

ROB MCGREGOR

A TALE OF TENNESSEE

By Martha McCulloch Williams

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CHAPTER VI.

Miss Winford found the blind man alone in the wide hall. He turned his head at her knock, saying, with a pitiful little smile:

"My ears cannot tell me names, though they say my visitor is a lady and young. Come in, please. My daughter will soon be here. She has gone this morning to look at the crops for me."

"Oh, howdy, Mr. McGregor!" Alice said, smiling at the fine, transparent old face into something like cordial heartiness. "It's me—Alice Winford. I haven't come to see Rob, at least I shall tell her so. Ma was telling me this morning about your wedding—she was there, you know—an says you an' your wife were the handsomest couple she ever saw. Then I just wanted to see you—an Rob, of course—so I said I was comin' right over. An I shall tell Rob it was on purpose to see you."

"Sit down, my dear. I am glad truly you have come, all the gladder that I cannot see you," Mr. McGregor said, with a laugh more pitiful than tears. "But I say you among the last things," he went on. "I remember it well. You were at the store with your mother—the chubbyest, neat little girl, with dimples all over her hands. Let me see. Are the dimples there still? Yes, every one," touching her plump hand. "And I hear through my friend Talbot that you are the best daughter in the world. You know, I cannot quite agree to that, though he says his wife thinks so. I have a girl of my own. Aside from her you are no doubt the dearest girl in the world."

"Well, I must say this caps the climax," Rob said from the door back of them. "Daddy! To think of your blossoming out into a gallant at this time of life! Alice, I shall like you awfully for a stepmother. But, oh, dear, how surprised I am! I thought I had this young man," laying a light hand on her father's head. "So well trained I could trust him, even with the belle of the neighborhood."

Alice laughed brightly, falling easily in with Rob's whimsical humor. But she would not take off her hat and stay to dinner. "I must go in a minute," she said. "Mother has oceans of work laid out to do. I just ran away from it. Come an' give me some roses, Rob, by way of reward."

"First you must tell some peaches," Rob said. "And tell your mother the White Heaths are nearly ripe. She must send and get all she wants next week."

"You have such roses. Why don't you sell some?" Miss Winford asked innocently. At once Mr. McGregor sat very upright.

"We have not more than enough for ourselves and our neighbors, black and white," he said. "And, Miss Alice, even if there were a great surplus, I should hate to think that the sale of it had cheapened the price of some poor neighbor's wares."

Rob flashed deeply and gave Alice an appealing glance. That young lady opened her eyes very wide, but said nothing, only rose and walked beside Rob to the garden.

"It looks like witch work—the way your flowers bloom," she said, glancing along the borders. "Everybody else's are all dried up. But wait a minute, Rob. I didn't come out for just the flowers. I—I want to ask you something—something important—that I can't mention to anybody else."

"Why, Alice, I am the last person for serious matters, and if it's a secret please don't tell me," Rob said, with a half smile. "Not that I can't keep one, but some one else might not, and then the one who had trusted me might think I was the traitor."

"But you are the only one I can tell," Alice said, dropping her eyes. "You are my age an' all that. I—I can't talk about this with mother. She wouldn't understand."

"I'm sure I shall not understand either," Rob said, his smile broadening. "You may tell me if you choose. But I warn you it is no use."

"Yes, it is some use," Miss Winford persisted. "It is, Oh, I shall never get it out. It's about—Jack Talbot, you know. He wants me—to be engaged to him, an I don't know whether it would be right while he has to take care of the family, you know."

Rob was bending to clip an especially choice rose. She snipped the stalk with a clean cut and got up steadily, the flower in her hand, as she said, with a careless accent: "By all means be engaged to him. The family will be delighted. And as to taking care of them, the debts are almost paid now. I reckon Jack will soon have a place of his own."

"Is not that so much. I know he'd give me everything heart could wish. I had better tell you all of it," Miss Winford said, with a beautiful smile. "You see, he came to see me, an' mother was away, so we got to talk about—well, about ourselves. An then he took my hand an' said he—loved me; never had loved anybody else; would I be engaged to him? Then he broke out: 'Maybe I haven't got the right to ask it. You don't know, Alice, how weak a young fellow can be nor how he lets himself get entangled. But you are my salvation. Say you'll have me after awhile, an' no doubt think some one is trying for him who really does not care the least bit for the world.'"

"Oh, I am so glad you say that!" Miss Winford cried, making to fling her arms about Rob's neck. "Of course I wouldn't let Jack know it for the world. But, oh, Rob, I do love him better than anybody!"

"I wish you all happiness with him," Rob said, shrinking a little from the



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have, except for a broken spur tied on with twine. The right had been thrust into a woman's ragged shoe.

He came toward her as though he were a hundred years old, dropped his hat upon the ground, pushed back his enormous surplus of sleeve and held out to her a note in a cream laid envelope with a red and gold B upon the flap of it.

"How you does, Miss Rob, an how's de ole marm?" he asked mournfully. "Please, marm, tell Marse Ben I ain't forgot ter ax you dat, 'cause he say of I do, he'll give me a fine fashin book."

