Richards Laura Elizabeth Howe

The Wooing of Calvin Parks

Laura Richards

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCING THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

"If I'm not mistaken," said Calvin Parks, "this is the ro'd where Sam and Sim used to live!"

He checked his horse and looked about him. "And there – well, I'm blowed if that ain't the house now. Same old pumpkin-color; same old well-sweep; same old trees; it certinly is the house. Well!"

He looked earnestly at the house, which seemed to give him a friendly look in return; a large, comfortable yellow house, with windows of cheerful inquiry, and a door that came as near smiling as a door can. Two huge elms mounted guard over it, and touched tips with a group of splendid willows that clustered round the ample barnyard; the front yard was green and smooth, with a neat flagstone path; a vast and friendly-looking dog lay on the broad door-step; everything about the place looked comfortable and sociable.

"If that ain't a pictur'," said Calvin Parks, "I never see one, that's all."

He drove into the yard, and clambered rather slowly out of his wagon. He was a tall, light-limbed, active-looking man, but the wheels seemed to be in his way.

"I never shall get used to this rig," he muttered; "I'd ought to have a rope and tayckle to hi'st me out."

He cast a disapproving look at the wagon, and hurried toward the house. The vast dog rose, shook himself, yawned, and sniffed approvingly at his trousers.

"That's right, son!" said Calvin. "A friend is a friend, in pants or tails! Now let's see where the boys be. I must wipe my feet good, though, or I shall have the old lady after me!"

He opened the front door; and after casting a look of friendly recognition round the hall, tapped on the door at his left.

"Come in!" said a voice.

"Sam!" said Calvin Parks; and he stepped into the room.

"How are you, Sam?" he began. "How are you – why, where's Sim?" he added in an altered tone. "Where's your Ma?"

A little man in snuff-brown clothes, with a red flannel waistcoat, came forward.

"Calvin Parks," he said, "don't tell me this is you!"

"I won't!" said Calvin. "I'll tell you it's old John Tyseed if that'll do you any good. What I want to know is, where's the rest of you? Don't tell me there's anything happened to your Ma and Sim, Sam Sill!"

The little man cast a curious look toward a door that stood ajar not far from where he sat. He was silent a moment, and then said in a half whisper, "Ma is gone, Calvin!"

"Gone!" repeated the visitor. "What do you mean by gone?"

"Dead!" said the little man. "Departed. No more."

"Sho!" said Calvin Parks. "Is that so? Well, I'm sorry to hear it, Sam! And I'm – well, astounded is the word. Your Ma gone! Well, now! she was one, somehow or other of it, never seemed as if she *could* go."

"I expect," said Mr. Samuel Sill in the same subdued tone, "she is with the blessed;" he reflected a moment, and added, "and with father!"

"To be sure! naturally!" said Calvin Parks reassuringly. "How long since you laid her away, Sam?"

"We laid her away," said Sam, "a year ago, Calvin. She'd been poorly for a long spell, droopin' kind of; nothing to take a holt of. Kep' up round and done the work, but her victuals didn't relish, nor yet they didn't set. She knew her time was come. She said to me and – the other one," (again he cast a curious look toward the open door), "sittin' in this very room – 'Boys,' she says, 'my stummick is leavin' me; and without a stummick I have no wish to remain, nor yet I don't believe it would be wished. I expect I am about to depart this life.'"

"I want to know!" murmured Calvin Parks sympathetically. "She come as close to it as that, did she?"

"About twice't a week," the little man continued, "she'd call us to come in after she was in bed, and say she'd most likely be gone in the mornin', and to be good boys, and keep the farm up as it should be. First for a time we tried to reason her out of it like, for the Lord didn't seem in no hurry, nor yet we weren't; but one night she seemed set on it, told us goodbye, and all the rest of it. 'Well, mother!' I says, 'if you see father, tell him the hay's all in!' I says. Sure enough, come morning she was gone. Cut down like a – well!" he paused again and reflected. "I don't know as you'd call Ma exactly a flower, nor yet was she what you'd call real fruity, though ripe."

"Call it grain!" said Calvin Parks gravely. "First crop oats, or good winter wheat; either of them, Sam, would represent your Ma good. Well, I certinly am astounded to find that she is gone. But that don't tell me the rest of it, Sam. Where's Sim?"

"Sim," replied the little man, turning his eyes toward the open door; "Sim is – "

At this moment a singular sound came from beyond the door; a sound half cough, half call, and all cackle.

"That's Sim!" said Mr. Sam. "You'll find him in there!"

Calvin Parks's large brown eyes seemed to grow quite round; he stared at the little man for a moment; then "Red-top and timothy!" he muttered; "there's something queer here!" and stepped quickly into the other room.

A stranger would have said, here was a juggler's trick. The little snuff-colored man sitting hunched in the low chair was apparently the same man, but he had changed his red waistcoat for a black one, and had whisked himself in some unaccountable way into another room. But Calvin Parks knew better.

"How are you, Sim?" he said.

"Calvin," said the second little man, "I am pleased to see you, real pleased! Be seated! In regards to your question, I am middlin', sir, only middlin'."

Calvin Parks sat down, his eyes still round and staring. "What's the matter?" he asked abruptly.

"Some thinks it's lumbago," said the little man; "and more calls it neurology. There is them," he added cautiously, "as has used the word tuber-clossis; I don't hold with that myself, but I'm doctorin' for all three, not to take no chances."

"All that be blowed!" said Calvin Parks. "What's the matter between you two? Why are you sittin' here and Sam in t'other room, you that have set side by side ever since you knew how to sit? Siamese Twins you've been called ever since born you was; dressed alike, fed alike, and reared alike; and now look at you! What's the matter, I say?"

The little man cast a look toward the door, a duplicate of the look which Calvin Parks had seen cast from the other side of it. Then he leaned forward, and fixed his sharp gray eyes on his visitor.

"Calvin Parks," he said, "you never was a twin!"

