

MISS MINERVA and WILLIAM GREEN HILL

By FRANCES BOYD CALHOUN

CHAPTER VIII.

Tellers of Tales.

The days flew rapidly by. Miss Minerva usually attempted to train Billy all the morning, and by the mid-day dinner hour she was so exhausted that she was glad to let him play in the front yard during the afternoon.

Here he was often joined by the three children whose acquaintance he had made the day after his arrival, and the quartet became staunch friends and chums.

All four were sitting in the swing one warm spring day, under the surveillance of Billy's aunt, sewing on the veranda.

"Let's tell tales," suggested Jimmy. "All right," agreed Frances. "I'll tell the first. Once there's—"

"Now, you ain't neither," interrupted the little boy. "You all time talking 'bout you going to tell the first tale. I'm going to tell the first tale myself. One time they's—"

"No, you are not either," said Lina positively. "Frances is a girl and she ought to be the first if she wants to. Don't you think so, Billy?"

"Yes, it does," championed he; "go on, Frances."

That little girl, thus encouraged, proceeded to tell the first tale:

"Once there's a man named Mr. Elisha, and he had a friend named Mr. Eljah, so his mantelpiece fell on top of his head and make him perfectly bald; he hasn't got a single hair and he hasn't got any money, 'cause mama read me 'bout he rented his garments, which is clothes, 'cause he didn't have none at all what belong to him. I s'pec' he just rented him a shirt and a pair o' breeches and wore 'em next to his hide 'thout no undershirt at all. He was dreadful poor and had a miser'ble time and mean Mr. Per'dventure took him up on a high mountain and left him, so when he come down some bad little children say, 'Go 'long back, bald head!' and they make pock-mocks on him. Seems like everybody treat him bad, so he cuss 'em, so I never see anybody with a bald head 'thout I run, 'cause I don't want to get cussed. So two Teddy bears come out of the woods and ate up forty-two hundred of 'em."

"Why, Frances," reproved Lina, "you always get things wrong. I don't believe they ate up that many children."

"Yes, they did too," championed Jimmy. "'Cause it's in the Bible and Miss Cecilia s'plained all 'bout it to me, and she's our Sunday school

teacher and 'bout the bullyest 'splain er they is. Them Teddy bears ate up 'bout a million children, which is all the little boys and girls two Teddy bears can hold at a time."

"I knows a man what ain't got no hair 't all on his head," remarked Billy; "he's a conjure-man an' me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln been talkin' to him ever sence we's born an' he ain't never cuss us, an' I ain't never got eat up by no Teddy bears neither. Hucome him to be bald? He's out in the fiel' one day 'pickin' cotton when he sees a tu'key buzzard an' he talk to her like this:

"I say tu'key buzzard, I say, Who shall I see unexpected to-day?"

"If she flop her wings three times you goin' to see yo' sweetheart, but this here buzzard ain't flop no wings 't all; she jes' lean over an' 'throw up on his head an' he been bald ever sence; ev'y single hair come out."

"Did you-all hear 'bout that Tallan Dago that works on the section gang eating a buzzard?" asked Frances.

"Now," said Billy. "Did it make him sick?"

"That it did," she answered; "he sent for Doctor Sanford and tells him, 'Me killa de big bird, me eat-a de big bird, de big bird make-a me seek.'"

"Them Dagoes 'bout the funnest talking folks they is," said Jimmy, "but they got to talk that way 'cause it's in the Bible. They 'sput on the tower of Babel and the Lord say 'Confound you!' Miss Cecilia s'plained it all to me and she's 'bout the dandiest 'splainer they is."

"You may tell your tale now, Jimmy," said Lina.

"I'm going to tell 'bout William Tell 'cause he's in the Bible," said Jimmy. "Once there's a man name—"

"William Tell isn't in the Bible," declared Lina.

"Yes, he is too," contended the little boy. "Miss Cecilia s'plained it to me. You all time setting yourself up to know more'n me and Miss Cecilia. One time they's a man name William Tell and he had a little boy what's the cutest kid they is and the devil come 'long and temp' him. Then the Lord say, 'William Tell, you and Adam and Eve can taste everything they is in the garden 'cepting this one apple tree; you can get all the pears and bunnanas and peaches and grapes and oranges and plums and persimmons and scalybarks and fig leaves and 'bout a million other kinds of fruit if you want to, but don't you reach a single apple.' And the devil temp' him and say he going to put his top on a pole and everybody got to bow down to it for a idol and if

what he call 'No-To-Kink' what he say would take the kink out of any nigger's head. An' Aunt Cindy bought a bottle fer to take the kink out of her hair an' me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln put some on us heads an' it jes' make mine curlier'n what it was already. I's 'shame' to go roun' folks with my cap off, a-lookin' like a frizaly chicken. Miss Cecilia say she like it though, an' we's engaged. We's goin' to git married soon's I puts on long pants."