"I'll see to it you get that fishin book, Peter," Rob said, twirling the massive between thumb and finger. She had no thought that it related to aught save the result of the inquiries Mr. Topmark had volunteered to make. Far from taking his visit to herself, she had set it to computation for next neglect awakened by present sorrow. Now her mind said: "Mr. Topmark is recovering from his grief. I dare say this fine stationery will very shortly be in use for other things than friendly business."

"So she was a trifling startle for little Peter broke in, 'Miss Rob, please, marm, write or answer ter dat note, 'cause he—Marse Ben—say of I do, he'll fetch one back he givine tan me elive.'"

"Oh, I reckon he was only joking about that," Rob said, unfolding the missive. Next minute her hand fell. She was laughing aloud in real and uncontrolled merriment.

"So he wants the pleasure of my company for the whole big meeting," she said, eying the sheet with disdainful amusement. "What a monopolist he must think I am! And, oh, what a joke on Mrs. Winford it is that he has asked me! I have a great mind to go with him, once, just to see how green she will turn."

A quick thought shot through her and brought the red to her face. Something whispered that thus she could show Jack how little she cared for his treachery. It was treachery of the blackest sort. Alice Winford was truthful. She would never have come to Rob with her tale had there not been fact behind it.

No doubt Jack had hoped she would come. Perhaps even now he was—Go on! she would think no worse of him than she could possibly feel. He had been her friend, perhaps was still her friend. He was impulsive. It might be his compassion had carried him too far. Yet she had not willfully appealed to his sympathies. No, she could not acquit him of deliberate trifling. How glad she was to remember that she had spoken as she did. Yet how her cheeks burned, remembering his warm clasp and the quick, delicious tremor it had sent through her.

"I do, can amuse myself," Rob said very low. Then she said to Peter: "Go to the kitchen while I write my note. It will not take long, just long enough for you to eat a watermelon. Marm Liza will give you one. Do you think you care about it?"

Peter vanished like a shadow. Somehow the note took a long time, though when finished it was but a line. Rob scrawled it upon a scrap of paper, folded it narrowly and tied it in a cocked hat.

"Teddy Barton will likely say that is a true love knot," she said, with a low laugh. Then she sat holding it fast, thinking, thinking over all the week had brought. Jack—Jack did love her after a cowardly fashion. He had fallen away from her because his mother did not like her. She did like Alice Winford best of all the world. Anyway nothing concerning him could touch her any more. She was grieved, half heart-broken indeed, but it was at finding him so much less noble and manly than she had thought, not through any feeling personal to herself.

She had lost her friend, the friend who had made her large a part of life. That was harder than losing a hundred lovers. But she did not sigh over it. She seemed indeed to herself to stand above and outside herself, looking curiously at the turmoil within an alien soul. With senses tensely alert, she noted the dips and wheelings of the humming birds about the honeysuckles and how delicately the red of the woodbine trumpets melted into the gold of their tips. The vines had but sparse flowers. Rob broke a neat cluster and thrust it in her hair, then turned lightly down the long hall and passed in the back door to hear Marm Liza say:

"My Lawd, I'll Peter, 'pear hear ter me all at de sto' petty hear er."

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business this year in short. What took an fished you year, rigged up dat erway, wasser'n er skeerrow?"

"Bill mule, he forced me ober da groun, but I s'pe' it's Miss Rob whar at de bottom er my comin', Peter said, with a grin. 'I s'pe' dat er lub letter Marse Ben Topmark took an soun' her by me. Lordy, I h'p'es de answer givine tok long enough fer me ter eat neider watermillin'."

"Peter, you can go now. The note is ready," Rob called from the piazza. The lad jumped as though he had been shot, took a straining last gulp of red, juicy melon, then darted away, as grotesque a messenger as ever bore the decree of a human fate.

CHAPTER VII.

Next day was Saturday, and Jack Talbot got up firmly resolved before night came to take his mother into his confidence, then go straight to Rob, for he found himself unreasonably in love, many fathoms beyond judgment or prudence. Life without her was not worth living, worth having. He must woo her manfully and win her even in spite of herself.

Fate had other uses for his day—fate that took the guise of his lady mother. Before he was half through breakfast she said, with a calm and smiling reasonableness that put contradiction out of the question:

"Jack, dear, will you please call for Alice Winford on your way to town to-day. I know you are going. You always do when the hands have holiday. And so I promised Alice that she should go with you. She wants a few things for the big meeting tomorrow."

"But, mammy," Jack protested, "I had planned to have a holiday myself. Going to town is not much fun, not even with Miss Alice for company."

"Jack, I am ashamed of you. Such a dear girl, the very nicest in the neighborhood, and so dependent!" Mrs. Talbot said in arieved voice. "Poor child! You know she has no brother."

"Umph! But the poor child's mother has, and he is in town half the time now," Jack said ungraciously. Mrs. Talbot's mouth hardened as she said:

"I do not forget Mr. Topmark. But, Jack, you must admit it can hardly be pleasant to a delicate girl like Alice to go about with him now—that he is making himself so foolishly, so intolerably, conspicuous by his infatuation for that poor, flighty girl. If he marries her—may he will—heaven help poor Mrs. Winford to hear it."

