

DONALD DONALDSON, JR.

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CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF THE EXPECTED ROBBER.

DONALD DONALDSON, JR. was born May 2, 1881. He was the healthiest and altogether the finest child that ever came into the world, the most desired, the best loved. And whimsical nature exacted the smallest possible price of pain for him.

Yet permit me to reconsider that statement in the light of a better philosophy. There are those who say that in adversity one need not shout for the awakening of the gods nor in the day of superabundance dread it; that nothing comes which is not earned. It may be that a young mother reaped no more than the just reward of consistent right living from her earliest girlhood. However that may be, the fact remains that all things went incredibly well. Behold Dorothy, as pretty as ever and not a day older, tripping about the house with a song; behold the boy, healthy as a young lion and roaring when he roared, for his own good pleasure and not for any ill.

Hackett prophesied great things of him, believing that his exploits would some day necessitate a revised edition of our "Psychic Facts," a work that was then complete except for the last section, which Hackett wished to entitle "The Real Facts" despite the imputation upon the accuracy of the preceding portions.

As to his hopes of young Donald his partner spoke only once in the presence of the boy's parents.

"You'd have thought I had accused him of being cross eyed," said he to me in describing the incident, and thereafter we discussed the subject strictly in private.

Our book eventually went to the printer, but Hackett never saw it in a binding. He was stricken with an illness which rushed on to a fatal termination in such haste that it seemed all over in a day, and I was standing by the grave of my oldest friend. Afterward I could hardly bear to look at the book upon which we had labored together. I left everything to others. It had a small success and was soon forgotten, though recent events have led the publishers to print some thousands of copies from the old plates. The work is full of unfounded belief and equally unfounded doubt. I am proud only of the former, which was mostly Hackett's. A natural, honest, seemingly baseless belief is probably founded upon the knowledge of the ages and the soul's sympathy with infinite wisdom, but your doubt is likely to be your own, and you should be the more modest in the expression of it.

Pardon this digression about "Psychic Facts." The psychic fact with which this present record principally concerns itself is Donald Donaldson Jr., and from this point onward I shall stick closely to him. I have given a view of his parents because that was absolutely necessary to an understanding of his nature and of the events in which he took part. I shall now very briefly sketch his youth, which was unmarked by any incident out of the ordinary.

He was a healthy baby and a sturdy, active schoolboy when the years had brought him onward to that stage of life. Mentally he was too quick to require diligence. The tasks in the Tunbridge schools were easy for him, and he led his classes without effort. It must be remembered, however, that no other pupil had equally good home training. His mother was a teacher, both by nature and by instruction. He might have advanced more rapidly under her care alone, but the public school is a part of our creed in Tunbridge. If any school in the town had not been a good place for Donald, we should not have taken him away. We should have made the school better.

While upon this subject I will quote a curious remark that I once heard a little girl make to another in Don's hearing and somewhat in the way of a taunt:

"Don Donaldson always knows what the teacher's going to ask him. He guesses it before recitation and hunts it up in his book."

I questioned the little girl, but could not learn that she had any basis for her belief except Donald's proficiency in his studies and a vague tradition that he "could guess things." It was impossible to discover any specific instance worth mentioning in the sports of boys he was very successful, but any boy will be so who grows up ahead of his years. From the time when he reached school age he was always growing more rapidly in height and weight than the average. Moreover, he played with tremendous energy and concentration. He was fond of rough games, but neither suffered injury nor inflicted it. Indeed he presently began to be known as "lucky," and if I were to select one attribute of his which never deserted him and seemed always to make his impression upon his associates I would choose his "luck."

For luck is a personal quality. It means, as a rule, no more than an instinctive accuracy of judgment, the power that makes a bird fly south in the fall, though he knows nothing of the danger which he is escaping, having never seen a winter.

his head into a football scrimmage in a place where it will not encounter another boy's fist or his skull or his feet and to keep on doing this all through a season of the game, I shall laugh at you. Yet it is well known that injuries are not equally distributed; that neither the strong nor the prudent escape them; that the boy who doesn't get hurt is the one who has the faculty, the natural gift, the instinctive guidance, the luck. And the world's a great football game, full of flying fists and feet.

So when I say that Donald was lucky I decline to be accused of superstition or of fatalism. That which all of us believe in, though some of us affect to doubt it, the thing called luck as a personal asset, is neither ordinary good judgment nor the favor of heaven. It is the faculty of relying upon a deep seated, guiding power resident in the individual and nearly if not quite infallible.

This power is not limited by the fineness of the physical senses. It will help you to dodge an invisible microbe just as a more obvious instinct will help you to dodge a snowball. It is natural to step out of the snowball's path, but if you hesitate and try to reason about it you will get hit. And the same thing is true of that mysterious force within you which is absolutely at one with nature.

