

* * The Story Page * *

A Plucky Girl.

Debbie never dreamed that she would by and by become a heroine. Even in the wildest flights of her imagination such a thing would never have seemed a possibility. Her name was against her, for one thing. Who ever heard of a girl named Debbie becoming anything great or wonderful in any way? If her name had been Mabel or Ethelinda, now, there might have been some hope; but Debbie!

Her name had always been a source of great discomfort to her, for she thought it was so hopelessly commonplace and every day that she would never outgrow it or amount to anything worth while. Besides, she did not have any opportunities to do anything out of the ordinary line of very practical home duties. Why should she expect that anything great or heroic should ever fall to her lot?

It was just in the doing of her ordinary duties that her chance to distinguish herself came, as opportunities for heroism always do come.

"Debbie, your father and I are going to drive over to town tonight to see Cousin Eliza Ann, so you must stay at home and mind the children. Get Dottie to bed as early as you can, and you and Rob may roast some chestnuts, if you have a mind. Don't let Dottie go near the door or windows, though, for she's cold is so bad, and I'm afraid she will get the croup like she did last winter."

"Allright, mother; I'll look after things," responded Debbie, with as womanly an air as if she had been fifty instead of twelve. It was no new thing to her to be left in charge of the children, and a very careful little nurse she always was. Debbie was nothing if not trustworthy.

After the early tea the dishes were soon washed up, and the father and mother started, with a few words of caution to Debbie. The little girl was not at all timid about being left alone with the children, but two weeks ago there had been several burglaries committed in a neighboring town, and Debbie had read all the accounts. She remembered them now as she realized that she would not see her father and mother again before ten o'clock.

The burglar had never been caught. Once some one had come near enough to catching him to find out that he had one club-foot, but he was too wily to be captured. Perhaps he might come and try to rob them some day, and Debbie's heart beat fast at the thought, for she was not at all brave only just a timid little girl who had no desire for an encounter with a burglar.

She soon forgot all about her fears in her patient efforts to put wilful two-year-old Dottie to sleep. It was some time before she succeeded, and then she and Rob set about their preparations for a chestnut roast. Debbie went to a large closet at the end of the kitchen, which was pretty well filled up with all manner of odds and ends, that had been accumulating for some time.

It was only that morning that her mother had declared that she must take time soon to look over and send the greater part upstairs to the garret. The chestnuts were in a large bag on the floor, and as Debbie stooped over to take some out in the basket she saw something that made her heart stop beating and her head reel. She wondered afterwards that she did not scream at the top of her voice; but in an breathless instant she had time to think, and her sturdy common sense came to her rescue.

There was a pile of old horse blankets thrown over a broken armchair that stood at the back of the closet, and just protruding from the back of the blanket she saw a very thick-soled shoe. As surely as if she had seen it before she recognized the club-foot of the burglar, and she knew that her worst fears were realized. What should she do? She could not run away, for Dottie was soundly asleep in her crib at the end of the kitchen; and while she was trying to awaken the little sleeper the burglar would spring out upon them. No thought of making her own escape and leaving the sister who had been committed to her charged occurred to faithful Debbie.

She must stay by her post, but how could she let anyone know of the peril they were in? Did the burglar know that her father had been paid that day for several head of stock, and had the money in the house? She must not let that money be stolen, for poor father had worked so hard for it, and he needed it so much.

A bright idea flashed into the little girl's head, and she acted on it at once. In less time than it has taken to tell you all this she had come out of the closet with her chestnuts, and by a mighty effort of her will kept from showing her alarm.

She waited a moment till she could trust herself to speak steadily, and then she said to her brother: "It seems too bad, Rob, for us to have all the fun

of a chestnut roast to ourselves. I'm going to write a note and ask Mollie and Jim Sayres to come over and spend the evening with us. It would be ever so much more fun. You'll take the note over, won't you, and then we'll have a roast and a candy pull."

