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The House of the Three Ganders

By Irving Bacheller

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Exhausted, ragged, and starving, a boy of about sixteen is found in the woods, and befriended by a camping party. He has fled from his brutal father, Bat Morryson. Bat comes after him, but his new friends conceal him. Fed and in clean clothes, Shad, who gives his name as Shad (Sheridan), is sent on his way to Canton, with a letter to Colonel Blake.

CHAPTER II.—Shad cleverly eludes his father, Colonel Blake, his wife, and their young daughter Ruth, who are impressed by the boy's manner. The colonel secures him a situation in the village of Amity Dam. He becomes friendly with a youth of his age, "Bony," and Bumpy Brown, tinker, a village character, considered by the straitlaced people of Amity Dam as a drunkard because of his periodic lapses from strict sobriety. With Bony, who is a frequent visitor to the picturesque shack which Bony calls home, known in the vicinity as the "Fun Shop," Bat Morryson comes to Amity Dam, with determination to take his son back to his own dissolute life.

CHAPTER III.

Morryson, known lawbreaker, is overruled by Colonel Blake, who is the district attorney, and his father passes out of Shad's life. With Bony, he visits a village of Amity Dam. Bumpy Brown, a girl, young and pretty, comes to Brown's shack, inquiring for him. Shad applies himself diligently to his neglected education. Two years pass.

CHAPTER IV.

Foreground of the Mystery. SHAD spent a year and a half in the little village. It was enveloped by many visits to the Fun Shop in Brown's cove. The mysterious young lady had thrown a glamor of romance upon it. Once Bony had spoken playfully of their admiration and of their wish to see her again. Bumpy Brown looked serious and quickly changed the topic. He never spoke of her. The boys had jolly times with the tinker and his bird. He entertained them with quaint jests and thrilling tales and good food. His good-natured, merry talk, not like that of any other man, had made them fond of him. They were keen-minded boys. They suspected that his stories were not all true, that his alleged friend "Muggins" was a fiction. In spite of all this, they loved to be with Bumpy Brown.

Shad had now begun to find himself. He was growing in strength, stature and wisdom. He had learned how to study. He had acquired an almost sinful longing for good clothes. Still he liked not less good books and good company. His friend, the village doctor, had lent him the novels of Reade and Dickens and the poems of Longfellow and Tenyson. His best creditors were the doctor, the grammar, and the dictionary. He had begun to enjoy his letter-writing. He had a sense of pride in the long letter that he had written to Mr. Conyere.

Mr. Conyere was so pleased with the letter that he sent a check of fifty dollars to the boy and bade him do as he pleased with the money. Shad went to Ashfield and bought fine raiment. That day he wrote a letter to Ruth Blake in which he said:

"At last I can come to visit you without being intimidated and oppressed by soiled garments. I hope that you will like my new clothes and me. We have gone into partnership and our business is to make a good impression on you. If we fail I shall not blame the clothes but I shall think that I am in very bad luck."

and be alone with your happiness. In the morning the birds sang of the love in your heart. Even the flowers in the field knew your secret. They looked at you and nodded their heads as if they would give you encouragement. That is the way they treat me."

"You?" "Yes, they are always reminding me of the colors in her hair and eyes and cheeks. I think that the sun and the moon and the stars shine only to show her face to me."

"My child! Are you in love?" "Yes, but I am not a child."

"Whom do you love?" "Your daughter."

"Mrs. Blake took the boy's hand and laughed."

"In love! and getting one hundred and fifty dollars a year!" she exclaimed with good-natured amusement. "I suppose that you and your wife could get along on bread and water."

"I am not always going to be poor."

"Your school days have scarcely begun."

"I learn fast. I shall get along."

"The time to fall in love is after you have got along, not before."

It comes when it comes. No body can tell when he will fall in love."

"I wouldn't take this so seriously. You'll get over it."

"Never! I don't know how bad it is. I would rather die than give it up. I want to be engaged to Ruth."

"It is impossible. You are both far too young."

"But you were only seventeen when you fell in love."

"True, but those days things were different and I was not engaged for a year after that. The colonel was then three years older than I—old enough to be sure of himself. Now, Shad, I must ask you to promise me on your word of honor as a gentleman that you will say nothing to Ruth of this until I give you permission to do it."

"I will make the promise and keep it, but if I see that some other fellow is trying to get her it would be hard for me to keep myself from jumping in."

"Don't worry. You have the inside track. We are all fond of you. Let's see what happens."