In Donald there appeared a singular combination of spontaneous judgment and deliberate action. As a child he would respond to questions slowly and with care, even when the expression of his eyes showed that the correct answer had flashed through his mind instantly. His greatest and most obstinate fault was secretiveness. Though his nature was very affectionate and his sympathy most tender, he lacked the natural tendency to confide his troubles, his joys or his hopes to those he loved, even to his mother. He had no aliveness. He was at no pains to keep a secret. He simply said nothing about it and gave no sign of its existence.

We were often grieved to find that he had left us in ignorance of some incident of his daily life, some act neither praiseworthy nor blamable or one perhaps involving a moral question beyond the appreciation of his years. When reproved for such an omission, his customary—and, I believe, sincerely—reply would be:

"Why, it never occurred to me that you didn't know."

It was frequently necessary to give him quite an elaborate explanation before he seemed to realize that we had had no means of knowing.

By all this I do not wish to give the impression that he was a markedly phenomenal boy, but it is important, of course, that I should point out all particulars in which he differed from the average. I have therefore with great care selected these three peculiarities: He thought very quickly and spoke very slowly.

He had an unconquerable habit of keeping his own affairs to himself. He enjoyed remarkably good fortune, including a notable immunity from illness and injury, in which connection I may record the fact that he never had one of the so called diseases of childhood.

In other respects he was the typical American boy. He played as much as possible and studied when his conscience or his elders compelled him to do so. He had his friendships and his childish loves. He romped gayly in the long summer evenings and committed clever and amusing mischief once in awhile, in regard to which I think that even the recording angel always waited. See Donald's confession and never attempted to know the facts in advance of it.

At the age of sixteen he was ready for college. He was then six feet in height and weighed 170 pounds. He resembled both his parents, but was generally called his mother's boy, for he had her red gold hair and bright blue eyes. His father's nature lay deeper in him. It came to the surface most plainly in moments of excitement, and at such times, even during his childhood, young Donald would exhibit the solemn, superficial calm and extreme precision of speech which had always characterized the "deacon" when in a high state of nervous tension.

If he had during his youth such psychic experiences as are not the common lot of humanity, I was not able to observe them. A few vague hints of no more importance than the school-girl's remark which I have quoted would have been the best evidence that I could have adduced previous to the month of June in the year 1899.

We were expecting him home from college in a week or two when we were surprised by receiving this telegram: "Last exam. today. Leave immediately. You will see me tomorrow."

We knew that he had intended to stay beyond class day and that the variety baseball nine, of which he was a member, had not closed its season, so the message puzzled us and gave rise to considerable anxiety. His mother telegraphed for an explanation, but no answer came. On the morning, however, came Donald himself, hale and hearty, and handsome beyond the

"Why, there's no particular reason for my coming," said he. "I merely felt like it; that's all."

Then after a pause he added: "I wonder why the dickens I did come? I can't think, unless it was because I wanted to see my very best girl."

Whereupon he put his arm across his mother's shoulders and kissed her tenderly upon the forehead and hair. To all appearances Dorothy might indeed have been his "very best girl" or perhaps his sister, but surely not his mother. She had preserved her youthful looks to a degree that is beyond the credence of the reader, so that I shall not attempt to state the truth about it. When she was thirty, the Tunbridge people spoke of her with wonder, and she looks younger now than she did then.

Donaldson, upon the other hand, has aged greatly. He is a worrying man, I am afraid, and must always be so. Moreover, he received a peculiar injury some years ago, when an old factory building which we bought from the Strobel estate collapsed while a dozen of our workmen were inspecting it with a view to ascertaining its needs. Donaldson was the first to perceive the peril, and it is said that he sustained a mass of falling timbers in the posture of Atlas long enough to permit several of his companions to crawl out to safety who would otherwise have been shut in. A maze of tradition has grown up around this incident, but it really involved nothing more than a very ready and brave use of great physical strength. Though he escaped broken bones or any specific hurt to which the best of doctors could give a location or a name, he was never the same man afterward. He began to stoop in the shoulders and to move more slowly, and upon his forty-second birthday his hair was as white as mine.

He was morbidly sensitive about the change in his looks, though he had come by it so honorably, and I have seen tears in his eyes when strangers have spoken of Dorothy as his daughter. I think that he had always held too high an idea of youth. It is a common fault and was exaggerated in him by his love of Dorothy, who would not grow old. She seemed to stand still while he was dragged onward in the grip of time. This is the natural sorrow of women, but one which men are rarely called upon to bear.

When Donald came home that June day, his father was busy about some matter of immediate importance, and so the boy and I walked down to the office, as we call it, a separate building upon the other side of the street from the factory. I was witness of a most affectionate greeting. Donaldson was very proud of his son, as he had every reason to be, and the boy loved him heartily. Afterward Donald paid his respects to the office staff, especially to old Jim Bunn, our cashier, and his crippled assistant, Tim Healy, sometimes called "Tiny" Tim, a youth who sat on a very high stool and kept the hand-somest set of books in the state of New Jersey.