"How long you been here, Billy?" asked the other boy.

"Well, I don't know perxactly, but I been to Sunday-School four times. I got engaged to Miss Cecilia that very firs' Sunday, but he did n' know it till I went over to her house the nex' day an' to' her 'bout it. She say she think my hair is so pretty."

"Pretty nothin'," sneered his rival. "She jus' stuffin' you full'er'n a tick with hot air. It just makes you look like a girl. There's a young lady come to spend a week with my mama not long ago and she put somepin' on her head to make it right yeller. She left the bottle to our house and I know where 't is. Maybe if you'd put some o' that on your head 'twould take the curl out."

"Tain't nothin' a-goin' to do it no good," gloomily replied Billy. "'Twould jes' make it yeller'n what 'tis now. Won't I be a pretty sight when I puts on long pants with these here yaller curls stuck on top of my head? I'd nuther sight ruther be bal'-headed."

"Bennie Dick's got 'bout the kinkiest head they is."

Bennie Dick was the two-year-old baby of Mrs. Garner's cook, Sarah Jane.

"It sho' is," replied Billy "Wouldn't he look funny if he had yaller hair, 'cause his face is so black?"

"I know where the bottle is," cried Jimmy, snatching eagerly at the suggestion. "Let's go get it and put some on Bennie Dick's head and see if it'll turn it yeller."

"Aunt Minerva don't want me to go over to yo' house," objected Billy. "You all time talking 'bout Miss Minerva won't let you go nowhere; she sure is imperdunt to you. You 'bout the fraidest boy they is."

"Come on, Billy," pleaded Jimmy. "The little boy hesitated. 'I don't want to git Aunt Minerva's dander up any mor'n I jes' natchelly 'bout to,' he said following Jimmy reluctantly to the fence; "but I'll jes'

"Once upon a time," said Lina,

take a look at that bottle an' see if it looks anything 't all like 'No-To-Kink.'"

Giggling mightily, they jumped the dividing fence and slipped with stealthy tread around the house to Sarah Jane's cabin in the back-yard.

Bennie Dick was sitting on the floor before the open door, the entrance of which was securely barricaded to keep him inside. Sarah Jane was in the kitchen cooking supper; they could hear her happy voice raised in religious melody; Mrs. Garner had not yet returned from a card party; the coast was clear, and the time propitious.

Jimmy tiptoed to the house and soon returned with a big bottle of a powerful "blondine" in one hand and a stick of candy in the other.

"Bennie Dick," he said, "here's a nice stick of candy fer you if you'll let us wash your head."

The negro baby's thick, red lips curved in a grin of delight, his shiny ebony face beamed happily, his round black eyes sparkled as he held out his fat, rusty little hands. He sucked greedily at the candy as the two mischievous little boys uncorked the bottle and poured a generous supply of the liquid on his head. They rubbed it in well, grinning with delight. They made a second and a third application before the bottle was exhausted; then they stood off to view the result of their efforts. The effect was ludicrous. The combination of coal black skin and red gold hair presented by the little negro exceeded the wildest expectations of Jimmy and Billy. They shrieked with laughter and rolled over and over on the floor in their unbounded delight.

"Hush!" warned Jimmy suddenly. "I believe Sarah Jane's coming out here to see 'bout Bennie Dick. Let's get behind the door and see what she's going to do."

"Hit were good fer Paul an' Silas. Hit were good fer Paul an' Silas. Hit were good fer Paul an' Silas. An' hit's good enough fer me."

CHAPTER IX.

Changing the Ethiopian.

Billy and Jimmy were sitting in the swing.

"What makes your hair curl just like a girl's?" asked the latter. "It's 'bout the curliest hair they is."