"No, I warn't!" said Calvin Parks.

The little man waved his hand. "That's all I've got to say!" he said. "We was. That's the situation. I've nothin' against Samuel, nor he as I knows on against me; but we have had a sufficiency of each other, and we are havin' us a rest, Calvin. We eat together, but otherwise we don't. But I'll tell you one thing," he added, leaning forward and dropping his voice, while his eyes narrowed to pinpoints. "When I don't like a man, I don't like him any better for bein' twin to me, I like him wuss!"

He leaned back again, and then repeated aloud, "Not that I've anything against Samuel, or fur as I know, Samuel against me."

"Well! may I be scuttled," said Calvin Parks, "if ever I see the beat of this! Why, Sim Sill – "

At this moment another door opened behind him, and a clear, pleasant voice said,

"Dinner's ready, Cousin Sim! Cousin Sam, dinner's ready!"

Mr. Simeon Sill made a gesture of introduction. "Calvin," he said, "let me make you acquainted with my cousin Miss Sands!"

Calvin Parks rose and made his best bow. "Miss Hands," he said, "I am pleased to meet you, I'm sure!"

CHAPTER II
BROTHERLY WAYS

"You'll stay to dinner, Cal?" said Mr. Sim.

"Calvin, you'll eat dinner with us?" cried Mr. Sam.

Calvin Parks looked at Miss Sands, and saw hospitality beaming in her face.

"Thank ye, Sim;" he said, "I'm obliged to you, Sam; I'll stay with pleasure, Miss Hands!"

It was a singular meal. Mary Sands sat at the head of the table, with all the dishes before her, and helped the three men largely to the excellent boiled dinner. Calvin Parks faced her at the foot, and the twins sat on either side. They talked cheerfully with their visitor and Miss Sands, but did not address each other directly.

Calvin remarked upon the excellence of the beef. "Fancy brisket, ain't it?" he asked.

"Yes!" replied Mr. Sim. "It's the best cut on the critter for cornin'."

Mr. Sam looked at his cousin. "Tell him I don't agree with him!" he said.

"Cousin Sim, Cousin Sam don't agree with you!" said Mary Sands placidly.

"Tell him the aitch bone is better!" continued Mr. Sam with some heat.

"He says the aitch bone is better!" repeated Mary Sands.

"Tell him it ain't!" said Mr. Sim.

"Cousin Sim says it ain't, Cousin Sam," said Mary, "and that's enough on the subject."

She spoke with calm and cheerful authority; the twins glowered at the corned beef in silence.

"Speakin' of critters," said Calvin Parks hastily, "how many head are you carryin' now, boys?"

There was no reply. Looking at Miss Sands, her eyes directed his glance to Mr. Sam.

"How many head are you carryin', Sam?" he repeated.

"Twenty!" replied Mr. Sam.

"That's a nice herd," said Calvin. "Hereford, be they?"

"Holstein!" said Sam. "They're the best milkers, and the best beef critters too."

Mr. Sim looked at Mary Sands with kindling eyes. "Tell him it ain't so!" he said. "Tell him he knows better!"

"Cousin Sim says it ain't so, and you know better, Cousin Sam," said Mary Sands.

"Tell him he knows wuss!" grunted Mr. Sam.

"Cousin Sam says you know wuss, Cousin Sim, and that will do!" said Mary Sands quietly.

It was the same at dessert. Calvin praised the admirable quality of the pie.

"Now this," he said, "is my idee of a squash pie. It isn't slickin' up and tryin' to look like custard, nor yet it don't make believe it's pumpkin; it just says, 'I am a squash pie, and if there's a better article you may let me know.'"

"I'm real pleased you like it," said Mary Sands modestly; "it's Cousin Lucindy's recipe. She must have been a master hand at pies."

"She certinly was!" said Mr. Sam. "Squash and pumpkin and cranberry, Ma was fust-rate in all; but mince was her best holt."

"Tell him it warn't," said Mr. Sim, fixing his cousin with a burning eye. "Tell him her apple bet it holler."

"Cousin Sim says it warn't, Cousin Sam, and her apple bet it holler," repeated Mary Sands cheerfully.

"Tell him he's a turnip-head!" said Mr. Sam.

"I don't repeat no calling names," said Mary Sands. "Mr. Parks, will you have some more of the pie? Cousin Sam, another piece? Cousin Sim? well, then, the meal is finished, Cousins!"

Each twin, as he rose from the table, cast a glance of invitation at Calvin Parks; but he hastily seized a dish. "I'm going to help Miss Hands clear off," he said; and he followed Mary Sands into the kitchen.

"Oh! Mr. Parks," said Mary, "you no need to do that! I'm well used to washing dishes!"

"I should suppose you was," responded Calvin Parks gallantly, "but if you'll let me help, Miss Hands, it would be an accommodation, now it would. Fact is," he continued, "I expect I shall bust if I don't find out what this all means, and I want you to tell me. How long have the boys been actin' this way?"

"How long?" repeated Mary Sands. "Ever since I come. Haven't they always been so?"

"Always been so?" repeated Calvin Parks. "Why, Miss Hands – why – " he looked about him helplessly. "Well, I am blowed!" he said plaintively. "I'll have to ask you to excuse the expression, Miss Hands, but I really am! Perhaps I'd better tell you how things used to be in this house, and then you can see how – how blowed I am at findin' them as they be."

"I should be real pleased if you would!" said Mary Sands. "I've been wonderin' and wonderin', ever since I come, but there's no near neighbors, you know, and I don't know as I should have cared to ask 'em if there had been; but you are a friend of both, I see, and it seems different."

