

PARNASSUS ON WHEELS

BY

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

To H.B.F. and H.F.M.
"Trusty, dusky, vivid, true"

A LETTER TO
David Grayson, Esq.
OF HEMPFIELD, U.S.A.

MY DEAR SIR,

Although my name appears on the title page, the real author of this book is Miss Helen McGill (now Mrs. Roger Mifflin), who told me the story with her own inimitable vivacity. And on her behalf I want to send to you these few words of acknowledgment.

Mrs. Mifflin, I need hardly say, is unskilled in the arts of authorship: this is her first book, and I doubt whether she will ever write another. She hardly realized, I think, how much her story owes to your own delightful writings. There used to be a well-thumbed copy of "Adventures in Contentment" on her table at the Sabine Farm, and I have seen her pick it up, after a long day in the kitchen, read it with chuckles, and say that the story of you and Harriet reminded her of herself and Andrew. She used to mutter something about "Adventures in Discontentment" and ask why Harriet's side of the matter was never told? And so when her own adventure came to pass, and she was urged to put it on paper, I think she unconsciously adopted something of the manner and matter that you have made properly yours.

Surely, sir, you will not disown so innocent a tribute! At any rate, Miss Harriet Grayson, whose excellent qualities we have all so long admired, will find in Mrs. Mifflin a kindred spirit.

Mrs. Mifflin would have said this for herself, with her characteristic definiteness of speech, had she not been out of touch with her publishers and foolscap paper. She and the Professor are on their Parnassus, somewhere on the high roads, happily engrossed in the most godly diversion known to man—selling books. And I venture to think that there are no volumes they take more pleasure in recommending than the wholesome and invigorating books which bear your name.

Believe me, dear Mr. Grayson, with warm regards,

Faithfully yours,
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

CHAPTER ONE

I wonder if there isn't a lot of bunkum in higher education? I never found that people who were learned in logarithms and other kinds of poetry were any quicker in washing dishes or darning socks. I've done a good deal of reading when I could, and I don't want to "admit impediments" to the love of books, but I've also seen lots of good, practical folk spoiled by too much fine print. Reading sonnets always gives me hiccups, too.

I never expected to be an author! But I do think there are some amusing things about the story of Andrew and myself and how books broke up our placid life. When John Gutenberg, whose real name (so the Professor says) was John Gooseflesh, borrowed that money to set up his printing press he launched a lot of troubles on the world.

Andrew and I were wonderfully happy on the farm until he became an author. If I could have foreseen all the bother his writings were to cause us, I would certainly have burnt the first manuscript in the kitchen stove.

Andrew McGill, the author of those books every one reads, is my brother. In other words, I am his sister, ten years younger. Years ago Andrew was a business man, but his health failed and, like so many people in the story books, he fled to the country, or, as he called it, to the bosom of Nature. He and I were the only ones left in an unsuccessful family. I was slowly perishing as a conscientious governess in the brownstone region of New York. He rescued me from that and we bought a farm with our combined savings. We became real farmers, up with the sun and to bed with the same. Andrew wore overalls and a soft shirt and grew brown and tough. My hands got red and blue with soapsuds and frost; I never saw a Redfern advertisement from one year's end to another, and my kitchen was a battlefield where I set my teeth and learned to love hard work. Our literature was government agriculture reports, patent medicine almanacs, seedsmen's booklets, and Sears Roebuck catalogues. We subscribed to Farm and Fireside and read the serials aloud. Every now and then, for real excitement, we read something stirring in the Old Testament—that cheery book Jeremiah, for instance, of which Andrew was very fond. The farm did actually prosper, after a while; and Andrew used to hang over the pasture bars at sunset, and tell, from the way his pipe burned, just what the weather would be the next day.

As I have said, we were tremendously happy until Andrew got the fatal idea of telling the world how happy we were. I am sorry to have to admit he had always been rather a bookish man. In his college days he had edited the students' magazine, and sometimes he would get discontented with the Farm and Fireside serials and pull down his bound volumes of the college paper. He would read me some of his youthful poems and stories and mutter vaguely about writing something himself some day. I was more concerned with sitting hens than with sonnets and I'm bound to say I never took these threats very seriously. I should have been more severe.

