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Ramsey Milholland by Booth Tarkington Illustrations by Irwin Myers

In his anguish he felt a paper napkin pressed gently into his hand; a soft voice said in his ear, "Wipe it off with this, Ramsey. Nobody's noticing."

So this incredibly charitable creature was still able to be his friend, even after seeing him mayonnaised! Humily marveling, he did as she told him, but avoided all further risks. He ate nothing more.

He sighed his first sigh of inexpressibility, had a chill or so along the spine, and at intervals his brow was bedewed.

Within his averted eyes there dwelt not the Milla Rust who sat beside him, but an iridescent, fragile creature who had become angelic.

He spent the rest of the day dawdling helplessly about her; wherever she went he was near, as near as possible, but of no deliberate volition of his own. Something seemed to tie him to her, and Milla was nothing loth.

He seldom looked at her directly, or for longer than an instant, and more rarely still did he speak to her except as a reply. What few remarks he ventured upon his own initiative nearly all concerned the landscape, which he commended repeatedly in a weak voice, as "kind of pretty," though once he said he guessed there might be bugs in the bark of a log on which they sat; and he became so immoderately personal as to declare that if the bugs had to get on anybody he'd rather they got on him than on Milla. She said that "just perfectly lovely" of him, asked where he got his sweet nature, and in other ways encouraged him to continue the revelation, but Ramsey was unable to get forward with it, though he opened and closed his mouth a great many times in the effort to do so.

At five o'clock everybody was summoned again to the rendezvous for a ceremony preliminary to departure; the class found itself in a large circle, standing, and sang "The Star Spangled Banner." Ordinarily, on such an open-air and out-of-school occasion, Ramsey would have joined the chorus uproariously with the utmost blatancy of which his vocal apparatus was capable; and most of the other boys expressed their humor by drowning out the serious efforts of the girls; but he sang feebly, not much more than humming through his teeth. Standing beside Milla, he was incapable of his former inelegancies and his voice was in a semi-paralyzed condition, like the rest of him.

Opposite him, across the circle, Dora Yocum stood a little in advance of those near her, for of course she led the singing. Her clear and earnest voice was distinguishable from all others, and though she did not glance toward Ramsey he had a queer feeling that she was assuming more superiority than ever, and that she was icily scornful of him and Milla. The old resentment rose—he'd "show" that girl yet, some day!

When the song was over, cheers were given for the class, "the good ole class of Nineteen Fourteen," the school, the teachers, and for the picnic, thus officially concluded; and then the picnicers, carrying their baskets and faded wild flowers and other souvenirs and burdens, moved toward the big "express wagons" which were to take them back into the town. Ramsey got his guitar case, and turned to Milla.

"Well—g'by."

"Why, no," said Milla. "Anyway, not yet. You can go back in the same wagon with me. It's going to stop at the school and let us all out there, and then you could walk home with me if you felt like it."

"Well—well, I'd be perfectly willing," Ramsey said. "Only I heard we all had to go back in whatever wagon we came out in, and I didn't come in the same one with you, so—"

Milla laughed and leaned toward him a little. "I already 'tended to that," she said confidentially. "I asked Johnnie Fiske, that came out in my wagon, to go back in yours, so that makes room for you."

"Well—then I guess I could do it." He moved toward the wagon with her. "I expect it don't make much difference one way or the other."

"And you can carry my basket if you want to," she said, adding solicitously, "unless it's too heavy when you already got your guitar case to carry, Ramsey."

This thoughtfulness of hers almost overcame him; she seemed divine.

"I'll be glad to carry the basket, too," he faltered. "It—it don't weigh anything much."

"Well, let's hurry, so's we can get places together."

Then, as she maneuvered him through the little crowd about the wagon, with a soft push this way and a gentle pull that, and hurried him up

the improvised steps and found a place where there was room for them both to sit, Ramsey had another breathless sensation heretofore unknown to him. He found himself taken under a dove-like protectorship; a wonderful, inexpressible Being seemed to have become his proprietor.

"Isn't this just perfectly lovely?" she said cozily, close to his ear.

He swallowed, but found no words, for he had no thoughts; he was only an incoherent tumult. This was his first love.

"Isn't it, Ramsey?" she urged. The cozy voice had just the hint of a reproach. "Don't you think it's just perfectly lovely, Ramsey?"

"Yes'm."

CHAPTER V.

The next morning Ramsey came into his father's room while Mr. Milholland was shaving, an hour before church time, and it became apparent that the son had something on his mind, though for a while he said nothing.

"Did you want anything, Ramsey?" "Well—"

"Didn't want to borrow my razors?" "No, sir."

Mr. Milholland chuckled. "I hardly supposed so seriously! Shaving is a great nuisance and the longer you keep



"And When You Do, You Let My Razors Alone, Young Feller!"

away from it the better. And when you do, you let my razors alone, young feller!"

"Yes, sir." (Mr. Milholland's razors were safe. Ramsey had already achieved one of his own, but he practiced the art in secret.)

"What is it you really want, Ramsey?"

"I guess I don't want anything."

"Money?"

"No, sir. You gay' me some Friday."

Mr. Milholland turned from his mirror and looked over the edge of a towel at his son. In the boy's eyes there was such a dumb agony of interrogation that the father was a little startled.

"Why, what is it, Ramsey? Have you—?" He paused, frowning and wondering. "You haven't been getting in to some mess you want to tell me about, have you?"

"No, sir."

His tone was meek, but a mute distress lurked within it, bringing to the father's mind disturbing suspicions, and foreshadowings of indignation and of pity. "See here, Ramsey," he said, "if there's anything you want to ask me, or to tell me, you'd better out with it and get it over. Now, what is it?"

"Well—it isn't anything."