Shad returned to his task in Amity Dam a bit depressed. Soon after that an unexpected trouble came upon him. One of the gold rings had been missing from its showcase for a week. Since the loss had been discovered Shad had observed a difference—slight but unmistakable—in the manner of Mr. and Mrs. Smithers. Indeed, he thought that other people had begun to treat him coolly.

The next Sunday afternoon Shad and Bony went down to Brown's cove. Shad told Bumpy of his trouble.

"Folks are just nat'rally cussed mean," said Bumpy. "They're made that way. By Jeedix! They can't help it no more'n a toad can help havin' warts. I heard 'o'er day in a house where I was tinkerin' that you an' Bony was wild. I says: 'Them boys are all right. Till they've learnt their lesson be easy on 'em. They'll come out as straight as a loon's leg.'"

Boys are quick to detect the note of insincerity. They knew that Bumpy spoke from his heart in spite of his own bitterness.

Suddenly he came to Shad. "Boy, I forgot yer trouble," he said. "Tell me about that ring. When did you see it last?"

"When I was showing it and some other trinkets to a girl the other day."

"What girl?" "I don't know her name. She was about eighteen years old—light-colored hair an' blue eyes. She had pretty teeth an' a turned-up nose. There was a scar on her left cheek. Wore a blue dress."

"I'm afraid she's rather light-fingered," said Bumpy. "I know her, an' what folks say in her neighborhood—a few miles south o' here. I'm agoin' up there in a day or two. I'll see what I can do. Don't worry."

As they were leaving Bumpy said: "Come down next Sunday. I may have some news."

The next Sunday, to avoid criticism, they went to meeting and promptly set out for Brown's cove. Bumpy was standing by the door. He waved his hat as they came up and called out: "By Jeedix, boys! I'm happy! See that?"

He held up the gold ring between his thumb and forefinger. Shad trembled with excitement. "How did you get it?" he asked.

"Oh, I went an' see that gal an' I jus' scared it out o' her. Told her she'd have to give it back or go to jail. She broke down and handed it over. It was kind o' pitiful. I told her nobody would even know her name an' they won't—not from me. I'm agoin' to take it to Smithers and tell him how I come by it."

They sat down to their dinner of roast partridges and baked potatoes and pumpkin pie.

"There's just one fly in my ointment," said Bumpy, as he began to carve the birds.

"What's that?" Bony asked. "I've been drunk ag'in. Met an

old comrade. We got to talkin' 'bout the second day at Gettysburg. There's suthin' cur'us 'bout Gettysburg. It's slippery ground. He had a bottle, we walked to Brown's cove in the cool o' the night an' got drunk on the way. We set down here an' fit the Confeds till daylight. If I could fertig Gettysburg an' some other things, I'd be respectable."

"They ate a moment in silence. Then Bumpy added: 'One drink will put the devil in me. The old sores begin to bleed. But I'm through—by Jeedix! Never no more whisky for me. I'm through. The woman has looked purty solemn since then.'"

He carved the birds and loaded their plates. It was no time for idle words. Talk was not resumed until each had dulled his appetite on the bones. Then Bumpy began his tales of thrilling and improbable adventure.

When the boys thanked him and bade him good-by the sun was low. They left with a most friendly feeling for the old man.

TANNER SCHOOL.

Teacher, Leta O'Dell. Motto: "We grow like what we think of, so let us think of the good, the true, and the beautiful." The fifth grade are now learning the poem, "The Fly Goes By." Billie Jackson has the most achievement stamps for good reading.

CEAR RUN SCHOOL.

Teacher, Mrs. Mardell Ware. We are glad spring is here. Some of the boys got us a small willow tree and the lower grades decorated it with pink blossoms, butterflies, and birds, which they made from paper.

SAND VALLEY SCHOOL.

Eva Marble, Teacher. Yellow ducks wearing green jackets make a brilliant decoration on our walls. Dorothy Klinkman started coming to school Tuesday.

STORMY PETRELS.

The stormy petrels, sometimes called Mother Carey's chickens, are the tiniest of web-footed birds. Their name, "petrel," is a form of "Peter," and was given them because of their ability to walk upon the water.

DANDRIDGE FAMILY.

Marta Dandridge (Mrs. George Washington) was the eldest of eight children. The children of John and Frances Jones Dandridge were: Martha, John, William, Bartholomew, Anna, Maria, Frances, Elizabeth and Mary.

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