

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
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A Melody in Silver

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CONTENTS

- I. The Lost Cause
- I. Rue and Rosemary
- III. The World's End
- IV. Dead Sea Fruit
- V. The Mug of Woe
- VI. "Fav-ver"
- VII. As a Fountain in the Desert
- VIII. The Gone-away Lady
- IX. The Crime of David
- X. The Nip of Guilt
- XI. Apotheosis
- XII. Light
- XIII. The Substitute
- XIV. Sky Blossoms

[Pg 1]

A MELODY IN SILVER

CHAPTER I TO C

THE LOST CAUSE



David had a suspicion. He did not know it was that, but that is what it was. He suspected that Mother thought he was a good little boy, and he suspected that she thought Mitchell Horrigan was a bad little boy. Perhaps Mother had a suspicion, too; she might have suspected that it was Mitch who had put a certain notion into David's head—a notion which had to do with pants. Only you must not call them pants; they are "trouvers."

But it doesn't really matter in the [Pg 2]least what they are called. Mitch had them. He also had the measles once. David did not know whether it was the measles part or the pants part that made Mitch a bad little boy. All David knew about it was that if he invited Mitch into the yard to climb trees and give swimming lessons in the high grass, it usually happened that Mother could think of some important business for her little boy to do in the house. It was surprising how many important matters there were for David to do in the house every time Mitch came into the yard to play. She might want to show him something, and perhaps it would be a turn-over that she wanted to show him, a delicious little half-grown pie stuffed with strawberries or with cherries. If Mitch were waiting out under the trees, the toothsome bit of pastry was [Pg 3]always a very peculiar kind. Mother believed in generosity, but generosity with limitations. Strawberry turn-over was not good for Mitch. Mother was positive that it was not good for him. That seemed a little singular to David, for he had never noticed anything wrong with Mitch. It does not seem credible that a boy who owns a real Indian bow 'n' arrow, which shoots so high he can knock the eye out of an angel with it, should yet be so foolish as to have a bad stomach. David had never seen any of the one-eyed angels that Mitch had knocked

down out of heaven with his Indian bow 'n' arrow. Mitch was not the kind to show all of his treasures. He didn't even show his bow 'n' arrow. He kept it hid, so that if the police ever found out about it they could not get it away from him. If they wanted to arrest him for [Pg 4]having it, that would be all right, but they should not get hold of his Indian bow 'n' arrow.

The thing you liked about Mitch was that he was so reasonable. One's faith in him would never be shaken unless one were to try his recipe for getting trauvers. In theory it was a sound recipe. Mitch, who had reached trauvers and understood the mightiness of the achievement, could vouch for the sure result of his prescription. It was guaranteed to cure the dress-habit in seven days. At first, though, Mitch would not tell how the great honor of pants had been bestowed upon him. He was then too important even to say, "Hello, kid!" For a time he did not deign to notice anybody, and when he did notice anybody it was only to pretend that David was nothing but a little girl.

[Pg 5]"I am not, neither."

David filed his protest between the palings of the fence. But it was no use. He might protest, he might cross his heart and hope to die, but still the boy on the other side of the fence would not believe.

"Are, too," Mitch would say.

Then a startled look, an appealing, hopeless fear suddenly abashed the little boy in the dainty white dress. As he shook the ringlets out of his eyes he asked, earnestly:

"Why, then, am I a girl?"

Here, you see, was another case like the bow 'n' arrow. Mitch did not have to tell all he knew. He only got proud and spat through his teeth and said, "Why?" right back at David.

Such a question, you must agree, may be illuminating, but is not satisfying. [Pg 6]The meaning of it seems a bit indefinite and lonesome, but if you are a little boy with ringlets it has meaning enough. It hurts mightily. But Mitch was still not satisfied.

"Dear Little Curly Locks," he said with contemptible sweetness, "oo mustn't get oo dress dirty."

Then did David's fists clench defiantly, and he said an awful swear.

"Dresses!" he exclaimed derisively; "that's all you know about it. They're kilts!"