"All right," responded Rob, and taking a piece of paper and a stub of a pencil, Debbie sat down and wrote, with trembling fingers: "Come with help as soon as you can. The burglar with a club-foot is in our kitchen closet."

She folded it up and handed it to Rob, who never guessed upon what an errand he was despatched. "Now run as quick as you can with it," said Debbie. "The sooner they come the more fun we'll have."

Poor little Debbie! It was with a quaking heart that she saw the door open and shut behind Rob, and knew that she was left alone with the burglar except for helpless little Dottie. She stepped about the room doing little things as naturally as possible, wondering all the time whether the burglar meant to come out and attack her when she was alone, or whether he meant to wait till her father and mother were home, and they were all in their beds.

As the moments passed away the suspense became perfectly unbearable, and she felt as if she should scream. Debbie was as near a fit of hysterics as anyone ever came to be, though in all her healthy young life she had never learned that she had any such unfortunate encumbrances as nerves. But she must not scream. What should she do? What do you suppose she did do? When she felt the intense nervousness bubbling up to her lips, and she knew in another moment some sound would come despite her best efforts, she opened her mouth and sang. Never had her voice rung out as it did just now, when it was the only outlet for her terror. "Hold the fort, for I am coming," she sang, and the chorus grew louder and stronger every moment as her fears increased.

The man in hiding never dreamed that his presence was suspected when he heard that jubilant song. "Hold the fort!" fairly shouted Debbie, wondering if help would ever come. Why did not Rob run faster?

At last the sound of hurried footsteps was heard, and Mr. Sayres, with two of the other neighbors, armed with pistols enough to have killed a dozen men, and strong ropes enough to have safely secured the most vicious animal that was ever raised on a farm, rushed into the room. Debbie was sitting in the large arm-chair singing away fairly burning with excitement, and her cheeks ablaze. The words died away in a hysterical laugh as they entered the room. "In there," cried Debbie; and, rushing to the bed and throwing her arms protectively around sleeping Dottie, she quietly fainted away for the first time in her life.

"Well, if she isn't a game 'nn," said the captured burglar, with unwilling admiration, as he learned how neatly he had been captured by the little girl.

Of course, Debbie was a heroine after that, and she deserved to be, for her presence of mind and her bravery, but it didn't spoil her a bit. She was just the same willing little helper that she had always been, nor was she any braver than she had ever been about other things.

"The idea of a girl who could catch a burglar being afraid of snakes," said Rob one day.

"If Debbie had to handle a snake to save anyone else, she would do it fast enough, I'll warrant," said his father. "Give me the girl who can be a heroine in time of danger and I won't ask her to be foolhardy at other times. Debbie is the kind for me."—Christian Commonwealth.

The Patchwork Boy.

By Albert C. Caldwell.

"I wonder if he meant me? It's a funny name to call a fellow—'patchwork' boy," and Phil Dudman started, with a low, resentful whistle, for the house. "He couldn't have, but there's no one else here."

Phil Dudman had come to Granville for the summer; and it was a splendid place in which to spend one's vacation—the large stock farm of his uncle Thornton.

"If possible, teach him to work," Judge Dudman had written to his brother, at the suggestion that Phil summer on the fine farm. "He's strong and muscular; it will do him good to have some regular tasks. You'll probably find it necessary to keep him at it if he accomplishes anything. His greatest fault is in leaving things half done. But he's willing, and is capable of doing a great deal—if you can only keep him at it."

Thornton Dudman had got more than the bare statement in his brother's concisely worded letter—he had read between the lines.

"Lewis didn't say it—not in so many words—but it's there, nevertheless," glancing hurriedly over the contents. "It's as plain as printing; Phil's a little careless, and hasn't much stick-to-it-iveness. But then," Thornton Dudman slowly folded up the letter,

"in time he'll lose the one and gain the other. Phil Dudman is good boy stock, and most any boy stock is worth investing thought and patience in. It will pay excellent dividends, only let it mature."