Then great-uncle Philip died, and his carload of books came to us. He had been a college professor, and years ago when Andrew was a boy Uncle Philip had been very fond of him—had, in fact, put him through college. We were the only near relatives, and all those books turned up one fine day. That was the beginning of the end, if I had only known it. Andrew had the time of his life building shelves all round our living-room; not content with that he turned the old hen house into a study for himself, put in a stove, and used to sit up there evenings after I had gone to bed. The first thing I knew he called the place Sabine Farm (although it had been known for years as Bog Hollow) because he thought it a literary thing to do. He used to take a book along with him when he drove over to Redfield for supplies; sometimes the wagon would be two hours late coming home, with old Ben loafing along between the shafts and Andrew lost in his book.

I didn't think much of all this, but I'm an easy-going woman and as long as Andrew kept the farm going I had plenty to do on my own hook. Hot bread and coffee, eggs and preserves for breakfast; soup and hot meat, vegetables, dumplings, gravy, brown bread and white, huckleberry pudding, chocolate cake and buttermilk for dinner; muffins, tea, sausage rolls, blackberries and cream, and doughnuts for supper—that's the kind of menu I had been preparing three times a day for years. I hadn't any time to worry about what wasn't my business.

And then one morning I caught Andrew doing up a big, flat parcel for the postman. He looked so sheepish I just had to ask what it was.

"I've written a book," said Andrew, and he showed me the title page—

PARADISE REGAINED
BY
ANDREW MCGILL

Even then I wasn't much worried, because of course I knew no one would print it. But Lord! a month or so later came a letter from a publisher—accepting it! That's the letter Andrew keeps framed above his desk. Just to show how such things sound I'll copy it here:

DECAMERON, JONES AND COMPANY PUBLISHERS UNION SQUARE, NEW YORK

January 13, 1907.

DEAR MR. MCGILL:

We have read with singular pleasure your manuscript "Paradise Regained." There is no doubt in our minds that so spirited an account of the joys of sane country living should meet with popular approval, and, with the exception of a few revisions and abbreviations, we would be glad to publish the book practically as it stands. We would like to have it illustrated by Mr. Tortoni, some of whose work you may have seen, and would be glad to know whether he may call upon you in order to acquaint himself with the local colour of your neighbourhood.

We would be glad to pay you a royalty of 10 percent upon the retail price of the book, and we enclose duplicate contracts for your signature in case this proves satisfactory to you.

Believe us, etc., etc.,

DECAMERON, JONES & CO.

I have since thought that "Paradise Lost" would have been a better title for that book. It was published in the autumn of 1907, and since that time our life has never been the same. By some mischance the book became the success of the season; it was widely commended as "a gospel of health and sanity" and Andrew received, in almost every mail, offers from publishers and magazine editors who wanted to get hold of his next book. It is almost incredible to what stratagems publishers will descend to influence an author. Andrew had written in "Paradise Regained" of the tramps who visit us, how quaint and appealing some of them are (let me add, how dirty), and how we never turn away any one who seems worthy. Would you believe that, in the spring after the book was published, a disreputable-looking vagabond with a knapsack, who turned up one day, blarneyed Andrew about his book and stayed overnight, announced himself at breakfast as a leading New York publisher? He had chosen this ruse in order to make Andrew's acquaintance.

You can imagine that it didn't take long for Andrew to become spoiled at this rate! The next year he suddenly disappeared, leaving only a note on the kitchen table, and tramped all over the state for six weeks collecting material for a new book. I had all I could do to keep him from going to New York to talk to editors and people of that sort. Envelopes of newspaper cuttings used to come to him, and he would pore over them when he ought to have been ploughing corn. Luckily the mail man comes along about the middle of the morning when Andrew is out in the fields, so I used to look over the letters before he saw them. After the second book ("Happiness and Hayseed" it was called) was printed, letters from publishers got so thick that I used to put them all in the stove before Andrew saw them—except those from the Decameron Jones people, which sometimes held checks. Literary folk used to turn up now and then to interview Andrew, but generally I managed to head them off.

