, maybe I'll like a chicken better, and put it on."
"All right with me," agreed Mickey. "You just hold still so this doesn't make you sick, and tomorrow you can see things when you are all nice and rested."
Mickey bent and what he heard buried his face against Peaches' a second and when lifted it radiated a shining glory light, for he had whispered: "Mickey, I'm going to always mind you and love you best of anybody."

Because she had expected the trip to result in the bringing home of the child, Mrs. Harding had made ready a low folding davenport in her first-floor bedroom, beside a window where grass, birds and trees were almost in touch, and where it would be convenient to watch and care for her visitor. There in the light, pretty room Mickey gently laid Peaches

down and said: "Now if you'll just give me time to get her rested and settled a little, you can see her a peep; but there ain't going to be much seeing or talking tonight. If she has such a lot she ain't used to and gets sick, it will be a bad thing for her, and all of us, so we better just go slow and easy."
"Right you are, young man," said Peter. "Come out of here, you kids! Come to the back yard and hiny quietly. When Little White Butterfly gets rested and fed, we'll come one at a time and kiss her hand, and wish her pleasant dreams with us, and then we'll every one of us get down on our knees and ask God to help us take such good care of her that she will get well at our house. I can't think of anything right now that would make me prouder."

Mickey suddenly turned his back on them and tried to swallow the lump in his throat. Then he arranged his family so it was not in a draft, sponged and fed it, and felled in the remainder of his promise, because it went to sleep with the bite and lay in deep exhaustion. So Mickey smoothed the sheet, slipped off the ribbon, brushed back the curls, and the light marshaled them in on tiptoe and with anxious heart studied their compassionate faces.

Then he telephoned Douglas Bruce to ask permission to be away from the office the following day, and ventured as far from the house as he felt he dared with Junior; but so anxious was he that when he folded his arms of one entire family, for even Bobbie was told to add to his prayer: "God bless the little sick girl, and make her well at our house!"

CHAPTER XIV. An Orphan's Home

"Margaret, I want a few words with you some time soon," said James Minton to his sister.
"Why not right now?" she proposed. "I'm not busy and for days I've known you were in trouble."
"You would deserve my gratitude if you could," he said. "I've suffered until I'm reduced to the extremity that drives me to put into words the thing I have thrashed over in my heart day and night for weeks."
"Come to my room, James," she said.
James Minton followed his sister. "Now go on and tell me, boy," she ordered. "Of course, it's about Nellie."
"Yes, it's about Nellie," he repeated. "Did you hear any part of what that very charming young lady

had said to me at our chosen playground, not long ago?"
"Yes, I did," answered Mrs. Winslow. "But not enough to comprehend thoroughly. Did she convince you that you are mistaken?"
"No. But this she did do," said Mr. Minton. "She battered the walls of what I had believed to be an unalterable decision, until she made this opening: I must go into our affairs again. I have got to find out where my wife is and what she is doing; and if the things Miss Leslie thinks are true, Margaret, I thought it was settled. I was happy in a way; actually happy! No biblical miracle ever interested me half so wonderful as the change in the boys."
"The difference in them is quite as much of a marvel as you think it," agreed Mrs. Winslow.
"It is greater than I would have thought possible in any circumstances," said Mr. Minton. "Do they even remember their mother to you?"
"Incidentally," she replied, "just as they do maids, footman or governess, in referring to their past life. The only thing that Miss Leslie knows of wanting her, that I know of, Malcolm resembles her in appearance and any one could see that she liked him best. She was a dear friend against James in his favor if any question between them were ever carried to her."
"Malcolm is like her in more than looks. He has her musical ability in a marked degree," said Mr. Minton. "I have none, but Miss Winton suggested a thing to me that, Mr. Minton, has been able to work up some, and while both boys are deeply interested, it's Malcolm who is beginning to slip away alone and listen to and practice his cries until he deceives the birds themselves. Yesterday he called a catbird to within a few feet of him, by reproducing the notes it uttered and imitated, by the female."
"I know. It was a triumph! He told me about it."
"That's well named," said Mr. Minton. "He is my boy. Already he's beginning to ask questions that are filled with intelligence, solicitude and practical business, and what things mean, what I am doing, and why. He's going to make the man who will come into my office, who in a few years will be offering his shoulder for part of my load. You can't understand what the change is from the old attitude of regarding me as a father, but there is also even a gentleman, as my wife's servants were teaching my sons to think. Margaret, how am I going back even to the thought that I may be making a mistake? Wouldn't the unpardonable error be to again risk those boys an hour in the company and influence which brought them once to what they were?"
"You poor soul!" exclaimed Mrs. Winslow.
"Never mind that!" warned Mr. Minton. "I'm not accustomed to it, and it doesn't help. Have you any faith in Nellie?"
"Some whatever!" exclaimed Mrs. Winslow. "She's so selfish it's simply feldish. I'd as soon bury you as to see you subject to her again."
"And I'd much sooner be buried, were it not that my heart is set on winning out with those boys," said Mr. Minton. "There is material for fine men in them, but there is also a propriety that would shock you, inexpressibly, instilled by ignorant, malicious servants. I wish Leslie Winton had kept quiet."
"As you do!" cried Mrs. Winslow. "I could scarcely endure it, as I realized what was going on. While Nellie had you, there was no indignity, no public humiliation at which she stopped. For my own satisfaction I examined Elizabeth before she was laid away, and I held my tongue because I thought you didn't know. When did you find out?"
"A newsboy told me. He went with a woman who was in the park when it happened, and he said that they were insulted for their pains. Some way my best friend, Douglas Bruce, picked him up and attached him, as I did William; it was at my suggestion. Of course, I couldn't imagine that out of several thousand newsboys Douglas would select the one who knew my secret and who daily blasts me with his scorn. If he runs into an elevator where I am, the whistle dies on his lips; his smile fades and he actually cringes from my presence. You can't blame him. A man should be able to protect the children he fathers. What he said to me stunned me so, he thought me indignant. In my place, would you stop him some day and explain?"
"I most certainly would," said Mrs. Winslow. "A child's scorn is withering, and you don't deserve it."
"I have often wondered what or how much he told Bruce," said Mr. Minton.
"Could you detect any change in Mr. Bruce after the boy came into his office?" asked Mrs. Winslow.
"Only that he was kinder and friendlier than ever."
"That probably means that the boy told him and that Mr. Bruce understood and was sorry."
"No doubt," he said. "You'd talk to the boy then? Now what would you do about Nellie?"
"What was it Miss Winton thought you should do?"
"See Nellie! Take her back!" he exclaimed. "Give her further opportunity to exercise her brand of wifehood on me and motherhood on the boys."
"James, if you do, I'll never forgive you!" cried his sister. "If you tear up this comfortable, beautiful place, where you are the honored head of your house, and put your boys back where you found them, I'll go home and stay there; and you can't blame me."
"Miss Winton didn't ask me to go back," he explained. "That couldn't be done. I saw and examined the deed of gift of the premises to the city. The only thing she could do would be to buy it back, and it's torn up inside, and will be in shape for opening any day now, I hear. The city needed a children's hospital; to get a place like that for so beautiful and convenient a location—and her old friends are furious at her for bringing sickness and crooked bodies among them. No doubt they would welcome her there, but they wouldn't welcome her anywhere else. She must have endowed it liberally, no longer than the city has a staff of the strength announced for it."
"James, you are wandering!" she interrupted. "You started to tell me what Miss Winton asked of you."

