

A BRAVE PUPIL  
AND A MANLY TEACHER.

John Walsh had red hair.

If his hair had been brown, this story would probably never have been written. He had, besides the hair, a pair of blue eyes and a quick temper. An Irish ancestor who had come to America had brought with him a spade and a brogue, a keen wit, the red hair, and the quick temper. The spade and the brogue had disappeared; but the temper and the hair survived. Sometimes they skipped a generation, and flashed out in the next one keener than before.

John Walsh had them. He was teacher in the Burleighville High School. There were three rooms in the school building. The room in which John Walsh taught was called the high school room. The highest class in it was fitting for college; and the lowest—in which were Annie Day and Dennis Quinn and Edgar Button—was studying decimals. They were in the upper room only because the lower rooms had overflowed and floated them up to the front seats in the high school room. They sat there very much awed by their fate, and thankful when the flash of John Walsh's blue eyes overleaped them and landed on the big boys in the back seats.

The master's temper was no secret. "As quick as John Walsh's temper" was a town proverb. It had been the same in the boy in the man. As a pupil, he had made his way through the school flashing and fighting and exelling. There had never been such a scholar in Burleighville. The town was secretly proud of him; and when, on his return from college, he had applied for the position of teacher in the high school to help him carry on his law studies, they had welcomed him back. The life of the school had quickened and broadened. He imparted enthusiasm and knowledge in the same breath. Every pupil in the room became alert. They loved the fiery, impetuous master; and the fact that they stood a little in awe of him did not diminish zeal.

It was the last week of the spring term. John Walsh had been teaching in Burleighville two years. He was planning to go, at the end of the term, to study with the well-known firm of Marsh & Blakewell of Boston. His old mother was comfortably provided for, and there was money ahead to carry him through. The last weeks of the term promised to be balmy—indoors and out.

Three weeks before the end of the term a change had come. Word had been received from Marsh & Blakewell that there was doubt of their being able to receive a law student this year. They would write again in two weeks. Meanwhile they "remained regretfully, etc."

The sky clouded in the Burleighville high school. Signs of a storm were on the horizon. The school took in sail and steered very close to the wind, with cautious glances at the blue eyes flashing and darting above them. The front seats quaked and worked on decimals.

"There he goes!"  
"Hurry up, Annie!"  
"We'll be late!"

"Let's go 'cross the island."

The group broke into a swift, jogging run. Books and slates and dinner-pails bumped in swinging hands, and panting breaths escaped. Hurrying feet rattled the loose boards of the bridge and thudded on the soft grass as they crossed the island.

Tommy Day was last in the race. He had a round face and fat legs, and his little brown trousers were too wide. He lumbered along, holding fast to his sister's hand, and wailing now and then at the flying group. They gave no heed till the other bridge was reached. There they paused, glancing at it a little doubtfully and nudging each other to go on.

Two signs were across it: "Danger.—Not a Public Way."

It was a swinging bridge—two parallel cables with boards across and a stout rope for hand-rail. It had been thrown across for the operatives of the mill on the island.

But the island was a handy cut when one was late and the last bell ringing.

"Go on, Will." Sammy Talcott gave the boy in front a little push.

"G'on yerself."

"Hurry up! We'll be late."

The boy hesitated. Then, with a little run, his feet touched the bridge and sped swiftly across. He swayed lightly to the motion, and barely touched the hand-rope swinging beside him.

With a whoop and a chase, they followed big and little, speeding across, one at a time, and landing with a flying leap.

"Come on, Annie."

"Oh, leave him there!"

"He's a baby! Come on!"

Tommy plumped himself on the ground, his legs extended, and raised a round wall to heaven.

The group across the river regarded him with eager disgust. Come along!—"He'll come if you leave him!"—"Hurry up!"

She placed one foot on the bridge and glanced down at Tommy. Then she looked at the bridge.

The group waited. "Coward yourself,

Annie Day!" called Mary Bell, tauntingly.

"Fraid cat! Fraid cat!"

She looked over to them appealingly. "He's too little," she called back. Her voice was high and squeaking, and her small face was full of anxious care.

"Oh, leave 'em alone!"—"Come on!"—"There's the bell!" They turned with a wild scramble. Their voices floated back as they ran, and grew faint and fainter. The air was very still. The boom of the mill on the other side of the Island hummed softly in it. A sparrow, hopping in a bush by the water, looked up at the pair and gave a little trill, and hopped away.