But Andrew got to be less and less of a farmer and more and more of a literary man. He bought a typewriter. He would hang over the pigpen noting down adjectives for the sunset instead of mending the weather vane on the barn which took a slew so that the north wind came from the southwest. He hardly ever looked at the Sears Roebuck catalogues any more, and after Mr. Decameron came to visit us and suggested that Andrew write a book of country poems, the man became simply unbearable.

And all the time I was counting eggs and turning out three meals a day, and running the farm when Andrew got a literary fit and would go off on some vagabond jaunt to collect adventures for a new book. (I wish you could have seen the state he was in when he came back from these trips, hobbing it along the roads without any money or a clean sock to his back. One time he returned with a cough you could hear the other side of the barn, and I had to nurse him for three weeks.) When somebody wrote a little booklet about "The Sage of Redfield" and described me as a "rural Xantippe" and "the domestic balance-wheel that kept the great writer close to the homely realities of life" I made up my mind to give Andrew some of his own medicine. And that's my story.

CHAPTER TWO

It was a fine, crisp morning in fall—October I dare say—and I was in the kitchen coring apples for apple sauce. We were going to have roast pork for dinner with boiled potatoes and what Andrew calls Vandyke brown gravy. Andrew had driven over to town to get some flour and feed and wouldn't be back till noontime.

Being a Monday, Mrs. McNally, the washerwoman, had come over to take care of the washing. I remember I was just on my way out to the wood pile for a few sticks of birch when I heard wheels turn in at the gate. There was one of the fattest white horses I ever saw, and a queer wagon, shaped like a van. A funny-looking little man with a red beard leaned forward from the seat and said something. I didn't hear what it was, I was looking at that preposterous wagon of his.

It was coloured a pale, robin's-egg blue, and on the side, in big scarlet letters, was painted:

R. MIFFLIN'S TRAVELLING PARNASSUS GOOD BOOKS FOR SALE SHAKESPEARE, CHARLES LAMB, R.L.S. HAZLITT, AND ALL OTHERS

Underneath the wagon, in slings, hung what looked like a tent, together with a lantern, a bucket, and other small things. The van had a raised skylight on the roof, something like an old-fashioned trolley car; and from one corner went up a stove pipe. At the back was a door with little windows on each side and a flight of steps leading up to it.

As I stood looking at this queer turnout, the little reddish man climbed down from in front and stood watching me. His face was a comic mixture of pleasant drollery and a sort of weather-beaten cynicism. He had a neat little russet beard and a shabby Norfolk jacket. His head was very bald.

"Is this where Andrew McGill lives?" he said.

I admitted it.

"But he's away until noon," I added. "He'll be back then. There's roast pork for dinner."

"And apple sauce?" said the little man.

"Apple sauce and brown gravy," I said. "That's why I'm sure he'll be home on time. Sometimes he's late when there's boiled dinner, but never on roast pork days. Andrew would never do for a rabbi."

A sudden suspicion struck me.

"You're not another publisher, are you?" I cried. "What do you want with Andrew?"

"I was wondering whether he wouldn't buy this outfit," said the little man, including, with a wave of the hand, both van and white horse. As he spoke he released a hook somewhere, and raised the whole side of his wagon like a flap. Some kind of catch clicked, the flap remained up like a roof, displaying nothing but books—rows and rows of them. The flank of his van was nothing but a big bookcase. Shelves stood above shelves, all of them full of books—both old and new. As I stood gazing, he pulled out a printed card from somewhere and gave it to me:

ROGER MIFFLIN'S TRAVELLING PARNASSUS

Worthy friends, my wain doth hold
Many a book, both new and old;
Books, the truest friends of man,
Fill this rolling caravan.
Books to satisfy all uses,
Golden lyrics of the Muses,
Books on cookery and farming,
Novels passionate and charming,
Every kind for every need
So that he who buys may read.
What librarian can surpass us?