"I'll wash to your wipin'," said Calvin Parks, taking off his coat and rolling up his shirt sleeves, "and we can talk as we go; I'm an old hand at dishes too. Well! Friend of both? well, I should remark! I lived on the next ro'd, not more'n half a mile across lots. You might have seen a burnt cellar hole? – Well, that was our home. First I remember of Sam and Sim was them sittin' together in their chair. 'Twas a queer chair, made o' purpose to hold the two of 'em. There they set, and tell 'tother from which was more than I could do, or anybody else for that matter, except their Ma. They might ha' been nine then, and I s'pose I was four or five. I rec'lect I went up to 'em and says, 'Be you one boy cut in two?' Cur'us things children are, sure enough. They was dressed alike, then and always; fed alike, and reared alike, every human way of it. Doctored alike, too, poor young ones! One time when they was babies the wrong one got the medicine, and after that Ma Sills always dosed 'em both, whichever was sick. 'There's goin' to be no partiality!' she says; 'the Lord made them children off the same last, and they're goin' to stay the same!' Why, Miss Hands, she wouldn't so much as allow they could *think* different. If they got to scrappin', same as all boys do, y'know, Ma would take 'em by the scruff of their necks and haul 'em up to the looking-glass. 'Look at there!' she'd say. 'Do you see them boys? do you see the way they look? Now I give you to understand that your souls inside is just as much alike as your bodies outside. I ain't sure but it's two halves of the same soul,' she'd say, 'and do you think I'm goin' to let 'em quarrel? You make up and love each other pretty right away, or I'll take the back of the hairbrush to you both!'

"So they'd make up; they had to! There! Ma Sills certinly did rule the roost, and no mistake. She'd been a widder ever since the boys were a year old, so she had to do for herself and them, and she done it. She was a master hand; a master hand!"

He shook his head, and washed the platter vigorously.

"Did it keep on that way after they grew up?" asked Mary Sands.

"Did it?" repeated Calvin. "Yes, it did! Neither one of 'em could stand against their Ma. Folks thought the boys would marry, and that would break it up like, but Ma wouldn't have that. 'When I find two girls as much alike as they is boys,' she'd say, 'we'll talk about gettin' married; till then they're wife enough for each other.'

"That was when Sam was takin' notice of Ivy Bell. She was a girl from Vermont, come visitin' Ammi Bean's folks; her mother was sister to Ammi. She was a pretty, slim little creatur', and I expect Sam thought she was all creation for a spell; but she never could tell him from Sim, and Sim didn't take to her no way, shape or manner. That suited their Ma first rate, and she'd take a day when Sam was off to market, and then she'd send Sim on an errant down to Bean's. I rec'lect I was there one day when he come, – I guess I was some taken with Ivy myself, for she was a pretty piece. When she

see him she begun to roll her eyes and simper up the way gals do – I ask your pardon, Miss Hands! I don't mean all gals, nor I shouldn't want you to think it."

"Thank you, Mr. Parks!" said Mary demurely; "I won't!"

"Well, she did," said Calvin; "no two ways about that. 'Good mornin', Mr. Sills,' she says, 'was you wishin' to see anyone?'

"'Yes!' says Sim, 'I want to see Mr. Bean.'

"'He's down in the medder,' says Ivy; and then she kind o' hung down her head and looked up at him sideways. 'I don't suppose there's anyone else would do instead, Mr. Sills?'

"'No, there ain't!' says Sim; and off he legged it to the medder."

"My!" said Mary Sands, "What did she say to that?"

"Why, I snickered right out in meetin'," said Calvin. "I just couldn't help it; and she was so mad she whisked into the house and slammed the door in my face, and that was the last *I* saw of Ivy.

"But next time poor old Sam come along, slicked up for courtin', with his heart in his vest pocket all ready to hand out, why, he got the door in his face, too, and had to start in all over again. Well, sir – I beg your pardon, ma'am, or I should rather say miss – that was pretty much the way things was when I quit home, and that was pretty much the way I expected to find 'em when I come back. It didn't seem as if a trifle of fifteen years was going to make much difference in Ma Sill, nor yet in Sam and Sim; they seemed sort of permanent, don't you know, like the old well-sweep, or the big willows. I s'pose when Ma was laid away the boys commenced to feel as if they was two minds as well as two bodies. You don't know what started them actin' this way?"

Miss Sands reflected a moment.

"I shouldn't be surprised," she said, "if it was their vests."

"Their vests?" repeated Calvin.

"Yes! You noticed Cousin Sam had on a red one and Cousin Sim a black one? Well – but suppose I tell you my end of it, Mr. Parks, just as it come to me."

"I should be fairly pleased to death if you would!" said Calvin Parks. "That's what I've been layin' for right along. Yes, I spotted them vests first thing, I guess it's the first stitch ever they had on that was anyways different. Well! you was going to say?"

Mary Sands was silent a moment, gazing thoughtfully at the blue platter she held.

"I'm a lone woman!" she said at last. "I was an only child, and parents died when I was but young. I've kept house these ten years for my uncle over to Tupham Corners. He was a widower with one son, and a real good man; like a father to me, he was. Last year he died, and left the farm to Reuben, – that was his son, – and the schooner, a coasting schooner he was owner of, to me. I expect he thought – " she paused, and a bright color crept into her warm brown cheek; "well," she continued, "anyhow, Reuben and I didn't hit it off real well, and I left. I was staying with friends when a letter come from Cousins statin' their Ma had passed away and would I come to keep house for them. I'd never visited here, but Cousin Lucindy was own cousin to my mother, and we'd met at conference and like that, but yet I'd never seen the boys. Well, I thought about it a spell, and I thought I'd come and try, and if we suited, well and good, and if not there'd be no bones broke. So I packed up and come over by the stage. Well!"

She stopped to laugh, a little mellow tinkling laugh. "I guess I sha'n't forget my first sight of Cousins. I come up the steps kind of quiet. The door stood open, and I knocked and waited a minute, hearin' voices; then I stepped inside the hall. The front sittin'-room door was open too, and Cousins was standin' back to it, them same brown backs, each one the other over again, and one of them was holdin' a red vest in each hand. I coughed, but they didn't hear me, and he went right on speakin'.

