

CHAPTER XIV HOME AGAIN

Mr. Conant, who was Colonel Hathaway's lawyer and confidential agent, was at the train to meet his important client on his return to Dorfield. The first to alight from the coach was the Colonel, who greeted his lawyer with a cordial handclasp. Mary Louise kissed Peter Conant upon his impassive cheek and presented him to a pretty young girl who clung to her arm smiling, yet half bewildered by her arrival in a strange town. There seemed no one else with the party and Mr. Conant glanced over the crowd of passengers and said:

"Mr. Jones did not accompany you, then?"

"Why, yes; I suppose he's here," answered the Colonel carelessly. "I believe he traveled another car."

"I don't see him anywhere," added Mary Louise. "I wonder if anyone reminded him that this is the place to get off?"

"Never mind," said Alora; "if father can't keep track of himself, let him go on to another station. I can't lose him for long, that's certain."

"There he is, up ahead," announced Mara Louise. "He's quarreling with his porter about something."

"To save the tip," suggested Alora, scornfully.

Mary Louise rushed to greet an old colorful man with snow-white hair, who was picking up their hand baggage.

"Oh, Uncle Eben, I'm so glad to see again!" she exclaimed. "And how's Aunt Sallie? And is my pony well? And are the goldfish still alive? And----"

"Bress yo' soul, Ma'y Weeze!" said the delighted old servant, "ev'body's well an' joyful to see you-all back ag'in."

The Colonel shook Uncle Eben's hands--both of them--in a kindly but dignified manner. "I suppose the automobile is still running, Uncle?"

"Not jes' dis yere minnit, Kun'l," with a glad chuckle, "but dat car's gwine ter run jes' as soon as we-all gits aboahd. What yo' think I's be'n doin' all

winter, Kun'l, in dat lonesomeness house, 'cept keepin' dat car greased up?"

"Did you grease it in the house, then, Uncle?" asked Mary Louise gravely, but with twinkling eyes.

Old Eben chuckled again, for this was a happy hour for him, but while he chuckled he led them to where the automobile stood waiting. Behind the others slowly followed Jason Jones, carrying his own luggage and eyeing every detail of his surroundings in the manner of a countryman paying his first visit to town. He was inwardly sizing up Dorfield as a place of residence. When Jones got into the car the Colonel briefly introduced him to the lawyer.

"This is Mr. Jones, Mr. Conant."

He looked at the lawyer and gave a slight nod, and Mr. Conant's bow was very stiff and formal. Already he had, with fair accuracy, grasped the relationship of the man to the others. Alora Jones seemed a fine girl-- the right sort--and Mary Louise was evidently fond of her. The Colonel barely tolerated the man Jones, whom he did not like, for the daughter's sake. The girl herself lacked in respect for her father, and this unfilial attitude seemed condoned by both Mary Louise and the Colonel, which was evidence that there was something wrong about Jason Jones. With such a cue for guidance, Mr. Conant decided he had no use for Jason Jones, either.

Uncle Eben first drove the car to the Widow Harrington's cottage, where Mrs. Conant awaited the new tenants to introduce them to their servant and to assure them that everything was prepared for their convenience. Then they drove to Colonel Hathaway's home, where Irene was at the gate in her wheeled chair, a bunch of her choicest roses in her hand, ready to welcome her friend Mary Louise and to be kissed and hugged with girlish enthusiasm.

It was a happy homecoming, indeed, for Mary Louise. And Colonel Hathaway breathed a deep sigh of relief as he entered his own portals.

"From now on," he said to his granddaughter that evening, "I am under no obligation to assist that impossible person, Jones, or to even associate with him. For your sake, my darling, I have suffered the infliction of his presence with fortitude, even going to the extent of locating him in our

beloved town of Dorfield, that you and Alora might enjoy one another's society. But from this time forward Jason Jones is to be a distant acquaintance rather than a companion. Congratulate me, Mary Louise!"

"I do, Gran'pa Jim," she replied soberly, "and I thank you, too. It has been a trial for both of us, but we've been really helpful to poor Alora. I want to try to bring a little happiness into her life and encourage her to become as sweet and lovable a girl as she has the nature to be, and this could never have been accomplished had we allowed her to drift in the sole companionship of her disagreeable father."