"That I bring Nellie here," he explained. "That I make her mistress of this house. That I put myself and the boys in her hands again."
"Oh, good Lord!" ejaculated Mrs. Winslow. "James, are you actually thinking of that? Mind, I don't care myself. I have a home and all I want. But for you and those boys, are you really contemplating it?"
"No!" he said. "All I'm thinking of is whether it is my duty to hunt her up and once more convince myself that she is heartless vanity personified, and utterly indifferent to me personally, as I am to her."
"Suppose you do go to her and find that through plague, because you made the move for separation yourself, she wants to try it over, or to get the boys again—she's got a mint of money. Do you know just how much she has?"
"I do not, and I never did," he replied. "Her funds never in any part were in my hands. I felt capable of making all I needed myself, and I have. I earn as much as it is right I should have; but she'd scorn my plan for life and what satisfies me; and she'd think the boys disgraced, living as they are."
"James, was there an hour, even in your honeymoon, when Nellie forgot herself and was a lovable woman?"
"It is painful to recall, but yes! Yes, indeed!" he answered. "Never did a man marry with higher hope!"
"Then what?" marveled Mrs. Winslow.
"Primarily her mother, then her society friends, then the power of her money," he answered.
"Just how did it happen?" she queried.
"It began with Mrs. Blondon's violent opposition to children; when she knew a child was coming she practically moved in with us, and spent hours playing her daughter, sending for a doctor at each inevitable consequence, keeping up an exciting rush of friends coming when the girl should have had quiet and rest, treat-

ing me with contempt, and daily holding me up as the monster responsible for all these things. The result was nervousness and discontent bred by such a course at such a time, until it amounted to actual pain, and lastly unlimited money with which to indulge every fancy."
(Continued in the Morning Bee.)

6:30 Chicago Limited

6 P. M.

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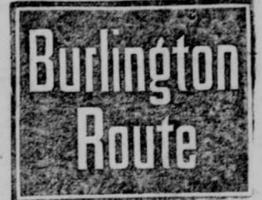
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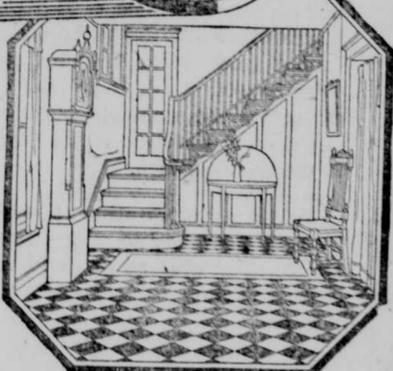
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