"'Ma bought this red flannel at the bankrupt sale,' he said. 'She allowed 'twould keep us in vests and her in petticuts and thro't bandages for ten years, and I'm not going to begin to waste the minute she's under ground. She would say, "you go on wearin' them vests!" and I'm goin' to.'

"'She wouldn't!' said the other. 'She'd say, "you go on wearin' the coat and pants, but if you are in mournin' for me, show it by puttin' on a black vest, as is no more than decent."'

"'I can mourn just as well in red flannel as what I can in black!' says the first one.

"'You can't!' says the other.

"'I'll show you whether I can or not!' says the first.

"And at that they turned face to face to each other and sideways to me, and each riz up his right arm – honest, Mr. Parks, I couldn't believe but 'twas the same person and him reflected in a mirror, they was so like. I thought they was goin' to strike each other, so I stepped forward and said, 'Good mornin', Cousins; I've come!'"

Again she tinkled a laugh. "You never see men more surprised than what they was; but they shook hands real pleasant, made me welcome, and then walked one off one way and one the other, and so it has remained. At first they wanted to eat in different rooms, but I told 'em I couldn't have that, nor yet I couldn't have no quarrellin', so now we get on real pleasant, as you see. But isn't it comical? There! when I see them – "

At this moment a prolonged cough was heard from the direction of the sitting-room; and at the same time a thin high voice called, "Calvin! you got lost, or what?"

"Cousins are gettin' uneasy!" said Mary Sands. "You'd best go in, Mr. Parks, and I'm a thousand times obliged to you for helpin' me with the dishes. You are an elegant washer, I must say."

"Miss Hands," replied Calvin Parks as he drew on his coat, "the man who wouldn't wash good to such wipin' as yours wouldn't deserve to eat out of a dish. The thanks is on my side for enjoyin' the privilege."

CHAPTER III
CALVIN'S STORY

Passing from the kitchen into the back sitting-room, Calvin found Mr. Sim hunched in his chair, looking injured.

"I didn't know but you had gone without comin' in," he said; "seems to me you've ben a long time with them dishes."

"They're handsome dishes!" replied Calvin. "You wouldn't have me hurry and risk droppin' of them, would you? Well, Sim, I s'pose I must be joggin' along."

"What's your hurry? what's your hurry?" cried Mr. Sim peevishly. "I didn't have no chance to talk at dinner, there was so much clack goin' on;" and he cast a baleful glance at the doorway. "I want to know where you've ben and what you've ben doin' all these years, Calvin. Sit down and fill your pipe, and let's hear about it."

Calvin looked about him. "Well!" he said slowly, "I don't know as there's any such drivin' hurry. Hossy'll be pleased to stay a bit longer, I reckon;" he glanced out of the window at the fat brown horse, who was munching oats sleepily.

"Want to hear where I've been, do you, Sim? All right! Where shall I set? Sam'll want to hear too, won't he?"

"Yes!" cried Mr. Sam from the other room. "Certin' I do, Calvin, certin' I do."

"Well, how about this? Come on into the front room, Sim!"

"No! no!" cried Mr. Sim hastily. "I allus set here, Calvin. You might set in the doorway," he added, "then the other one could hear too."

"Well, of all the darned foolishness ever I heard of!" said Calvin Parks. "Say, boys, how old was you last birthday? Was it fifty, or only five? Mebbe I was mistaken!"

Standing in the doorway, which he seemed to fill with his stalwart sunburnt presence, he looked from one twin to the other, half amused, half indignant. The brothers shuffled their feet and wriggled in their chairs. Their motions were identical, and the furtive glance which Mr. Sam cast at Calvin was mirrored by Mr. Sim. "I can hear fust rate if you sit there, Cal!" said both brothers together.

Calvin Parks pulled a chair into the doorway, and tilted it at a convenient angle. Again he looked from one twin to the other.

"If your Ma was here – " he said slowly; "but there! She ain't, and that's all there is to it. Well, I'm here anyhow, ain't I? and you want to know how I come here. Well, I come behind hossy. Whose hossy? My hossy, and my waggin. Good enough hossy, good enough waggin; but defend me from that way of gettin' about! Land is good to live on: take a farm like this now; I admire it, and barrin' tomfoolishness, I call you two lucky fellows; but come to gettin' about, give me water. This rumblin' and joltin' about over clay ro'ds, and climbin' in and out over a great wheel, and like as not hossy startin' up just as you've got your leg over and throwin' of you into the ro'd – what I say is, darn it all! And think you might be slippin' along in a schooner, and the water lip-lappin', and the shore slidin' by smooth and pleasant, and no need to say 'gerlong up!' nor slap the reins nor feed her oats – I tell you, boys, I get so homesick for it I think some days I'll chuck the whole concern."

"What concern?" inquired Mr. Sam. "You appear to me to ramble in your talk, Calvin, same as you allus did. Ma allus said you was a rambler in your talk and a rover in your ways, and you'd never settle down till you married."

"She did, did she?" said Calvin musing. "I expect she was about right. Well – you see," he cast an apologetic glance at Mary Sands, who had come in quietly and sat down with her sewing in the front room, "I've always laid it to some to the fire. Look at your house here, boys!" he gave a wistful glance round the two bright, tidy, cheerful rooms. "If I had a home like this, would I be a rover? I

guess not! I guess I shouldn't need no cobbler's wax on the seat of the chair to hold me down; but if all you had come home to was an empty cellar hole, not a stick nor a stitch – nothing was saved, you remember, – why, you might feel different. I took to the coastin' trade, as you know, and the past ten years I've been master of the 'Mary Sands, Bath and Floridy with lumber.'"

"I want to know!" said Mr. Sam.

"Do tell me!" cried Mr. Sim. "Why – "

Mary Sands had dropped her work at the sound of her own name, and looked up quickly; meeting Calvin Parks's look of unconscious admiration, the wholesome color flushed into her face again, and her brown eyes began to twinkle. She broke in quickly on Mr. Sim's slow speech.

