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THE JUCKLINS

By OPIE READ

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Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.—Bill Hawes, the hero, who tells the story, is a shy, over-grown Alabama farmer boy, whose blunders and awkward movements make him the target for many cruel jests from his brilliant and more active brothers and school-mates. He grows to manhood with little sympathy and companionship, save that from his books, and when he finally makes his debut into the neighborhood society, he celebrates the occasion by thrashing soundly a boy named Bentley, who endeavors to keep up the fun. This and his desire to be a lawyer lead him to apply for a school in western North Carolina. While walking the 15 miles from the railroad station to the school he makes the acquaintance of Lim Jucklin who takes him to his home to board. Here he makes the acquaintance of his host's family consisting of his wife, a daughter, "Guinea", and son Alf, with whom he is to room. Mr. Jucklin's pet vice is chicken fighting, much to the disgust of the rest of the family, and, as Guinea says, "when things go wrong," he has a regular set-to. School is to begin the following Monday. Alf confesses to Bill his love for Millie Lundsford, daughter of the neighborhood quire, and a schoolmate of Guinea's, in whose presence he feels abashed on account of his lack of education and polish, and asks him to teach him at home in secret. Bill who has already succumbed to Guinea's smile, through sympathy, readily consents to Alf's suggestion to call at General Lundsford's on Sunday. Unfortunately for our hero, Mrs. Bentley is visiting her brother who lives in the neighborhood and tells of his encounter with her son. The Almes boys, a lot of regular toughs, determine to get revenge, and begin by throwing chunks as he passes by on his way to school. The next day Alf goes to school with the information that they are "laying" for him a short distance away. They barricaded the door of the schoolhouse and a lively battle ensues. Failing to bring them out, the Almes boys set fire to the building, and they escape through the floor. The outrage is reported to the authorities and at the next term of court the Almes boys are given a penitentiary sentence of 15 years each. Bill has confided to Alf his love for Guinea and is then told that since a child she has considered herself engaged to Chydister Lundsford, Millie's brother, a young physician still in college. About this time Chyd comes home and all the young folks are invited to a party at the General's in his honor.

I got up with one hand resting on the piano, and stood there, nervous at first, but strangely steady later on. I told them that I could not make a speech, but that with their permission I would tell them a story, one of my own. They cried out that they would rather have a story than a speech, and I gave them a half humorous, half pathetic sketch, something that had long been running in my head and which I intended to write. What a strong confidence came upon me as I noted the effect of my words! I was drawing a picture and they were eager to see it; I was playing on a strange, rude instrument, and how they bent to catch every vibration. I was astonished at myself, thrilled with myself. And when the climax came, chairs were tipped over as if in a scramble, and a wild applause broke out. Every hand was stretched out toward me, every eye was bright with a tear. The old General grabbed me and, throwing back his great head, almost bellowed a compliment; and through it all I saw Guinea sweetly smiling. They urged me to give them another story, were almost frantic in their entreaty; they had heard the heart-beat of their own life and they must hear it again. I told another story, one over which I had fondly mused, and again the hands came out toward me, and again the General bellowed a compliment. I can scarcely recall anything else that passed that evening. Yes, I remember that as I was taking my leave, to walk across the meadows with Guinea and Chyd, Millie stood in front of me. Once or twice I thought that she had something that she would tell me, for her

isn't—hates the thing he can do best." "Your knowledge of the practical fortifies you against any advance that I might make," I replied. "I don't pretend to be practical." "Hum, I should think not," he rejoined. "Good deal of a dreamer, I take it. And you are in the right place. Everything dreams here, the farmers and even the cattle. Going to pull down the fence, eh? Guinea'll be over by the time you get it down. What did I tell you? Regular fawn, eh?" We had passed out of the meadow. They waited in the road until I replaced the rails which I had let down. The road ran along the ravine and home was in sight. I looked across toward the smooth old rock and saw a dark object upon it. We went down into the ravine and as we were coming out, a voice cried: "Is that you, Bill?" And instantly Guinea answered for me. "Yes, Alf. And here's Chyd."

