

# MICHAEL O'HALLORAN

BY GENE STRATTON PORTER

(Continued from Saturday.)  
Junior, passing, remembered he had omitted Jud Jason to bring a bundle. He had left there, and stopped for it. He stepped into the small front door and bent for the package lying in sight, when clearly and distinctly arose Mickey's voice lifted to reach Peter, at another task.  
"Course I meant him to get enough to make him good and satisfied. If I like we agreed on; but I never intended him to get any such a dose as he had."

Junior straightened swiftly, an astonished look crossed his eyes, and his lower jaw dropped. His father's reply was equally audible.  
"Of course I understand that, Mickey."

"Surest thing you know!" said Mickey. "I like Junior. I like him better than any other boy I ever knew, and I've known hundreds. I tell you, Peter, he was gamer than you'll ever believe to hang on as long as he did."

"Yes I think that too," said Peter. "You know he didn't come because he was all in," explained Mickey. "You can take a lot of pride in that. He'd about been the limit when he quit. And he quit, not because he was robbed and knocked out, but because what he had seen showed him that Multiopolis wasn't the job he wanted for a life sentence. See?"

"I hope you are right about that," said Peter. "I'm glad to see you get set home, cured in any way; but it sort of gags me to think of him as having been scared out. It saves my vanity considerable to feel, as you say, that he had the brains to sense the situation, and quit because he felt it wasn't the work for which he was born."

Then Mickey's voice came eagerly, earnestly, warning the cockles of Junior's heart.

"Now lemme tell you Peter: I was there, and I know. It was that way. It was just that way exact. He wasn't scared out, he'd have gone at it again, all right, if he'd seen anything in it he wanted. It was just as his mother felt when she first talked it over with me, and the same with you later; that if he got to the city, and got right up against earning a living there, he would find it wasn't what he wanted, and he did, like all of us thought. Course I meant to put it to him stiff. I meant to facilitate him in the ancient and honorable third degree of Multiopolis all right, so he'd have enough to last a lifetime; but I only meant to put him up against what I'd had myself on the streets; I was just going to test his gingers; I wasn't counting on the robbing, and the alleys, and the knockout, and the morgue. Gee, Peter!"

Then they laughed. A dull red surged up Junior's neck, and flooded his face. He picked up the bundle, and climbed on the wagon. The jerk of the horse stopping at its accustomed place told him when to load the first can. He had been thinking so deeply he was utterly oblivious to everything save the thought that it had been arranged among them to "cure" him; even his mother knew about it, if he heard aright, had been the instigator of the scheme to let him go to last a lifetime; but I only meant to put him up against what I'd had myself on the streets; I was just going to test his gingers; I wasn't counting on the robbing, and the alleys, and the knockout, and the morgue. Gee, Peter!"

Junior told him, and through putting his experience into words, he eased his heart and cleared his brain. He came to hints of great and wonderful things that were going to happen soon. There was just a possibility that Jud gleaned an idea from the experience in Multiopolis had brought his friend home to astound and benefit the neighborhood. At any rate Junior picked up the lines with all the sourness gone from his temperament, which was usually sweet, except that one phrase of Mickey's, and the laughter. Suddenly he leaned forward.  
"Jud, come here," he said. Junior began to speak, and Jud began to understand and sympathize with the boy and had known from childhood.  
"Could we?" asked Junior.  
"Could we? Well, I just guess we could!"

"When?" queried Junior.  
"This afternoon, if he's going to be off," said Jud.  
"Well, I don't know what his plans are, but I could telephone from here and by rustling I could get back by the horse car, and what for?"  
"To Atwater. Fishing is good enough excuse."  
"All right! Father will let me take the horse."  
"Hayseed! Isn't walking good enough to suit you? What's the matter with the Elkhardt? Junior drove fast as he dared and hurried through the marsh, and the woods around the house, and the lake. When there was no one ahead of them, and so he rode a boat they were sure of taking home."  
"Wouldn't I like to see Lily eating a fish," I caught," said Mickey, searching the grass and kicking rotting wood as he saw Junior doing to find him.  
"Minnie's got the real thing," ex-

plained Junior. "When we get the scheme father laid out going, before we start fishing, you and I will take a net and come to this creek and catch a bucketful of right bait, and then we'll have man's sport, for sure. Won't it be great?"  
"Exactly what the plutes are doing," said Mickey. "Gee Junior, if your pa does all the things he said he was going to, you'll be a plute yourself!"

"Never heard him say anything in my life he didn't do," said Junior, "and didn't you notice that he put you in too? You'll be just as much of a plute as I will."

"Not on your bromide," said Mickey. "He is your father, and you'll be in business with him; I'll just be along sometimes, as a friend, maybe."

"I usually take father at just what he says. I guess he means you to stay in our family, if you like."

"Looks like it to me. Father and mother both like you, and they're daffy about Peaches."

"It's because she's so little, and so white, and so helpless," Mickey hastened to explain, "and so awful sweet."

"Well, for whatever it is, it is," said Junior, "and I'm just as crazy about her as the rest. Look out kid! That fellow's coming right at us!"

Junior dashed for the fence, while Mickey lost time in turning to see what "that fellow" might be; so he faced the ram that had practiced on Malcolm Minturn. With lowered head, the ram sprang at Mickey. He flew in air and it butted space and whirled again, so that before the boy's breath was fully recovered he lifted once more, with all the agility learned on the streets of Multiopolis, but that time the broad straw that he wore to protect his eyes on the water, sailed from his head; he dropped the poles, and as the ram came back at him he hit it squarely in the face with the bait can, which angered rather than daunted it. Then for a few minutes Mickey was too busy to know exactly what happened, and movements were too quick for Junior. When he saw that Mickey was tiring, and the ram was not, he caught a rail from the fence and helped to subdue the ram. Panting they climbed the fence and sat resting.

"Why I didn't see Higgins had that ram," said Junior. "We fellows always crossed that field before. Say, there ain't much in that."

"Gee, sheep pray tell me why, in the pleasant fields you lie?" business is there?"

"Not much but the lie," said Mickey earnestly.  
Junior dropped from the fence and led the way toward a wood thicket with underbrush, laughing until his heart pained. As they proceeded they heard voices.

"Why that sounds like my bunch," said Junior.  
He whistled sharply, which brought an immediate response, and soon two boys appeared.

"Hello!" said Junior.  
"Hello!" answered they.  
"Where are you going?" asked Junior.  
"To Atwater lake fishing. Where you?"

"Where too?" said Junior. "Why great! We'll go together! Sam, this is Mickey."

Mickey offered hand and formalities were over.  
"But I threw our worms at the ram," said Mickey.  
"Well, that was a smart trick!" cried Junior.

"Wasn't it?" agreed Mickey. "But you see the ram was coming and I had the worms in my strong right, so I didn't stop to think I'd spent an hour digging them; I just whaled away."

"Never mind worms," said Jud. "I guess we got enough to divide; if you fellows want to furnish something for your share, you can find some grubs in these woods, and we'll get more chance at the base."

"Sure!" said Mickey. "What are grubs and where do you look for them?"  
"Oh, anywhere under rotting wood and round old logs," said Jud.  
"Believe it's a good place right here, Mickey; dig in till I cut a stick to help with."

(Continued in The Morning Bee.)



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