"Was she a good vessel, Mr. Parks? You know I told you I was owner of a schooner, and so I take an interest in vessels, especially coasters."

"If I should say that she was as fine-lookin' a vessel as you was lady," said Calvin deliberately, "you might cast it up that I was makin' personal remarks, which far be it from me to do; but I will say that she is a sweet schooner. There ain't a line of her but what is clean cut and handsome to look at. And as for her disposition! there! I've knowed vessels as was good-lookin', and yet so contrary and cantankerous that you'd rather lay down and take a lickin' than sail in them, any day. I've knowed poor-spirited vessels, and vessels that was just ornery and mean; but 't is handsome is as handsome does with the Mary Sands. She's sweet as her looks; she's capable and she willin'; she's free and yet she's steady. If your Ma was here, Sim and Samuel, I'd say to her, 'Show me the Mary Sands in petticoats and if she was agreeable I'd never need to be called rover again."

"Why," began Mr. Sim again; but again his cousin cut him short with less than her usual courtesy. "She must be a picture of a vessel, surely, Mr. Parks. And how come you to leave, if you liked the life so well? I'm sure Cousins want to hear about that, and I should be pleased too."

Calvin pulled at his pipe in silence for several minutes.

"'Tis hard to explain," he said at last. "I don't know as I can make it clear to you, Miss Hands; but it's a fact that a seaman, and especially a coastwise seaman, now and then takes a hankerin' after the land. Deep-sea voyages, you just don't think about it, and 'twouldn't make no difference if you did. But slippin' along shore, seein' handsome prospects, you know, and hills risin' up and ro'ds climbin' over them and goin' somewhere, you don't know where – and now and then a village, and mebbe hear the church bells ringin' and you forgettin' 'twas Sunday – now and then, some ways, it gets a holt of you.

"Well, it's goin' on a year now that one of them spells come over me. I rec'lect well, 'twas a hot day in August. We was becalmed off the mouth of the river, and the Mary couldn't make no headway, 'peared as though. The crew stuck their jackknives into the mainmast, and whistled all they knew for a wind; and I set there and watched the sails playin' Isick and Josh, Isick and Josh, till, honest, I could feel the soul creakin' inside me with tiredness. I expect the sun kind o' scrambled my brains, same as a dish of eggs; for bumbye a tug come along, goin' to the city, and I wasted good money by gettin' a tow and pullin' into port two days ahead of schedule time. Now see what I got for it! I went to the office, and there was a letter from a lawyer sayin' my owner was dead and had left the schooner to his niece. I didn't read no further, and to this day I don't know what the woman's name is. I set down and took up the paper; at first I was too mad to read. I don't know just what I was mad at, neither, but so it was. Pretty soon my eye fell on a notice of a candy route for sale, hoss and waggin', good-will and fixtures, the whole concern. 'That's me!' I says. 'No woman in mine!'

"I'm showing you what an incapable pumpkin-head I was, Miss Hands, so you can see I ain't keepin' nothin' back. All about it, I sent my papers to the lawyer that night, and next day I bought the candy route and the hoss and waggin! All the candies, lozenges, and peppermint drops; tutti-frutti and pepsin chewin'-gum; peanut toffy and purity kisses; wholesale and retail, Calvin Parks agent, that's me!"

He brought his chair down on four legs and towered once more in the doorway. "There's the first chapter of my orter-biography, Miss Hands and boys," he said. "I must be off now, or I sha'n't get over my route to-day."

CHAPTER IV
THE CANDY ROUTE

"Hossy," said Calvin as he drove out of the yard, "what do you think of that young woman?"

(Mary Sands was nearer forty than thirty, but she will be young at seventy.) The brown horse shook his head slightly as Calvin flicked the whip past his ear.

"Well, there you're mistaken!" said Calvin. "There's where you show your ignorance, hossy. I tell you that young woman is A 1 and clipper built if ever I see such. Yes, sir! ship-shape and Bristol fashion, live-oak frame, and copper fastenin's, is what I call Miss Hands, and a singular name she's got. Most prob'ly she'll be changin' it to Sill one of these days, and one of them two lobsters will be a darned lucky feller. I wonder which she'll take. I wonder why in Tunkett she should want either one of 'em. I wonder – hello!"

He checked the brown horse. A small boy was standing on a gate-post and shouting vigorously.

"What say, sonny?" said Calvin.

"Be you the candy man?" cried the child.

"That's what! be you the candy boy? lozenges, tutti-frutti and pepsin chewin' gum, chocolate creams, stick candy – what'll you have, young feller?"

"I want a stick of checkerberry!" said the boy.

"So do I!" cried a little girl in a pink gingham frock, who had run out from the house and climbed on the other gate-post. She was a pretty curly little creature, and the boy was an engaging compound of flaxen hair, freckles and snub nose. Calvin regarded them benevolently, and pulled out a drawer under the seat of the wagon.

"Here you are!" he said, taking out a glass jar full of enchanting red and white sticks.

"Best checkerberry in the State of Maine; cent apiece!" and he held out two sticks.

The children's eyes grew big and tragic. "We ain't got any money!" said the boy, sadly.

"Not *any* money!" echoed the little girl.

"Then what in time did you ask for it for?" asked Calvin rather irritably.

"I didn't!" said the boy. "I just said I wanted it."

Calvin looked from him to the girl, and then at the candy, helplessly.

"Well, look here!" he said. "Say! where do hossy and me come in? We've got to get our livin', you see."

"Could you get much living out of two sticks?" asked the little girl.

Calvin looked again at the round wistful eyes.

"This ain't no kind of way to do business!" he remonstrated. "You've got to airn it some way, you know. Tell you what! Let me see which can holler loudest, and I'll give you a stick apiece."

The babes closed their eyes, threw back their heads, and bellowed to the skies.

"That's first rate!" said Calvin. "Good lung power there, young uns! go it again!"