"How are you, Chyd?" he shouted, and then he added: "Bill, I want to see you a minute. Stay where you are and I'll come down." I halted to wait for him. He stopped a moment to shake hands with Chyd, and then he hastened to me. "Old man, I've got something to tell you," he said. "Let's walk down this way—no, not over in the road, but up the hollow." He gripped my arm tightly, walked fast, then slowly and then stopped. "Let's sit down here, Bill." We seated ourselves on a rock. "You have been over to the General's, along with Chyd and Guinea, haven't you? Of course, you have—what's the use of asking that? Do you know what I did today? Not long after dinner I went over there determined to find out how I stood. I was brave until I got nearly to the house and then my courage failed. I stood by the fence in the blackberry briars and gazed at the house. After a while I saw her come out and start down the Ebenezer road. And then I whipped around and met her. And as I stood beside the road, waiting for her to come up I noticed for the first time that the sun was nearly down. For hours I had been standing in the briars, pretended not to see her; let on like I was hunting for a squirrel up in a tree, until she came up. Then I spoke to her and she started as if she was scared. She said that she was going over to Lum Smith's to tell the young people to come over at night, and I asked her if I might walk along with her. She said with a laugh that I might go part of the way, and then I knew that she was ashamed for anyone to see her with me. This cut me to the red, but I walked along with her. I felt that I had nothing to say that would interest her, but I kept on talking, and once in a while she would look up at me and laugh. At last, and it was just as we came within sight of Smith's place, I asked her what she really thought of Dan Stuart. I knew that this was a fool's break, and if it hadn't been I don't suppose I would have made it. She looked up at me, but she didn't laugh this time. I begged her pardon for my rudeness, and she reminded me that I was only to come a part of the way with her. I then told her that I would wait for her to come back. She said that she might not come back that way. I replied that no matter which way she came back I would see her. She went on, laughing now, and I waited, but I didn't have to wait long before I saw her coming. As she came up I asked her if she was ready to grant my pardon and she wanted to know what about. We walked along together and she began to tell me about her brother, how smart he was and all that, and I said that I didn't think that he was as smart as you, Bill; I wanted to take credit for a friendship I had formed, you see? But a moment later I was sorry, for I was afraid that she might say some-

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(CHAPTER X.—(Continued))

He stayed to supper and this angered me, for I had set my heart on walking to the General's house with

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Guinea. Alf had not returned and we wondered whether he could have gone. And when the time came to go, that impudent sprig of a doctor asked me if I would ride his horse around by the road, said that he wanted to walk across the meadow with Guinea. How I should have enjoyed knocking him on the head, but I thought that Guinea supplemented his request with a look, and I consented.

There were many horses tied at the General's fence, and there was laughter within, when I rode up, and I was reminded of the night when I had stood with my hot hand melting the frost on the fence. But I thought of what the men had said on the railway platform, of the woman whom I had seen on the train, and boldly I walked in. The General met me with a warm grasp, and was asking me if I had seen his son, when in walked the young fellow himself, with Guinea beside him. The parlor and the library, opening one into the other, were well filled with good-humored young folk, and among them were old people, none the less good-humored. I was surprised to find myself so much in demand, for everyone asked for an introduction, but with bitterness I knew that it was because I had come near being burned up in an old house. They played games, but of this they soon tired; they sang and one of the ladies plucked a sparkling fandango, and then Chydister Lundsford was called upon for a speech. He was not at all embarrassed and he talked fairly well; and when he was done they called upon me.

lips moved, but she said nothing except to bid me good night.

And where was Alf all this time? No one had spoken his name; Millie had not asked me about him. I walked briskly in advance, half happy, but, of course, with my mind on Guinea, whose low-voice reached my ears through the quiet that lay on the grass-land.

"Why don't you wait for us?" she cried. I turned about and waited, and as she came up, holding Chyd's arm, she said: "I hope your success tonight hasn't turned your head."

"And I hope that I don't deserve such a suspicion," I answered, not with bitterness, but with joy to think that she had felt my apparent indifference.

"Oh, I don't see anything to cause a spat," said Chyd, straining himself to take long steps. "Good stuff, of course, but nothing to turn a man's head—a mere bit of fancy paint. But you ought to write it. Good many people like nonsense. I mean something light, you know. Two-thirds of the human family make it their business to dodge the truth. But it is a good thing for a school teacher to make himself felt in that way."

"Perhaps Mr. Hawes doesn't intend to be a teacher all his life," Guinea replied, speaking in kindness, but with no interest, as to whether or not I was to remain a pedagogue.

"God forbid," I replied. And the young doctor gave me a sarcastic cough. "Man ought to do what he's best fitted for," said he. "Trouble is that a man generally thinks that he's fitted for something that he

was afraid that she might say some-

(Continued on page 46)