This defense was not convincing, for there is no good way, once you think of it, to prove that a dress is a dress and that a kilt is a kilt. The only way, I fear, to settle such a controversy is to hit the other boy with a brick. Only David did not have a brick. What he did have was a confused feeling that Mitch was right. [Pg 7]For might it not be true, this horrible thing about being a girl? What if David was that, and couldn't ever get over it?

Now, Mitch, since you are at last in trauvers, here is the time to prove to this ignominious comrade of yours that in you are the instincts of a gentleman. Why don't you show David that there may be a chance for him after all? It would be proper for you to remind him that you yourself used to wear dresses, but of course you will make sure to speak of the disgrace as a thing of many years ago.

But there is no need, Mitch, in counseling David to go to extremes. It is quite unnecessary to inform him that the way to pants is a very simple matter. I dread to think that you are telling him to tear his kilts "all to splinters." Of course that can be done. You hook [Pg 8]the skirt over a paling in the fence; then you jump, and sometimes, David, it hurts when you hit the ground. But what matter? You are fighting in a noble cause. Mother will be so astonished! She will see how desperately you have outgrown your kilts.

Only she did not see it. She picked the splinters out of David's hands—cruel splinters from the fence—and she was very sorry for her little boy. And as for the dresses, it was no great matter about them. She would make other dresses for her David.

And that is why Mitchell Horrigan's recipe for pants is not a good recipe. Even at the end of a week David could not report much progress. Finally he had to acknowledge himself defeated. He then bore the dishonor of kilts with what manfulness he could and with a [Pg 9]creed which was recited something like this:

"We don't care to play with Mitch any more, do we, Mother?"

Or again:

"We don't care nothing about trouters, do we, Mother?"

Sometimes David would ask with husky heroism:

"Curls is all right for little boys, is they not?"

David was angry with Mitch; David was never going to speak to Mitchell Horrigan any more. His resolution was so strong that he hurried away to tell Mitch about it, but when the boy actually appeared, it was hard to remember why one should be angry with him. His brown feet came flapping along the stone walk, and in his hand was a freshly whittled stick that made an animated [Pg 10]clatter when he drew it along the fence. There was that in the reckless abandonment of Mitch which did not help David to tell him that he was too mean and disgraceful to be spoken to. And besides, his feelings might be hurt if one were to tell him that. So, as Mitch came nearer and nearer, David felt guiltier and guiltier, and presently he was surprised to hear himself asking rather abjectly:

"You isn't mad at me, is you, Mitch?"

Trouvers ignored the humble salutation. He took out his knife and began to whittle ceremoniously upon the stick.

"What you making?" David asked tentatively.

"Nothin' much," said Mitch, with the air of a man who has invented steamships and flying machines. "Only a tiger trap."

David knew better. David knew that [Pg 11]Mitch, in his insufferable conceit, was merely whittling to show off his new knife. So, pressing his red mouth between two white palings of the fence, David declared in a strong voice:

"I have a bigger knife than that."

The assertion was boldly made, but when Mitch asked to see the knife, David decided not to show it.

"Bigness don't count," said Mitch. "It's the steel."

He breathed upon the blade to test its quality. Every boy knows that if the film of moisture is quick to vanish, there can be no question about the superlative merit of the knife.

"Where did you get it?"

David was eager to know that, but Mitch decided that he must be going. He hadn't time to stay here any longer. He intimated that he had important [Pg 12]business to look after. He was going to make a kite ten feet tall, and, with the snobbishness of a plutocrat, he went strutting away. He was almost beyond earshot when he volunteered this brief information:

"My father, he guv it to me."

Had David heard correctly? Did Mitch say "father"? The little boy had never thought of such an article as a father except as something which belongs to a story book. Fathers were common enough in the story books; they were men, but until this moment David had never thought of them as being desirable. It now appeared that they were good for something. Mitch Horrigan had one. He actually kept a father, and the father gave him fine presents.

