

The waggoner was the other side of the horse. Steve could see the stout country feet lifting themselves as steadily as the horse lifted his great feet with the fingers of coarse hair down to the hoofs. The waggoner had no idea of Micky's peril. Would he cross in front of the horse safely? Would he not? The question was answered by Micky suddenly falling almost under the great hoofs. At the same moment Steve was upon him, and had flung him away, roaring lustily at the assault, as he took it. But Steve was caught. Something crashed down upon his hips, pinning him to the ground. Steve closed his eyes. The pain for an instant was sickening. He thought the train had caught him at last against the wall of the tunnel, as he had so often dreamt. But why was Micky screaming? Micky was free of the tunnel. It was only he, Steve, who had been ground to powder. Then there was forgetfulness.

He came to himself in the white ward of the children's hospital. He had seen the outside of it many a time, but he had never guessed it to be like this. He was so walled up in something that he could not move, but he smelt wallflowers somewhere near his bed. Turning his eyes from one side to another, he could see a long row of little white-curtained beds. There were faces on some of the pillows, but others were empty. Away at the end of the long ward he could hear children talking and laughing quietly about the fire.

Presently a little boy on crutches came down the ward, and seeing Steve, called out:

'I say, Sister, her's 227 awake!'

Then a sweet-faced nun with white teeth came and stood by him and smiled at him and asked him how he felt, and fed him with something delicious out of a little flowery cup with a long spout.

'You're going on very nicely,' she said, 'and if you're a very good little boy, perhaps you'll be able to see your friend on Sunday.'

'My friend, miss?'

'Yes, your friend who brought you here.'

Of course it could only be Mrs. Brady, though Steve wondered how she came to be about when he met with the accident.

'Micky wasn't hurt, was he, miss?' he asked anxiously.

'Micky?' The nun looked puzzled for an instant, then she seemed to understand. 'Oh, I remember—the child you got hurt in trying to save. No, he wasn't hurt. He's all right, I believe. Now, don't talk any more, dear, but sleep if you can.'

With little intervals of pain and rest from pain, Steve got round the week till Sunday came. There was no inflammation, and Dr. Heys thought that the little chap in 227 bed might certainly see his friend if the latter was quiet and stayed only a short time.

When the visitors came tiptoeing down the ward, amid shrieks of delighted recognition from many little beds, Steve's heart fell. There was no Mrs. Brady. She had forgotten him. But who was this big man with the country freshness on his cheeks and the mild blue eyes, with the great bunch of wall flowers and daffodils and the obvious eggs tied up in a red-and-white cotton handkerchief, who walked softly to the chair by Steve's bed and took up his place there? Steve felt a dreadful certainty that it was all a mistake, and the visitor not for him; but the mild, serious eyes had no doubt in their gaze.

'The Sister told me as I might come and see how you was,' he said in a voice subdued to the softest key possible, thought it was naturally a big voice to match the big man.

'But I never saw you before,' said Steve, weakly. 'Isn't it another boy you want?'

'I want the boy my Dobbin knocked down in the Dover road last Monday. Not as he'd ever 'ave done it, but that he didn't see you, or yet the little shaver as was the cause of it all.'

'Oh,' said Steve, 'it's very good of you to come.'

Steve's friend came many Sundays before Steve was able to get on crutches and hop about the ward. His hip had been broken, and he was hardly likely ever to walk without lameness; the most the kind doctor hoped for was that he would not be very lame as he grew stronger. Steve wouldn't have minded very much if he had been told that he was to be an inmate of the hospital for life. In fact, he would have liked it. He liked the doctor, he liked the nurses, he liked the other sick children. Above all, he liked John Grainger's visits on Sundays, and these, no doubt, would cease when presently Steve went back to Greek street.

John Grainger did not seem to get tired of coming as the weeks grew to months. Sunday after Sunday he sat by Steve's

bed in the ward, or by the open window, when summer at length arrived, and Steve was able to sit in a basket chair and look out on the courtyard with the few beds of hardy flowers in its shabby turf. In those visits it was wonderful how much the boy came to know about the man. All the simple, quiet life, with its joys and its sorrows, he came to read like a book. He knew that John Grainger had lost his wife and son, and was lonely without them forever. He knew the house with its green porch, standing back from the road, where John Grainger lived. There were stocks and wall flowers under the windows; the windows had green, outside shutter. There was a little kitchen and a bedroom and a parlor, and all day while John Grainger was away, Trusty, his old collie, lay in the shelter of the porch. Outside there was a kitchen and flower garden with a hedge of sweetbriar, and there were beehives under a roof of thatch on a stool by the house wall. Beyond were the fields where John Grainger earned his living by growing flowers, fruit, and vegetables. Yesterday it might be daffodils, to-day asparagus, lettuce, and young peas, to-morrow strawberries.

John was an epitome of the seasons as they came. He had begun by bringing violets and daffodils; then came anemones and little sprays of lilies of the valley. One Sunday there was a bunch of flowering May, big as a Christmas tree. Now, this last Sunday of all, there were roses.

This day Steve presented a very different aspect from the dirty and ragged boy who had come in the day of the accident. He supposed they had burnt his old clothes. Anyhow, it was a pleasure to find himself in a clean linen smock, with knickerbockers underneath and stout shoes and grey woollen stockings, even if he had to share them with Paddy Brady presently.

'Tis the last Sunday I'll be comin' to see 'ee here,' said John Grainger.

'Yes,' said Steve, and in spite of him a big tear escaped down his cheeks. Life wouldn't be more tolerable in Greek street now that he was lame.

'Ye'll be ready by noon a-Wednesday. I've got strawberries for Covent Garden, an'll be back by that time.'

'I'm to see you again, then?' said Steve, with an uplifting of the heart.

'Bless 'ee, didn't think I was goin' forever?'

'Shall I see you in Greek street, then?' asked Steve, with a new hope.

'Th'art not goin' to Greek street no more. Th'art goin' home wi' me.'

'With you?'

'Aye, little lad, place of him I lost. You're nobody's bairn, they tell't me, but you're mine. We'll never leave each other.'

Steve closed his eyes and lay back. At first the joy seemed too much for him. 'Oh, sir!' was all he could say.

'Not sir, Steve, but daddy,' said John Grainger, taking one of Steve's thin hands and crushing it between his own.

Then Dr. Heys came in and smiled at them, and the two Sisters came up and looked and smiled and went away; and during the rest of the visit neither Steve nor John Grainger spoke, but sat hand in hand, with a bashful delight in each other.

After three days packed full of the painfully sweet anticipation, Steve was carried out in his new father's arms, with his crutch across his shoulder, and set in a comfortable old straw chair, in a great empty roofed waggon, smelling deliciously of strawberries. A basket of strawberries was placed in his lap, and John Grainger, sitting just under the till of the waggon, drove Dobbin at a walking pace through the dreary miles of streets.

But at last they passed the last row of squalid dwellings, and came out among fields; and then Dobbin broke into a steady trot, and the air grew purer and sweeter, and there were wide fields and woods, and sometimes they passed a bridge over a stream, or they went through a village of the most delightful cottages, bowered in roses.

It was all more exquisite than Steve could have believed possible, though he had listened greedily to the tales of happy children who had gone on Sunday school treats into the country.

About 4 o'clock in the afternoon they reached the cottage of Steve's dreams, and he was sat down in the little flagged yard, while Dobbin was taken out and turned into his own paddock, and Trusty came and laid his head on Steve's knee.

'He fretted sore when little Willie was taken,' said John Grainger, watching the dog.

Afterwards he carried Steve into the cottage, and setting him in the chimney corner, began to light the fire and boil the kettle for tea.