"Yes, it do," was Billy's mournful response. "It done worry me 'mos' to death. Ever sence me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln's born we done try ev'rything fer to get the curl out. They's a Yankee man come 'long las' 'bout a year ago and he had some stuff in a bottle

what he call 'No-To-Kink' what he say would take the kink out of any nigger's head. An' Aunt Cindy bought a bottle fer to take the kink out of her hair an' me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln put some on us heads an' it jes' make mine curlier'n what it was already. I's 'shame' to go roun' folks with my cap off, a-lookin' like a frizaly chicken. Miss Cecilia say she like it though, an' we's engaged. We's goin' to git married soon's I puts on long pants."

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CHAPTER X.

Lo! The Poor Indians.

Billy had just decided to run down to the livery stable to pay Sam Lamb a visit when the gate opened, and Lina and Frances, their beloved dolls in their arms, came skipping in.

Jimmy, who had had a difference with Billy and was in the sulks on his own side of the fence, immediately climbed over and joined the others in the swing. He was lonesome and the prospect of companionship was too alluring for him to nurse his anger longer.

"Aunt Minerva's gone to the Aid Society," remarked the host. "Don't y' all wish it met ev'y day 's'id er jes' meetin' ev'y Monday?"

"Yes, I do," agreed Frances, "you can have so much fun when our mamas go to the Aid. My mama's gone too, so she left me with Brother and he's writing a love letter to Ruth Shelton, so I slipped off."

"Mother has gone to the Aid, too," said Lina.

"My mama too," chimed in Jimmy, "she goes to the Aid every Monday and to card parties nearly all the time. She telled Sarah Jane to 'tend to me and Sarah Jane's asleep. I hear her snoring. Ain't we glad there ain't no grown folks to meddle? Can't we have fun?"

"What'll we play?" asked Frances, who had deliberately stepped in a mud puddle on the way, and splashed mud all over herself. "Let's make mud pies."

"Now, we ain't a-goin' to make no mud pies," objected Jimmy. "We can make mud pies all time when grown folks 'r looking at you."

"Let's play sumpin' what we ain't never play, sence we's born," put in Billy.

"I hope grandmother won't miss me," said Lina, "she's reading a very interesting book."

"Let's plan Injun!" yelled Jimmy; "we ain't never play' Injun."

This suggestion was received with howls of delight.

"My mama's got a box of red stuff that she puts on her face when she goes to card parties. She never puts none on when she just goes to the Aid. I can run home and get the box to make us red like Injuns," said Frances.

"My mother has a box of paint,



floats Sarah Jane's song nearer and nearer.

"Hit's de old time erligion, Hit's de ole time—"

She caught sight of her baby with his glistening black face and golden hair. She threw up her hands, closed her eyes, and uttered a terrified shriek. Presently she slowly opened her eyes and took a second peer at her curious-looking offspring. Sarah Jane screamed aloud:

"Hit's de handiwork er de great Jehoshaphat! Hit's de Marster's sign. Who turn yo' hair, Benny Dick?" she asked of the sticky little pockaniny gitting happily on the floor. "Is a angel been here?"

Benny Dick nodded his head with a delighted grin of comprehension.

"Hit's de doing er de Lord," cried his mother. "He gwine turn my chile white an' de done begunt on his head!"

There was an ecstatic giggle from behind the door.

Sarah Jane rushed inside as fast as her mammoth proportions would admit and caught a culprit in each huge black paw.

"What yer up ter now, Jimmy Garner?" she asked. "What yer been er-doin'?"

Sudden suspicion entered her mind as she caught sight of the empty bottle lying on a chair. "You been er-puttin' suthin' on my chile's head! I knows yer, I's er-gwine ter make yo' mammy gi' ye de worses' whippin' yer eber got an' I's gwine ter take dis here William right ober ter Miss Minerva. Ain't y'all 'shame' er yer-selves? Er tamperin' wid de ha'r what de good Lord put on er colored pusson's head an' er-tryin' fer ter scarify my feelin's like yer done. An' yer hear me, I's gwine see dat somebody got ter scarify yer hides."

"If that ain't just like you, Billy," said Jimmy, "you all time got to perpose to make nigger heads yeller and you all time getting little boys in trouble. You 'bout the smart Alexist Jack-rabbit they is."

"You perposed this here hair business yo'self, Jimmy," retorted his fellow-conspirator. "You's always blamin' yo' meanness on somebody else ever sence you's born."

"Hit don't matter who perposed hit," said Sarah Jane firmly; "meanness has been did, an' y' gotter be structified on de place pervided by natur' fer ter let my chile erlono."

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