"He won't marry her—sure of that!" Jack said furiously, getting to his feet. "I'll give the Winfolds that much comfort. And, further, if he goes philandering after Rob McGregor again, I'll wring his neck, d—n him, the bleary-eyed old brute!"

"Jack, my soul O-o-o! To think you can speak so to your own mother!" Mrs. Talbot moaned, dropping her face in her hands. "Oh, my heart is broken. I did not think you ever—"

"Mammy, mammy, do forgive me! I was a scoundrel, a villain of the deepest dye, to wound you so!" Jack cried, kneeling and slipping his arms around her. She let her head drop on his shoulder. There were tears on her cheek. Sight of them swept away Jack's last fragment of resistance. He laid his head on her knee as he had done back in the dark days when first they had struggled together to save their maintenance, saying very low: "Precious mammy, you must not cry! Don't, please! Smile at me once, and I'll go to the north pole if you say I must!"

"There is no 'must' about it, Jack," she said, still brokenly. "Son, I forget sometimes that you are a man now, with f-friends and plans that are not mine."

Jack might possibly have withstood his mother's opposition. Her resignation was too much for him. As he got up and lifted her in his arms he said:

"I want a kiss of peace, mammy, to prove that I deserve it. When I come back from town, you shall hear if Miss Alice will let herself be seen at church tomorrow with such an ill looking fellow as I am."

"I'll wring his neck, d—n him!" Alice will let herself be seen at church tomorrow with such an ill looking fellow as I am."

"I do not believe she thinks you the least bit ill looking," Mrs. Talbot said and straightway in her heart reproached herself for saying it. It sounded like an indelicate betrayal of maiden preference. She was very tender in her thought of the girl upon whom her heart was set. Though she had little doubt that Alice adored her son, nothing would have induced her to admit as much to anybody. She looked upon Alice as Jack's predestined savior from his own misleading inclination, but not for her right hand, soft and kindly and useful, it was, would she have betrayed to him the thing of which Mrs. Winford's water eyed confidences left her no manner of doubt.

Much depends upon one's viewpoint. To the dear lady thus took herself to task, her protégée was saying fretfully:

"I don't more than half believe Jack is comin'. Like as not that foot mother of his told him he must, an' hea'dn't the sort to be driven. If he don't come, my cake is all dough. He's sure to be over at Roscoe, talkin' with Rob McGregor."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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Republicans and Their Opportunity. Mr. Edward Atkinson, in an address delivered in New Jersey again takes occasion to remark that the people cannot expect prosperity until the farmers and those who depend on them are in a measure reconciled for the enormous losses they have sustained since 1893.

These losses are estimated by competent authorities to amount in the aggregate to the vast sum of \$2,000,000,000—two thousand millions of dollars. This sum represents the amount the farmers could have afforded to spend in trade, and it may be said, therefore, that every dollar has been taken out of business.

It is reassuring to know that Mr. Atkinson realizes that the farmers are that much more poorer than they would have been, even though he shuts his eyes to the real cause of the calamity. The farmers themselves know well enough what has caused their loss, and, in good time, will rally around them all the forces that depend on them and force our law-makers to provide a remedy.

Meanwhile, Mr. Atkinson should address himself to the Republican politicians who, having taken a contract to restore prosperity, are now engaged in biting their thumbs at the people. Their organs declared that Mr. McKinley was the advance agent of prosperity, and declared that as soon as he was elected the mills would be opened to labor, and the wheels of industry. These things having failed to materialize, the Republicans are doing their best, as far as can be judged, to evade the responsibility they sued for.

Instead of trying to remedy the constant and growing losses of the farmers, the Republicans are actually engaged in preparing to legislate higher prices on the goods which the farmer has to buy, and which, for lack of money, he cannot buy even at present prices. As we have said on divers occasions, we have no objection to witnessing the operations of this experiment, though we know now what the upshot of it will be. We want the whole country to see it, for it will amount to a liberal education in economics for the most ignorant person in the country.

But the most surprising feature of the McKinley victory is the fact that the Republicans themselves have lost faith in the efficacy of McKinley remedies. We do not hear any loud or constant demand for high tariff. On the contrary, some of the loudest tariff brawlers have suddenly grown sober, and are now going about from corner to corner remarking confidentially that what we really need now is a "moderate," tariff—"conservative schedules."

This is the talk around Washington, and it would be a very hopeful sign if it meant anything. The only thing it does mean is, that if a "moderate" tariff does not restore prices and prosperity, then the Republican "statesmen" can fall back on the excuse that we should have a higher tariff. Still, they must make some kind of experiment, and the sooner they make it, the sooner the people will discover for themselves the scope and character of Republican "statesmanship" so called.—Atlanta Constitution.

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Tub-washed..... 21 @ 21
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Burry..... 9 @ 12
Black..... 13 @ 15
Burry and Oiled..... 1 @ 10

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Sawdust..... 25 @ 25
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