"Are you sure?"

Ramsey's eyes fell before the severe and piercing gaze of his father. "Yes, sir."

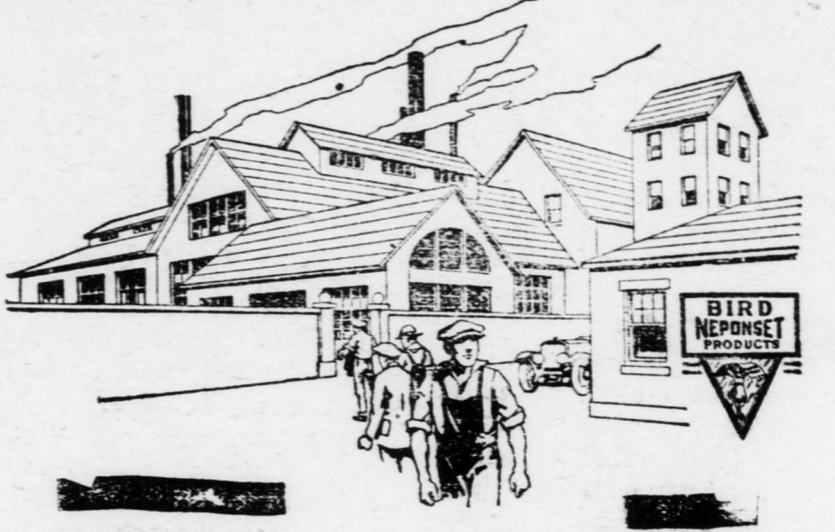
Mr. Milholland shook his head doubtfully; then, as his son walked slowly out of the room, he turned to complete his toilet in a somewhat uneasy frame of mind. Ramsey had undoubtedly wanted to say something to him and the boy's expression had shown that the matter in question was serious, distressing, and, it might be, critical.

(To be continued)

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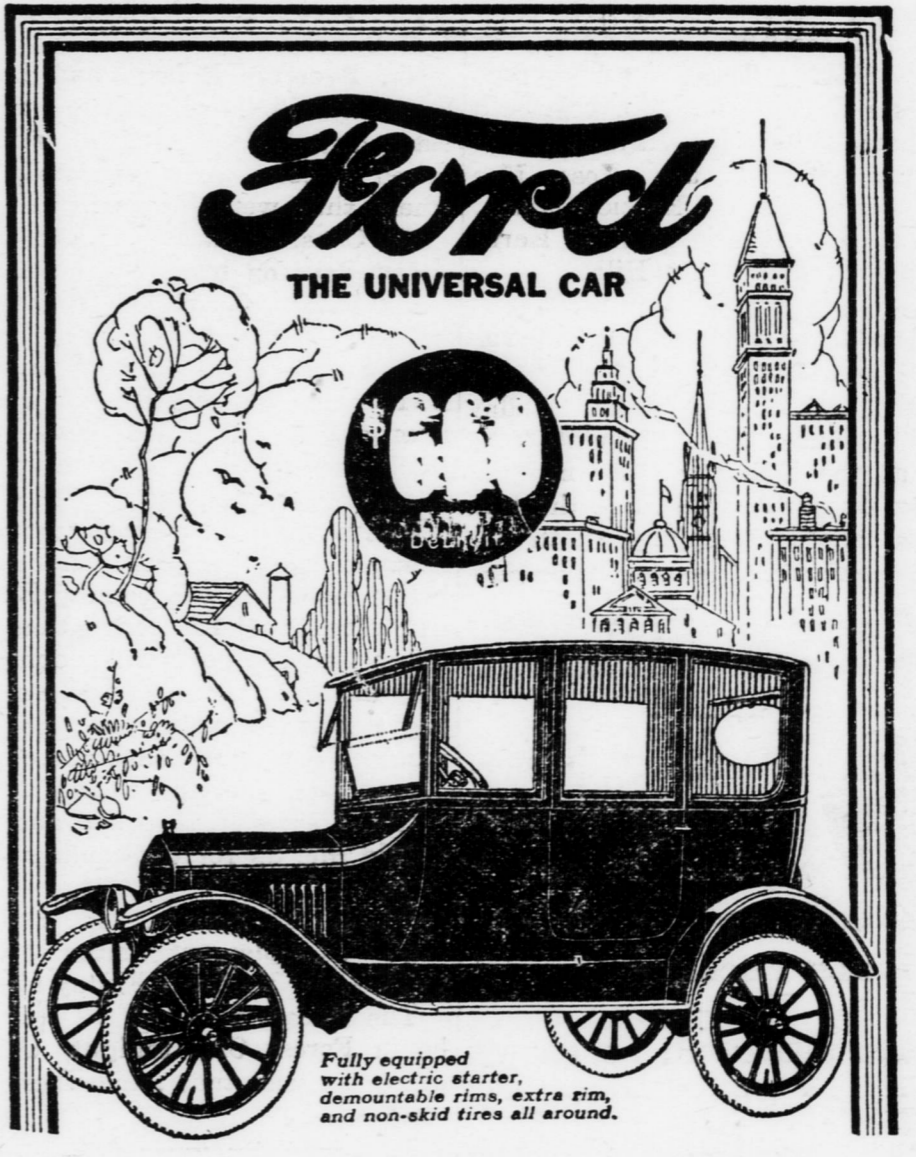
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x10:30a	109	Ellenboro-Rutherfordton	109	x10:30a
x11:20a	110	Rutherfordton-Ellenboro	110	x11:20a
12:17p	15	Monroe-Rutherfordton	15	12:17p
4:51p	16	Rutherfordton-Monroe	16	4:51p
7:00p	31	Wilmington-Raleigh and Rutherfordton	31	7:00

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