Reflecting upon all this, David [Pg 13]became a very quiet little boy. There seemed to be nothing interesting for him to do. He had no appetite for supper, and in his face was the look of one who dreams of such mighty things as trouters, and a hair-cut, and a brand-new knife. And when, at last, it came time to kiss Mother good-night, he turned appealing eyes upon her, and asked with trembling lips:

"Why don't *I* never have no fav-ver?"

[Pg 14]

CHAPTER II To C

RUE AND ROSEMARY



hey are not easy to take, siestas aren't. They are the word for going to sleep in the daytime when you would rather not. Sometimes you have to take medicine with them, and nearly always you feel that you must have a drink of milk. It is so easy to discover that you are thirsty, and besides, it usually gives you a chance to stay awake a little while longer. Frequently you find that you don't care as much for the milk as you thought you did, but in one way there is always a satisfaction in it. If you have a looking-glass, you can see the white mustache the drink has left on your lip. [Pg 15] Another satisfaction is that if Mother forgets to bring your milk in the mug you like best, you can send her right back for it.

If David wants to be particularly polite he sometimes asks Mother to tell him her story about the young man with the mustache. She has one that is tremendous dull because there are so many thinking places in it. "And then—and then—" Mother will say, and after that the story doesn't get on worth anything. The worst about it is that it always takes such a long while for her to reach the part which tells of the time when the young man started to raise a mustache.

"How did he start?" David never fails to ask.

"By not shaving his lip."

It is now that David feels of his white [Pg 16] lip with the tip of his red tongue and then stoutly declares:

"I have not shaved *my* lip."

"It was brown, like your hair," says Mother, "and when it was about half-grown it began to curl up at the ends. The boys made fun of it, but it was very beautiful and ever so soft and fine."

"Truly, was it?" asks David, and then something blooms pink in Mother's cheeks. That is the one interesting thing about her story, and up to that point he can always stand her narrative very well; for he is always watching for the pretty pinkness. But when that is gone, his interest goes too. It seems very ordinary to him that this young man should have studied mechanics and become a great engineer and invented things, and made discoveries.

Now, if he had ever been shipwrecked, [Pg 17]or if he had ever been eaten up by bears, or if he had fought Indians, or done some other notable thing with a scare in it, why, *that* would be worth talking about. But why tell so much about a young man who had done none of these things? Why speak of the way she had encouraged him and helped him and studied with him? You can see for yourself that it was a very stupid tale.

It was clever of David, though, to have her tell him the story, for then she would sometimes forget that her little boy was not having his siesta. To show her that he was trying to keep up an interest he would now and then ask a question, as, for example, when she spoke of the honors the young man had won at college.

"Could he spit through his teeth?" David would inquire, and it was always [Pg 18]a sad thing to him that this was not one of the young man's accomplishments. A very disappointing chap, to be sure.

"Do you know, my little boy," Mother would say in a strange, soft voice, "do you know that your eyes are as bright as his eyes used to be, and that—"

"It's a nice story," David would say courageously, and like as not, while Mother was still talking about the handsome young man with the mustache, her little boy would fall fast asleep.

It is good, David, that you do not hear the story that is hid away in the thinking places; it is good that you do not know the worn look which sometimes comes into Mother's face and crowds from it all the pretty pinkness that you love to see. You will never know that other look which was often in Mother's face before you came to nestle [Pg 19]in her arms and frighten it away. You have done well, brave soldier-man, for now I am right sure she does not wonder any

more why the day should have come when the one she had helped so much should have forgotten the help and been thankless for all the love that she had given him.

[Pg 20]

CHAPTER III To C

THE WORLD'S END



Sometimes, when David was working hard on his siesta, Mother would tell him that he was to whistle as soon as the Sand Man came. But even that doesn't always help. You have to ask so many times to make sure that the Sand Man *hasn't* come, and after you have been told repeatedly that you are not yet asleep it makes you discouraged. You know, too, that you mustn't cheat; it's not fair to whistle until you actually see the Sand Man.

