Chapter 5 - The rich old man (Part 2), April 1923


THE FAR EAST April 1, 1923.

Six Little Doers

A Serial Story for Maureen's Little Missionaries.

By MIRIAM AGATHA

Teddy dragged off his cap.

"Here, boy!" Mr. Carney cried, querulously. "Take yourself and your message round the other way to the back."

"I'm not -" Teddy began in an insulted tone.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I came to see you."

"To see me?

What for?"

The old man had brown eyes, with a red gleam in them; they burned into Teddy's soul, and made him blurt out the truth. He felt that if a burglar, disguised as a gentleman, had come to rob the house and had met Mr. Carney on the doorstep, he would at once have confessed the purpose of his visit when he met those red - brown eyes.

"What for, boy? What for?"

"To see," gasped Teddy, "if you have ass's ears."

The whole world seemed suddenly struck dumb; not a leaf stirred in the vast garden, all nature seemed shocked, and Teddy realised what a terrible thing he had said. Mr. Carney stood petrified, and Teddy stuttered and stammered an explanation.

"They all say - everybody - that everything you touch turns to gold, and that you are like some old - old cove that had ass's ears." The red - brown eyes gleamed fiercely, but was

there, could there have been, a little twitch of those thin, tight-shut lips? "Couldn't be." Teddy decided. Perhaps a tiny garden-fly had tickled his lips.

"Then I suppose I am to show you my ears?" demanded Mr. Carney.

"Aw-well," Teddy replied, "not if you don't like. But - I wanted to ask you about your money." Teddy had taken heart again. ("Might as well find it all out," he thought.)

"The kids about here say that you have tons and tons of money; that you could buy all Australia, and have Tasmania just for an apple orchard, it you liked."

"Um!" the old man muttered, and his lips closed tighter.

"But I want to know," continued Teddy gravely, "what's the good of it? What are you going to do with, it?" His young eyes calculatingly considered the old, lined face before him, the whitened hair, and with the unconscious cruelty of youth he said: "You'll have to die soon; someone else will get the money. Father said that, most likely, whoever does get it will waste it. He's often noticed that when mis -, er - old gentlemen save a lot of money, and won't do anything charitable with it, it is always wasted by whoever they leaves it to. The people who hadn't to earn it and save it always waste it.

The old man stirred at this. "Your father," he said drily, "must be a sagacious man. I've noticed the same thing myself."

Teddy was not sure what kind of a man that was, but since Mr. Carney seemed to infer he was one also, Teddy considered it very probable that Father wasn't one at all, because Father was the very opposite of this eagle-eyed old gentleman. (Teddy supposed his eyes had got that look with gloating over gold dishes and cups and beds and motor cars, not, to mention gazing on his gold daughter.)

"You came, then, for a dual purpose - to see my ears and to know what I intend to do with my money?"

Teddy had the grace to blush. Whatever would Mother think of him? Imagine a boy asking an old, old man two such personal questions. But he had to admit it was so.

"Well," Mr. Carney said, "I have not made my will yet, for the very reason that we spoke of just now. I don't intend spendthrifts to get it."

"You ought to make your will, though," Teddy advised. "Everyone should. I've made mine."

Again that tiny garden-fly must have tickled Mr. Carney's lips, for this time they really did twitch. He sat down on a rustic chair beside the rose-bed, and left the boy standing in front of him.

"Yes," Teddy went on. "You see, Mick and Mack - my twin brothers and I have some money in the bank."

"Good! All children should be taught to save."

"Oh, we didn't save it; we found it. Shamie, our dog, dug up a gold nugget near Doughboy Creek."

Mr. Carney seemed duly impressed and surprised.

"We've got eight pounds each in the bank. So the three of us made our wills. We were going out sailing one day with Uncle Michael, and we thought we might get drowned, so we made them. We put them in an envelope and gave them to Father to mind. We all left our money the same - to the Chinese Mission. And, if we don't die before we are twenty-one, we are going to draw it out on our birthdays and send it to the Mission. I tried to work out how much mine will be when I am twenty-one and how much the Twins' will be when they are. But I couldn't. The bank fellows will be able to do it all right. I meant to have a big party with mine, and buy some things I want - a watch and boxing-gloves and presents for Mother and everyone. But a party is over in a few hours, and does no good. And a watch - well, when I'm dead, having a watch will be no good, either, because I'll have no more time left to do any good in. It won't matter to me what time it is then. But if I gave my eight pounds and whatever the interest comes to - the bank fellows will know - the money will do good for me if I am alive and after I am dead.

Look here, Mr. Carney," Teddy struck his hands together earnestly, like a man making a speech about something very important, "when you make your will, don't leave all your money to people who will waste it, and do no good for you and no good for themselves with it. Make your money do good for you while you are living and after you are dead. Make it keep on working for you. You worked for it; make it work for you. You can't do good things yourself - you cannot nurse sick people and mind babies and orphans." Teddy smiled at the thought. "You can't go away to pagan lands to save souls there.

But your money can do these things for you, by sending others in your place. See? Dad says all these things about money. He says what he would do if he had a lot of money; I've often heard him, that's how I know. Dad says he'd help hospitals and orphanages and other charitable places, and that he'd give lots and lots of his fortune to train priests and Brothers and nuns to work in Australia and in pagan lands. Then all those priests and nuns and Brothers would be like his children. Their work would go on after his death, and he'd have a share in all the good they did. See?”

The old gentleman looked bewildered. He had never met a little boy like Teddy before; but this is not to be wondered at, for there are very few little boys like Teddy. "Well, he said, as Teddy paused for breath, “I am very thankful for your advice.

When you grow up, if you are a lawyer, I shall put my affairs in your hands. But I suppose you think I shall be dead then."

"Course you will!" Teddy answered heartily.

"How old do you think I am?"

"Aw - about ninety-seven."

Mr. Carney frowned, "I shall be sixty next month," he said, but Teddy thought he had very likely forgotten about two decades (at least), for old people have very poor memories.

"And now - for my ears -“

Teddy's cheeks crimsoned, although he was dying to know. "Oh-aw-never mind - I -“

Mr. Carney's lips twitched again. (That troublesome little fly!) He took off his cap. Teddy bent forward.

To be continued.