Phil had been at the farm now two weeks, and during that time his uncle had taken particular notice that while Phil was eager to undertake many odd jobs around the place, each one had been left unfinished—there hadn't been an exception.

"I'd like to measure out the grain for the cows tonight," suggested Phil, one evening after supper, going into the barn where two of his uncle's men were doing the milking.

"All right—the grain is in the second bin—the one to the left of the door. The boxes they eat from you'll find at the further end of the barn floor. Be sure not to give them too much."

"Yes, sir," and Phil went about his work, never for a moment forgetting his merry whistle.

He had measured out the grain in six boxes when he suddenly dropped the quart he held in his hand.

"Aunt Rachel wanted the eggs. I had better get them before dark."

Leaving the grain bin uncovered, Phil ran up the ladder hand over hand to the mow above, and it was there he overheard one of the men as he finished filling the grain boxes: "If he isn't a patchwork boy, I never saw one!"

"Patchwork boy—what did he mean?" Phil stopped whistling and took the eggs into the kitchen where Aunt Rachel was doing the supper dishes.

"Patchwork boy? Why, Phil, patchwork boy? I'm sure I don't know?"

"Rachel hasn't seen Phil at work the last two weeks," thought Uncle Thornton from behind his newspaper. The sitting room door was slightly ajar. "If she had, perhaps she could tell."

Thornton Dudman was silent a moment.

"It is—I doubt if I'd thought of it—a pretty appropriate name."

He took out of his coat pocket a small memorandum book.

"I'll keep a record tomorrow. It may be just what I'm hoping for—a cure for Phil's woeful lack of application."

They were almost through breakfast the next morning, when Phil suddenly turned to his uncle.

"Do you know, Uncle Thornton, what a patchwork boy is?"

"A patchwork boy? I think so. Why do you ask?"

"Because—is there one around here?"

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised. I think I've seen evidences of one lately," laying down his napkin.

"Then—do you s'pose—"

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Phil," evasively. "I'll observe a strict watch today, and if he's around I'll keep him to supper and introduce him to you. Would you like me to?"

"Awfully! Can I speak to him?"

"Certainly, if he's about—and I judge he will be."

And he surely was, as was evidenced that night by Uncle Thornton's carefully kept memorandum.

Phil came down to supper with his hair neatly brushed; he was evidently expecting to find company in the sitting room. But he was disappointed, on opening the sitting room door, to find his uncle alone.

"Didn't the patchwork boy come around, Uncle Thornton?"

"Yes, indeed, but before I introduce him, Phil, I want you to come over and see what I have in my memorandum."

Phil stepped over to the window where his uncle was sitting in an easy chair.

"Here, Phil, listen," and Uncle Thornton began slowly to read:—

"Sent to get a box of wood for the kitchen stove—got an armful."

"Asked to take some water to the men in the field. Left it on the front steps—forgot."

"Began to weed the cucumber bed—too hot to finish; only two hills left."

"Mowed three times around the lawn—left the mower right in the yard for somebody to carry away."

"Wanted to whittle out a pin for the churn—gave it up without finishing."

"Started in to—"

"Did he begin to do all these—"

"Listen," and Uncle Thornton continued.—

"Started in to hand up his clothes—left coat and vest lying on the floor."

"Promised to kindle the fire to get the supper with—Aunt Rachel was obliged to go out and bring in the chips."

"Began—"

"I—"

Uncle Thornton looked up. There were tears in Phil's eyes. "Then there isn't any patchwork boy—you were just fooling?"

"None?" Uncle Thornton took Phil's hand questioningly.

"None only—for I did all of those things. I—I didn't know till you got to Aunt Rachel."

"Then there is a patchwork—"

"Yes, I suppose I'm he, and I've been introduced

to myself. I patchwork boy. Phil was silent. "Let's not say that," Uncle Thornton said. "He was so—but—" "No; I'll do down to supper. I don't care if I'll be late," Zion said.

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