She bent over him sternly. "Get up, Tommy; I'm going back 'round the Island with you. Now don't you cry any more." Tommy's mouth, which had opened to emit a fresh sound, closed suddenly. He snuffed and looked at her—resentfully and hopefully.

She wiped his eyes on her apron and held out her hand. "Come along," she said swiftly. They disappeared through the bushes, Tommy's fat legs wagging fast. The gray stockings and flying shoe-strings, seen from behind, had an air of renewed courage.

The door opened timidly. It was Annie—Day fifteen minutes late. She squeaked respectfully and hurriedly to her seat.

The first class in arithmetic was reciting. The master looked up with a frown.

"Wait!" he said sharply to the boy who was reciting.

The boy paused.

A hush was on the room.

Annie squeaked miserably through it, the freckles on her small face lost in the rush of color, and her little turned-up nose, with its anxious, deprecating look, glancing hastily now and then at the master's face.

The blue eye was fixed on her sternly. When she had subsided into the front seat and had bent her face to the desk to look for her book and slate, the eye turned again to the class.

"Go on," he said shortly.

The silence clicked, and the boy went on reciting.

The class in arithmetic was dismissed and the second reading class had been called. They sat erect in their seats, their books clasped, motionless, in front of them waiting the signal.

Into the silence fell a muffled clatter and a crash—Dennis Quinn had tipped over his dinner-pail. He did it once a week on an average. His feet were large. His scared face disappeared under the desk.

The master glared. "Come here, Quinn?" he said, sharply.

There was no response. Dennis, under cover of the desk, was grappling with a rolling tea-cup, cold boiled cabbage, and doughnuts and pie; and he was deaf to the world above him.

A big, swift hand reached down and seized him by the collar, throwing him half across the open space in front of the school.

He stood quivering, the broken cup in one hand and the sugared doughnut in the other. The master's face was white with rage.

"I'll teach you to come when I call!" he said between his teeth. He reached out and seized the collar again. The boy's teeth chattered and the tea-cup and doughnut flew in two directions as he shook, like a rat, in the strong hands. The master threw him from him, with a force that sent the boy sprawling under the table. Then he stood staring down at a white, freckled face at his elbow.

Little Annie Day, shaking with fright and anger, had him by the coat. Her hand shook and her white face worked helplessly.

"Don't you touch him again, you mean old thing, you!" she piped shrilly.

A deep hush was on the room. Breathless necks craned at the scene.

Dennis, from beneath the table, lifted a trembling hand and straightened his collar and groped for his doughnut.

A flood of color surged into the master's white face and out again, leaving it whiter than before.

Annie had ceased pulling. She stood with her head meekly bent, waiting for the storm to descend.

The master looked at her for a long minute. He brushed a quick hand before his eyes and looked again. The rage had gone from his face. No one in the school had ever seen it look like this.

The silence deepened.

"Take your seats," he said quietly.

He stepped to the table and touched the little bell. Dennis, from beneath, sped quickly to his seat.

At the second touch of the bell the class in reading rose from their seats and filed silently to their places before him.

\* \* \*

The school had assembled with white aprons and clean collars and shining faces. It was the last day. To-morrow would be vacation. To-day they would speak pieces and have prizes. A row of complacent mothers and a scattering of fathers lined the walls and gave glory to the day.

The pieces had been spoken and the last prize distributed, when the master rose to speak. His blue eye swept the room. In

his hand he held a small object that shone in the light.

"I have another prize to give," he said slowly. "It was not offered but it has been earned."

The school looked on, breathless.

"There is in England," went on the master's voice, "a reward that is given only for bravery. It is known as the Victoria Cross. No one can wear it who has not been very brave. It is a great honor to have it. I have here—" He glanced at the bright object in his hand—"a cross that I would like to give in the same way."

He paused. A flutter ran through the school.

"To-morrow," said the master, "I shall leave you. I may never live here again. But I should like to think that you do not forget me."

Some of the girls blinked very fast. The boys looked out of the window.

"I should like to send every year a cross like this"—he held it up—"to be given to some one who has shown special courage."