The children roared like infant bulls of Bashan. At this moment the door of the house flew open and a woman appeared wild-eyed.

"What's the matter?" she cried. "Susy, be you hurt? Eben, has something bit you?"

"Don't you be scairt, Marm!" said Calvin affably. "They was just showin' off their lung power, and they've got a first rate article of it."

The woman's eyes flashed, and she hurried toward the gate. "You come along and be spanked!" she cried to the children; "scarin' me into palpitations, and your Aunt Mandy layin' in a blue ager! And as for you," she addressed Calvin directly, "the best thing you can do is to get out of this the quickest you know how. When I want peddlers round here I'll let you know."

The children were hurried into the house, shrieking now in good earnest, but clutching their candy sticks. Calvin gazed after them ruefully.

"Well, hossy, that didn't seem to work real good, did it?" he said. "Fact is, we ain't got the hang of this business, no way, shape or manner. Try to please the kids and you get 'em a spankin' instead. Well, they got their candy anyway. 'Pears as if their Ma needed somethin', howsomever."

He sat pondering with his eyes fixed anxiously on the house; finally he rummaged among his drawers, and taking out a small package, he climbed laboriously out over the wheel, and making his way up to the house, knocked at the door. The woman opened it with a bounce, and snorted when she saw him.

Calvin bent toward her confidentially, his face full of serious anxiety.

"Say, lady!" he said gravely; "I'd like to make you a present of these cardamom seeds. They do say they're the best thing goin' for the temper; kind o' counter-irritant, y' know; bite the tongue, and – "

The door banged in his face. He smiled placidly, and returning to his wagon clambered in again and chirruped cheerily to the brown horse.

"Gitty up, hossy!" he said. "I feel a sight better now. Gitty up!"

They jogged on for some time, Calvin mostly silent, though now and then he broke out into song.

"Now Renzo was a sailor;
That's what Renzo was, tiddy hi!
He surely warn't a tailor,
So haul the bowline, haul!
He went adrift in Casco Bay,
Mate to a mud-scow haulin' hay,
And he come home late for his weddin' day,
So haul the bowline, haul!"

Rounding a curve in the road, he saw a man walking in the same direction in which he was going; a young man, slight and wiry, walking with quick, jerky strides. Calvin observed him.

"That young feller's in a hurry, hossy," he said. "See him? he's takin' longer steps than what his legs are, and that's agin' natur'. What say about givin' him a lift, hey?"

The brown horse, his ear being flicked, shook his head decidedly. "Sho!" said Calvin, "you don't mean that, hossy. Your bark – well, not exactly bark – is worse than your – not precisely bite, but you know what I mean. He's in a hurry, and he's in trouble too, and you and me ain't neither one nor 'tother. Say!" he called as he came within hailing distance. "Want a lift?"

The man stopped with a start, and turned a pale face on Calvin. He had red hair, and his blue eyes burned angrily.

"Yes!" he said. Calvin stopped, and he jumped quickly into the wagon. Calvin looked at him expectantly a moment; then "Much obliged!" he said. "Real accommodatin' of you!"

The young man colored like a girl. "I beg your pardon!" he said. "I'm forgetting my manners and everything else, I guess. Much obliged to you for takin' me up. I'm in a terrible hurry!" he added, looking doubtfully at the brown horse, who was jogging peacefully along.

"Four legs is better than two!" said Calvin. "Gitty up, hossy! He makes better time than what he appears to, hossy does. He's a better ro'der than you be. We'll git there!"

"How far you goin'?" asked the man.

"Oh, down along a piece!" said Calvin. "Where be you?"

"I'm going to Tinkham," said the red-haired man with angry emphasis; "to Lawyer Filcher. If there was any lawyer nearer I'd go to him."

"I want to know!" said Calvin sociably. "Insurance?"

"No!" the man broke out. "I'm goin' to get a bill!"

Now in our part of the country a "bill" means a bill of divorce. Calvin shook his head with sympathetic interest.

"Sho!" he said. "A young feller like you? now ain't that a pity?"

"I can't stand it any longer!" the lad cried, and his hands worked with passion. "Nor yet I won't, I tell you. No man would. This ends it. We was mismated from the first, and this is the last."

"Well!" said Calvin. "Ain't that a pity now? If it's so, it's so, and mebbe a bill is the best thing. Awful homely, is she?"

The lad turned upon him, and his blue eyes flashed.

"Homely?" he said roughly. "What you talkin' about? she was Katie Hazard."

"Nice name!" said Calvin. "Come from these parts?"

"I guess you don't!" retorted the lad, "or you wouldn't have to be told. She was called the prettiest girl in the county when I married her, and she hasn't got over it yet."

"You don't say!" said Calvin placidly. "Well, good looks is pleasant, I always maintain; I'd full rather have a woman good-lookin' if other things is 'cordin' to. I suppose likely she's a poor cook? A man has to have his victuals, you know!"

"She's the best cook in the State!" said the young man doggedly. "I'd back her riz bread or doughnuts or pies against any woman's from Portland to 'Roostick."

"Quite a ways," said Calvin. "S'pose likely she's slack, hey? house cluttered up? calicker wrapper and shoes down at the heel? that kind?"

The blue eyes flared at him. "I don't want none o' this kind o' talk!" he said sharply. "Slack! I'd sooner eat off Katie's kitchen floor than any other woman's parlor table that ever I see. You find me a speck o' dust or a spot o' dirt round our house and I'll find you a blue hen."

"I see!" said Calvin. "Another fellow, is there?"

"No!" shouted the young man, and he turned savagely on Calvin. "I'd like to know why you're sayin' this kind of thing, when you never see nor heard of me nor my wife before."

"Well!" said Calvin comfortably. "I've been wonderin' ever since you got in whether you was an ill-used man or a darned fool, and now I've found out. Why, you loony, if you've got a wife like all that, why in Tunkett are you goin' to get a bill?"