I lost sight of Donald for a little while and subsequently discovered him in my private office. He was sitting in my chair, with his head thrown back and his clasped hands pressed hard across his eyes. I asked him what was the matter, and he started up and began to walk around the room in a peculiar, aimless fashion.

"Uncle John," said he at last, "every thing is all right, isn't it? You're not worried or anxious?"

"Anxious?" said I. "Certainly not. What should I be anxious about?"

"I don't know," said he, with hesitation. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have asked you the question."

"Ask me whatever you please, my boy," said I.

He resumed his restless wandering about the room.

"I wish I knew what to do," he said at last. "I feel very uneasy."

"In regard to what?" I inquired.

"That's just the point," he replied. "What is it all about? I don't know." He had a despondent and tormented air, and the sight of it carried me back a good many years to the day when I had first seen his father. It was impossible to shake my mind free of this memory. The scene of long ago in Bertram's eating house recurred with startling vividness.

I was aware of a strange sensation that this was something for which I had been waiting—a long expected occurrence. There came to me also an indescribable depression of spirit and a sense of chill.

"Do you mean"—I began. But he begged me hastily not to ask him anything.

"This is a queer business, Uncle John," said he. "I think I'm on the point of getting myself into all kinds of a tangle, and I don't want to do it the very first day I'm home. Please let me think it over."

"Speak when you are ready, Donald," said I. "It was always a habit of yours."

We were interrupted by the advent of Dorothy, who had come down from the house in a pony phaeton. She wore a sober gray gown, but it had the dainty grace of all her garments. Dorothy never takes any pains to dress either young or old. Her clothes are for Dorothy. They would not suit anybody else, and they have nothing to do with years.

Donald surveyed her with affectionate admiration.

"My incredible mother!" said he, drawing her close to him and looking down into her face.

Then I saw the tears come suddenly into his eyes. He drew a quick, deep breath and stood sharply erect, so that he seemed to grow both in breadth and height, while she looked almost like a frightened child in the embrace of his arm.

bones!"

"Did I hurt you, little mother?" said he. "Well, by the same token, nobody else ever shall."

"To what do we owe the honor of this visit?" I asked Dorothy, and she replied that she had come to take my nephew, Carleton Archer, across to the town of Solway, where our other factory was situated. Archer was an able, energetic and ambitious young man who had been brought into my service about two years before to be Donaldson's assistant and lighten his burdens. He lived at my house and was the leading spirit in all our recreations. He was blessed with unflinching activity of mind and body. He could both work and play at the same time. Often he has come to me at midnight with business plans that he had thought out during the evening, an evening devoted to ceaseless gaiety of the somewhat childish sort in which he found his chief delight and relaxation. He was an enthusiast for the gentler forms of athletics, such as women may indulge in, and as a result of his efforts there were tennis courts upon our lawn and golf links on the south slope of the hill.

After Dorothy and Carl had ridden away in the phaeton Donald remained with me until luncheon time, when he and his father and I walked up to the house together. The boy was not quite himself, as any one could see, and I was consumed with curiosity to know what lay on his mind, but experience taught me to ignore the subject.

Donald spent the afternoon with his mother, who returned from Solway, which was only a matter of five miles distant, in time for luncheon. In the evening he disappeared, and I found



"Be careful!" she cried. Him about 9 o'clock sitting on the steps of the office. I don't know how I happened to go down there and should be inclined to include it among the mysteries of the affair.

"Uncle John," said he when I sat down beside him. "You told me that I could ask you whatever I pleased. Will you tell me whether you are surrounded by thoroughly trustworthy people in your business?"

This was a rather startling question, and I answered it with another:

"Do you know anything to the contrary?"

"No," he replied. "If I did, I'd tell you, of course. I don't know anything, but I feel a lot! Is Mr. Bunn a good man?"

I replied that old Jim Bunn had been with me for thirty years and might be hanked upon so long as he lasted, which couldn't be very long, poor fellow, since his health was so bad. He then asked me a similar question in regard to every other person holding a position of any consequence in the company, even including his own father, though of course it was not a query in this case, but a naive and boyish expression of confidence. I answered soberly for them all that they were good men and true and even entered into some explanation of my method of judging men.

Donald seemed rather discouraged than cheered.

"It must be something else," said he. "You have a feeling that all's not right here," said I. "Is that why you came home so suddenly?"

"Yes, sir," he replied, and then, with hesitation: "Do you believe there's anything queer about me? I've always had an impression that you thought I wasn't quite—quite right. There have been some stories about me."

"Both your parents," said I, "possessed a power which I once thought myself competent to define and explain, but I have grown more modest." "Once possessed it?" he echoed, with what I might call joyful animation. "Then it's something a person can get rid of, outgrow? You don't always have to have it?"

"I think you know more about the subject than I do," was my answer, "and if you don't now you will some day."

"I'd like to have you tell me about my father and mother and the things that they did," said he, "but I mustn't ask you, because I tried to get it out of them long ago, and they didn't want me to know."

I applauded this view, and so we spoke of other subjects as we walked home together.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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