Hardly anything is so wearing on a little boy as to wait. This is especially true of siesta-time, when there are always [Pg 21] such a number of interesting things going on outside. Through the shutter's chink the yellow sunshine comes squirting into the room—such amazing sunshine, just as it is on circus day! Only to think of what great events must be in progress while you and Mother lie here together in the darkened room, and toss hopelessly in the dreadful throes of trying to get through with your siesta!

One of the mean things about it is that neither side of the pillow has any cool spot. You turn it over once more and once more, and yet once more again, but it is no use. It is utterly impossible to cuddle down and obey orders and go to sleep like a brave soldier-man. The more you try it the more squirmy and itchy you feel; for at such a time one is usually fretted by the repeated ticklings of some bothersome fly. He will sneak [Pg 22] along the edge of the pillow and rub his hands together in front of him, and then he's ready. Down he swoops upon your nose, hitting it precisely in the same place where he lit before.

It is easy for Mother to say, "Go to sleep, now," but what bad shift a little boy will sometimes make of his siesta!

There came a day in June when David believed he never in this world could get through with it. He heard the chuck and drowsy clack of the sprinkling-wagon as it ponderously advanced upon its lazy way; he heard the almost whispered clucking of a mother-hen who was calling her chicks to come shuffle with her in the cool loose earth under the shade of the crooked old apple-tree, and presently there came a time when the out-of-doors was all so still that even the falling of a shadow would have made a sound.

[Pg 23]David was right sure of that. There was such mystery, such an unwonted sense of unreality a-quake in this silence, that he wanted, very much, to learn what it was all about. Then, ever and ever so cautiously, he slipped down off the bed. His dimpled toes went patting daintily across the polished floor, and presently he had stolen forth upon a great adventure. His eyes narrowed; he winked rapidly; so dazed he was with the sunshine and the strangeness of a world that had never looked like this before.

He had found out where summer is. It was here in Mother's garden, and you knew it was, for you could feel it in the stillness, and you could see it in the sleepiness of blossoms that drowsed and drooped and hung their lazy heads in the languishing sweetness of good air [Pg 24]and golden sunshine. It was all very strange and very dear to David. The sky had never before been so blue, and never so big nor deep nor cool, and the ground was pleasantly warm and nice. As the seeded grass touched his ankles he could feel warm shivers run over his legs, delightful thrills which came to him this day for the first time. He had found out where summer is.

David paused, and listened, and heard nothing. The whole world was listening. By and by a honey-burdened bumblebee began talking to himself; you couldn't quite understand what he said because he mumbled and bumbled so. David knew he was such a very tired and sleepy bumblebee that nobody could understand what he was talking about; and besides, he wasn't nearly so wonderful as a big butterfly that balanced [Pg 25]with blazing wings upon a nodding rose.

He was too heavy for the wee, sweet flower. David was right sure the butterfly should have rested less heavily there, for pretty soon the bonnie bloom came all apart and began to fall. One after another

the crimson petals slipped away, and dipped and floated and came falling and falling down. David was confident that he could hear the warm whisper of them as they fell, so in tune he was with the summer and the sunshine, out here in Mother's garden.

It was good he had stolen forth into the ardent glory of the noon-time, for if he had not he never would have learned about the place where the world stops. Only a few of us have found out about that place. You don't think about it at all, and then, pretty soon, you *do* think [Pg 26]about it. The way David learned of it was a new way. He laid him down upon the petunia bed—dear, old-fashioned flowers, lavender and pink and white, that peeped between the palings of the white fence—he laid him down and smelled deep the good, queer smell of them, and like the flowers themselves, he, too, peeped between the bars into the vast world which lay beyond. And that is how he learned of the place where the world stops.

Down a long, long lane—down there, a little way past the cottonwood tree, where the lane quits going on, that is where the world stops. You know that is the place because of the awesomeness that comes to you. The old cottonwood stands sentinel over that region of the Great Beyond. So tall and big and still he is that if you look at him awhile [Pg 27]you will get the strange feeling of things. High up in the glossy leaves one can sometimes hear a little pattery sound, finer than the crinkle of tissue paper—a pretty little sound like a quiet sprinkle of cooling rain. When he does that he is whispering to the clouds that bring the freshness of the summer shower.