They gazed at it respectfully. Envious glances stole toward Willie Flint, in the back row. He sat very straight, his eyes fixed on the master's face, a serene look on his own.

There was no doubt as to who would have it. Willie Flint's name had been in all the local papers. He had become a hero since the day he rushed out and stopped old Mose Beckman's runaway horse. It had all been done in a minute—old Mose swaying drunkenly on the seat—a swift plunge at the horse, a turn toward the fence, a blocking of the wheel against the post, before the horse could plunge away—any boy would have done it. Willie had been very modest about it. But one or two of the other boys longed to pummel him as he gazed serenely at the master—after the droop of an eyelid toward the label of his coat.

The master looked at the cross thoughtfully, and then at the school. He opened his lips. "I give this cross," he said slowly, "because of special bravery, to—Annie Day."

The room stirred swiftly and shifted its gaze to a small girl in the front seat.

She sat with dazed countenance, blinking at the glittering cross. Her anxious little nose was upturned to it.

Dennis Quinn bent over and gave her a labored punch.

The master smiled. "Bring her here, Dennis," he said.

Dennis grinned. He reached out a hand, and, taking her by the elbow, shoved her gently to the front of the room.

The master bent and pinned the cross on the plaid shoulder, and she tiptoed back amid breathless silence. Then the school broke into cheers and clapping.

She looked up for a swift, doubtful moment, and her head fell forward on her arms. She burst into tears. They ran down her face and fell on the cross, and took the starch out of her white apron.

Not until recess, when the older girls gathered about her in the yard, fingering the cross and admiring it, did she begin to understand what it was all about.

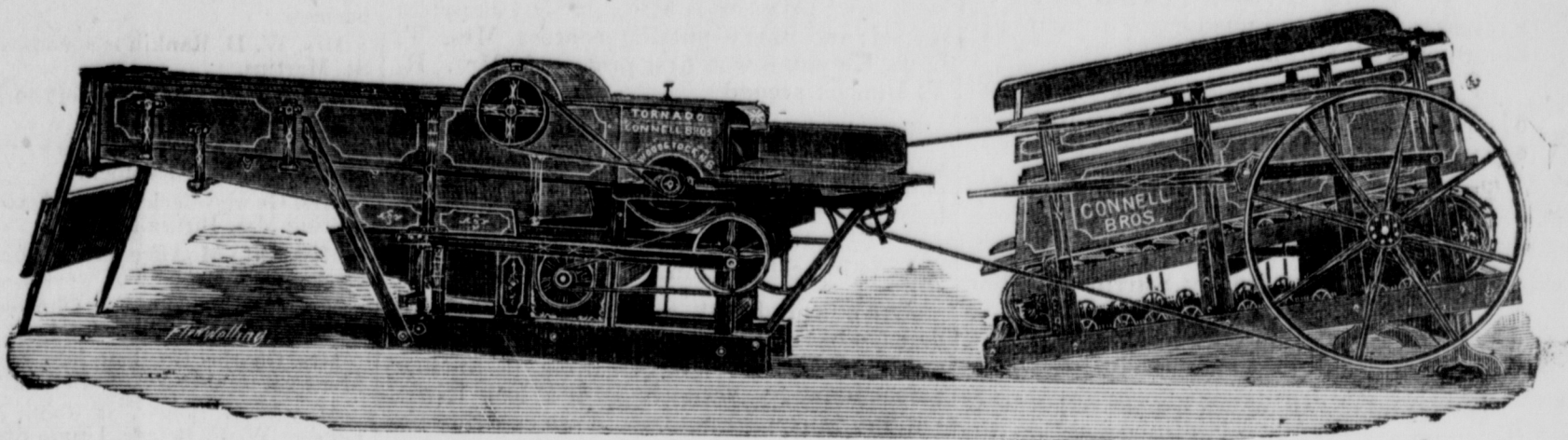
Tommy, surrounded by a group of cronies from the primary room, pointed a short, fat finger at the cross. "That's my sister!" he said, proudly.

Years later, when John Walsh was a leader at the bar, and his patience and skill and swift wit and even temper with baffling witnesses and opposing counsel were the wonder and admiration of his fellow-lawyers, he was accustomed to say, with a shrewd glint of the blue eye, that a little girl in the upper room at Burleighville had taught him to keep his temper.

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