

Chapter 5 - The rich old man (Part 3), May 1923



Mr. Carney carefully turned the side of his head, brushed back his longish hair, and revealed - a well shaped ear, set close to his fine - looking, white head. He gravely turned the other side, again brushed back his hair, and revealed another, the image of the first! Teddy was very disappointed; he had hoped there was some foundation for the story.

"I'll tell all the ki - children it's not true," he promised, in a flat, dull voice.

"Thank you," returned Mr. Carney, as if Ted had promised a great favour. "I suppose," the old man continued, "if this were a novel, I should adopt, you on the spot, give you a large income, distribute my surplus goods to charitable institutions, turn this place into an orphanage (horrid little things, what noise they would make in my garden!), and betake myself to a monastery -" He smiled, actually smiled, at the fancy. "But it isn't a novel, so I suppose it ends here."

Teddy's blue eyes gleamed with some inner knowledge of the situation that Mr. Carney could not be expected to know. ("Prayer moves mountains, so it will move misers," mentally decided young Teddy.)

Aloud he said: "I don't want to be adopted, thank you; I've got a lovely father and mother. And I don't think they'd take you at a monastery, and orphans are not horrid little things. I suppose you were a horrid little boy yourself. You must have been. I'm glad I didn't know you then."

Mr. Carney laughed, and the trees, the flowers, the house seemed very much astonished, so Teddy thought, as if they had never heard him laugh before, and had never expected that he ever would. The flowers stared, especially those with black centres like eyes; the trees murmured amongst themselves, and the house appeared to lift all its eyebrows; but this, perhaps, was a trick the sun played on the front windows.

"I'm afraid I was a disagreeable little boy," Mr. Carney admitted.

"You should be sorry for orphans, and not call them horrid. You should be glad you never had to depend on charity. If orphans had to depend on rich old men like you, well -" Teddy left the conclusion to the rich old man himself. Mr. Carney's mouth opened in astonishment.

"Well, well! You are an extraordinary child, the most extraordinary I have ever met."

Naughty Teddy replied: "You are an extraordinary old man, the most extraordinary I have ever met, and I'm glad I don't know any others like you. Good-bye."

Mr. Carney called after him: "Here, boy. Listen. Come and see me again. Come soon."

Teddy turned, and all enmity died down as he waved his hand and called a cheerful "Right-o."

The old man walked to the clump of palms to watch the little figure flying along. Perhaps it reminded him of the days when his old, creaky joints were young and supple. As he passed on to the house he plucked a rose, but it did not turn to gold. In his bedroom he looked in a mirror and smiled. "And we were rather proud of our ears in our family: Mother very much so." He brushed his hair back carefully and shook his head thoughtfully, even regretfully, at his reflection. "After all, John Carney, I believe they are an ass's ears," he said.