Beyond him, down there where the world stops, is the place where the clouds go to sleep after their long, slow journeyings across the deep, sweet blue of the sky.

"What does my little boy see with his two big, shining eyes? And what does my little boy hear?"

It was Mother's voice above him that was thus humbly asking admission into the strange world he had found, and so well she knew it was marvelous fine, this world of his, that she snuggled his [Pg 28]cheek against *her* cheek, and tried and tried, in her poor, grown-up way, to understand all the pretty things the great silent tree was whispering to the clouds.

"Is it there?" she asked very softly and very earnestly. "Is it down there that the clouds go to sleep?"

And they remained together, these two, side by side, thinking about the sweet go-to-bed place of the clouds. A silence which was new to them, a cool and reposeful silence, had come upon them and held them. They were conversing in a language which has no words. It was a melody in silver – the spirit of motherhood, the soul of childhood blending into music, bringing them nearer, deepening their love and making it more dear to them.

They understood each other, that woman and that little boy. They did not [Pg 29]move. David had taken hold of Mother's hand, and he held to it while they kept on looking down there, afar off, where the great silent tree was softly whispering to the summer clouds.

[Pg 30]

CHAPTER IVToC

DEAD SEA FRUIT



hy don't I never have no fav-ver?"

Often David asked that question; upon awakening and upon going to bed he was pretty sure to make inquiries that were never satisfactorily answered. And now, one morning, it was a decided relief to Mother to have him ask something else. With eager questioning he said:

"Am I?"

Early, very early, he had awakened her to ask her that, for he had been told, on going to bed, that when the day should come again he would be four years old. Twice in the night he had asked [Pg 31]if he was It; so when the dawn at last showed with a lovely pinkness in the lacy folds of the curtains, and the note of a far-away meadow-lark called him into the glory of birthday happiness, he wanted to be very certain that this famous period of his life had actually come.

Before demanding if it were quite true, he lay still awhile and thought about it. He looked at Mother's face, and snuggled his fingers into the fairy foam of her nightgown, but the face and the fairy foam at her throat had not changed in the least. They were just the same as they had been yesterday and the day before and the day before that.

It was very strange. He had supposed that when a little boy is four years old, his life would be somehow—different. That is why he was still in doubt; he [Pg 32]was not at all sure about being four years old. He would wake up Mother and then, if he *was* It, she would make him feel that he was.

Her reassurance, though, was not nearly so satisfying as he had hoped.

"Yes, dear; it's your birthday. Now go to sleep awhile, my pretty."

David lay very still, but he did not go to sleep. By and by he asked rather uneasily:

"What do you do first?"

"What do you mean, little boy?"

"Little? *Am* I little?"

"Of course you're growing," Mother told him.

But David would not be deceived. Already the suspicion had come to him that there was nothing grand about being four years old. It was not a success; it was a failure, and his one hope now [Pg 33]rested in Dr. Redfield, for this was the morning when the Doctor had promised to waylay the little boy.

"How does *that* begin?" David asked. He could not think what it was that began.

"How does *what* begin?" Mother inquired.

And that was not nice nor reasonable of her. Mothers are made to answer questions, not to ask questions, and they are so discouraging when they can't understand about being waylaid! David felt abused, but he decided to have one more try at her. Then, if she didn't give him satisfaction, he would know that Four Years Old was all a humbug. As he looked longingly into her face, his words faltered, as though he were again expecting disappointment.

"Will he — will he wear his big, shiny hat when he does it?"

[Pg 34]Into Mother's face came a puzzled, half knowing look. She recalled the admiration inspired in a certain little boy by a certain abominable top hat that a certain doctor had once worn to a certain annual meeting of the State Medical Society. But this was the extent of her knowledge.

"When he does what?" she asked.

The little boy's lip trembled, and he turned away his face. He saw it wasn't any use. Mother didn't understand; she evidently hadn't tried. It was plain that he was not four years old; he was only three. It is very hard on little boys to be only that old when they have made up their minds to be four. So, when David was being dressed,