His voice rang out like a ship's trumpet. The lad shrunk down in his seat, and his face grew dogged and set.

"We was mismated, I tell you!" he said. "She's got a temper!"

"Well, how about you?" asked Calvin. "You ain't got that red hair for nothin', son."

"I know! I have one too," the lad admitted; "and each one stirs the other up and makes it worse. It's no use, I tell you! We get jawin' and the house won't hold us both, so I'm going to clear out."

"Sho!" said Calvin.

They were silent for a few moments, the young husband brooding over his wrongs, Calvin meditating. At last he said slowly, "Young feller, I ain't no lawyer, nor yet wishful to be; but I expect I can cure your case."

"What do you mean?" asked the lad.

"I expect I can cure your case," Calvin repeated deliberately, "for less money by a good sight, and more agreeable all round. Lemme see! two and two is four, and seven times four is twenty-eight, and two more – yes, sir! I'll undertake to cure your case for thirty cents, and do it handsome."

He opened a drawer, and after a careful inspection took out two small objects which he held up. "See them?" he said. "This is your article. All Day Suckers, they're called, and well named. The candy fills the mouth and yet don't crowd it any; the stick is to hold on by, and take it out when necessary. Pure sugar, no glucose in it; not a mite! Pure sugar, cream o' tartar killed, and flavored with fruit surrup. Now, young feller, you take fourteen of them suckers. They're two cents apiece, that's two for every day in the week. Every time you two find you're beginnin' to jaw, in goes your sucker, and

you keep it there till you feel pleasant again. Keep that up for a week, and finish up at the end with a Purity Kiss – fifteen cents a dozen, call it two cents apiece, and I'll lay my next lo'd – what's that?"

A sharp rattle was heard. Both men turned round, and saw a light wagon whirling toward them. The horse was galloping; the driver, a young woman in a cloud of red gold hair, was urging him on with whip and voice.

"Well!" said Calvin Parks.

"Great hemlock!" cried the young man. "Katie, stop!" He leaped out over the wheel, and set off running toward the advancing wagon. The young woman pulled up with a jerk.

"Joe!" she cried. "Oh, Joe! come back! I – I'm sorry I bit you!"

She jumped out – over the wheel too – and the two red heads flamed together.

Calvin gazed for a moment, then turned round with a smile.

"I guess they won't need them suckers after all!" he said. "Gitty up, hossy!"

CHAPTER V
CONCERNING PEPPERMINTS

Mary Sands stood in the doorway, leaning on her broom and looking out over the pleasant autumn country. It was a golden morning, and the world shone and sparkled in quite a wonderful way.

The green dooryard had its special show of emeralds, set off here and there by a tuft of dandelion that had escaped the watchful eye of Mr. Sam. The stone wall of the barnyard was almost hidden by the hollyhocks; they were a pretty sight, Mary thought; she did admire hollyhocks.

The vast dog, who had been lying on the door-step, rose slowly, shook himself elaborately, pricked his ears, and looked down the road.

"What is it, Rover?" asked Mary Sands. "Do you feel good this mornin', same as I do? What you lookin' at? Somebody comin' along the road? So there is! It can't be Cousin Sam back again; he hasn't been gone but an hour. Why – can it – it surely is Mr. Parks!"

Involuntarily her hand went up to the smooth ripples of her brown hair; unconsciously she glanced down at her fresh print dress and blue apron.

"I wish't I'd had me a white apron!" she said. "But there! he'll have to take me as he finds me. Workin' time ain't perkin' time, as Gran'm'ther used to say. Good mornin', Mr. Parks! isn't this a pretty day?"

"Good mornin' to you, Miss Hands!" said Calvin Parks as he drove up to the door. "It is a pretty day, and everything to match, far as I can see. And the prettiest thing I've seen this mornin' is you," he added, but not aloud.

"I was lookin' at them hollyhocks," said Mary. "See 'em down by the wall yonder? Ain't they handsome? Them pink and white ones look to me like girls, slim young ones all ready to bob a curtsey. I don't know but you'll think it foolish, but I'm always seein' likenesses between flowers and folks."

"Be you?" said Calvin. "That's a pretty idee now. I believe women folks have pretty idees right along; it must be real agreeable. Now when I see a hollyhock there ain't nothin' to it but hollyhock – except the cheese!" he added meditatively. "I used to think a sight of hollyhock cheese when I was a youngster."

"So did I!" cried Mary with her tinkling laugh. "But aren't you comin' in, Mr. Parks? Do light down! Cousin Sam's gone to market, but Cousin Sim'll be real pleased to see you. He's been feelin' slim for two or three days."

"That so?" said Calvin. "Well, I didn't know as I should stop, more'n just to pass the time o' day, but if he's feelin' slim – " he threw the reins on the horse's neck and clambered out of the wagon.

"Hossy'll be glad to rest a spell, won't you, hossy?"

"He looks real clever!" said Mary. "I should think he'd be pleasant to ride behind."

"You try it some day and see!" said Calvin. "He's the cleverest horse on the ro'd, and the cutest. What do you think he did yesterday? Now I don't know as you'll believe me when I tell you, but it's a fact. I was in at the store down at the Corners, havin' some truck with Si Turner, and there come along a boy as wasn't any more honest than he had to be, and he thought 'twould be smart to reach in over the wheel and help himself to candy out of the drawers. Well, mebbe 'twas smart; but hossy was smarter, for he reached round his head and c'ot him by the seat of his pants – Jerusalem! if you'll excuse the expression, Miss Hands, how that feller did holler! Me and Si come hikin' out, thought he was killed and got the hives besides; when we see what was up, we sot down and laughed till, honest, we had to lean against one another or we'd rolled over an' over on the ground. Hossy held on like a good 'un till I told him to let go, and then he dropped the pants and went to work eatin' grass as if nothin' had been goin' on at all."

"Did you ever?" cried Mary Sands. "I never knew a hoss could have that much sense, Mr. Parks. Why, 'twas like a person more than a dumb critter."

"There's critters and critters!" said Calvin Parks. "Hossy's a prize package, that's a fact. Want a bite, hossy? tain't dinner time yet, but a bite won't hurt you."

He took a nose-bag from the wagon and hung it over the brown horse's head. The horse, who had gone to sleep as soon as he stopped, opened one eye, blinked at his master, and shut it again.

"Oh, all right!" said Calvin. "Any time; suit yourself! Only I can't wag your jaws for ye, ye know."

Mary had turned to enter the house, saying something about telling Cousin he was coming.

"Oh! wait just a minute, Miss Hands!" Calvin called. "I took the liberty – " he rummaged among his drawers, and finally brought out a small parcel.

"I dono – most prob'ly it ain't just what you'd like. I couldn't tell what flavor you'd prefer, and I always think myself that pep'mint is the wholesomest – "

Amazed and embarrassed at finding himself embarrassed, Calvin paused awkwardly, holding the box of peppermints in his hand; but when he saw Mary Sands blushing in the delightful red and brown way she had, and caught the twinkle in her eye, he was suddenly at ease again.

"You try 'em!" he said simply, and gave her the box.

"Why, Mr. Parks!" cried Mary. "You don't mean to say you brought these for me? Well, you are more than kind, I must say. Why, they're deleecious! There's nothing like pep'mint to my taste; now this is surely a treat. I'm a thousand times obliged to you, Mr. Parks. These don't taste like boughten candy; there's a real kind of home-made flavor to 'em."

"That's right!" said Calvin. "That's just it; they are home-made. Them pep'mints is made by an old gentleman in East Cyrus. I lighted on 'em by accident, as you might say, and 'twas a good job I did."

"How was that?" Mary inquired civilly.

"Why, I ain't greatly acquainted in these parts, you know, Miss Hands; been away so much, you understand, and never was one to go much when I was to home, only amongst the near neighbors. I dono as ever I was in East Cyrus before. 'Tis a pleasant-lookin' place. Nice street; not many stores, but what there was was ship-shape and Bristol fashion; folks personable and well-appearin'; I was pleased with East Cyrus. I druv along kind o' slow, lookin' for my kind of a place; sure enough, I come to a little store with candy in the window. Hossy saw it too, and stopped of his own accord.

"'That so?' says I. 'Friend of yours, hossy?' He nods his head real sociable, hossy doos, and I was just goin' to ramble down out of that squirrel-cage, when the door opens kind o' smart, and someone hollers out, 'I don't want any! You can go right along!'

"'Can!' says I. 'Now that's real accommodatin' of you. Anywheres special you'd like me to go? That's what I come to inquire about,' I says.

"He was a little man, kind o' dried up, but yet smart-lookin', and he *was* smart. He looks at hossy. 'You can go to Thunder!' he says.

"'First turn to the right, or second to the left?' says I. Then he looks at me. 'Hello!' he says; 'it ain't you!'

"'No,' I says; 'it ain't. It's my half-uncle's widder from out west,' I says.

"He kind o' laughed. 'What are you doin' with his hoss, then?' says he.

"'I bought it off'n him,' says I; 'it's my hoss now, and my team. Like to know how many teeth we've got between us?'

"'Well, all the same I don't want any!' he says; and he starts to go back into the store.

"'Excuse *me*!' I says, as polite as I knew how. 'Would you have any objections to namin' over the things you don't want? I didn't know as I'd offered you anything, but mebbe I done it in my sleep.'

"'Glucose is one thing,' he says. 'Terry alba, coal-tar, plaster-of-Paris; them's some of the things I don't want. And you're another. Is that enough?'

"'Not quite I says. 'Go slow, shipmate! If you wanted them things the wust way in the world you couldn't get 'em off'n me, 'cause I ain't got 'em."

"He grunted. 'Tell that to the monkey!' he says.

"'I am,' I says, 'or the nearest I can see to one.'

"'He always had 'em he says,'and tried to sell 'em to me every time he come by.'

"'I know!' says I. 'I found 'em in the stock, and I sot 'em on the fire and seen 'em burn. Gitty up, hossy!' I says. 'We'll go on and see if there's any place in this village where they keep manners,' I says, 'and we'll send this old gentleman a half a pound to stock up with!' I says.

"'Hold on!' he says. 'I spoke too quick. Come in and we'll talk.'

"So I went. Had half a mind not to, but 'twan't the sensible half. I tell you, I had a real pleasant time, Miss Hands. Come to get him smoothed down and combed out, and he was as pleasant an old gentleman as ever I see. But he was an old-fashioned candy-maker, you see, and he didn't like these new-fangled ways any more than what I do. Never had a pound of glucose on his premises, nor never will; nothin' but pure sugar. We had a real good time together; and he gave me them pep'mints, and I'm goin' to have 'em reg'lar every week. He's got a little kitchen in back there that's a perfect pictur' to look at. I'd like to have you see it, Miss Hands, honest I would."

At this moment a loud and peevish crow was heard from the house.

"There!" said Mary Sands. "We must be goin' in, Mr. Parks. Cousin's gettin' impatient, I expect."

They found Mr. Sim fairly spluttering with impatience.

"What – what – what – " he began as they entered; "I didn't know as you was ever comin', Cousin. I'd oughter have had my med'cine – that you, Cal? – half an hour ago; set down, won't you? half a glass, with sugar and hot water! pretty well, be ye? I'm most choked to death, settin' here waitin'."

"There, Cousin!" said Mary Sands in her mellow, soothing voice. "I'll get you the medicine right away; though if the truth was told I expect you'd be better off without it. I don't hold with all this dosin', do you, Mr. Parks?"

"I do not!" said Calvin Parks. "Looks to me as if all the doses he'd been takin' for a week was havin' it out inside him, and no two agreein'. Say, Sim! s'pose you let Miss Hands throw away all that stuff, and take a pep'mint instead."

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