MIFFLIN'S TRAVELLING PARNASSUS

By R. Mifflin, Prop'r.

Star Job Print, Celeryville, Va.

While I was chuckling over this, he had raised a similar flap on the other side of the Parnassus which revealed still more shelves loaded with books.

I'm afraid I am severely practical by nature.

"Well!" I said, "I should think you *would* need a pretty stout steed to lug that load along. It must weigh more than a coal wagon."

"Oh, Peg can manage it all right," he said. "We don't travel very fast. But look here, I want to sell out. Do you suppose your husband would buy the outfit—Parnassus, Pegasus, and all? He's fond of books, isn't he?"

"Hold on a minute!" I said. "Andrew's my brother, not my husband, and he's altogether *too* fond of books. Books'll be the ruin of this farm pretty soon. He's mooning about over his books like a sitting hen about half the time, when he ought to be mending harness. Lord, if he saw this wagonload of yours he'd be unsettled for a week. I have to stop the postman down the road and take all the publishers' catalogues out of the mail so that Andrew don't see 'em. I'm mighty glad he's not here just now, I can tell you!"

I'm not literary, as I said before, but I'm human enough to like a good book, and my eye was running along those shelves of his as I spoke. He certainly had a pretty miscellaneous collection. I noticed poetry, essays, novels, cook books, juveniles, school books, Bibles, and what not—all jumbled together.

"Well, see here," said the little man—and about this time I noticed that he had the bright eyes of a fanatic—"I've been cruising with this Parnassus going on seven years. I've covered the territory from Florida to Maine and I reckon I've injected about as much good literature into the countryside as ever old Doc Eliot did with his five-foot shelf. I want to sell out now. I'm going to write a book about 'Literature Among the Farmers,' and want to settle down with my brother in Brooklyn and write it. I've got a sackful of notes for it. I guess I'll just stick around until Mr. McGill gets home and see if he won't buy me out. I'll sell the whole concern, horse, wagon, and books, for \$400. I've read Andrew McGill's stuff and I reckon the proposition'll interest him. I've had more fun with this Parnassus than a barrel of monkeys. I used to be a school teacher till my health broke down. Then I took this up and I've made more than expenses and had the time of my life."

"Well, Mr. Mifflin," I said, "if you want to stay around I guess I can't stop you. But I'm sorry you and your old Parnassus ever came this way."

I turned on my heel and went back to the kitchen. I knew pretty well that Andrew would go up in the air when he saw that wagonload of books and one of those crazy cards with Mr. Mifflin's poetry on it.

I must confess that I was considerably upset. Andrew is just as unpractical and fanciful as a young girl, and always dreaming of new adventures and rambles around the country. If he ever saw that travelling Parnassus he'd fall for it like snap. And I knew Mr. Decameron was after him for a new book anyway. (I'd intercepted one of his letters suggesting another "Happiness and Hayseed" trip just a few weeks before. Andrew was away when the letter came. I had a suspicion what was in it; so I opened it, read it, and—well, burnt it. Heavens! as though Andrew didn't have enough to do without mooning down the road like a tinker, just to write a book about it.)

As I worked around the kitchen I could see Mr. Mifflin making himself at home. He unhitched his horse, tied her up to the fence, sat down by the wood pile, and lit a pipe. I could see I was in for it. By and by I couldn't stand it any longer. I went out to talk to that bald-headed pedlar.

"See here," I said. "You're a pretty cool fish to make yourself so easy in my yard. I tell you I don't want you around here, you and your travelling parcheesi. Suppose you clear out of here before my brother gets back and don't be breaking up our happy family."

"Miss McGill," he said (the man had a pleasant way with him, too—darn him—with his bright, twinkling eye and his silly little beard), "I'm sure I don't want to be discourteous. If you move me on from here, of course I'll go; but I warn you I shall lie in wait for Mr. McGill just down this road. I'm here to sell this caravan of culture, and by the bones of Swinburne I think your brother's the man to buy it."

My blood was up now, and I'll admit that I said my next without proper calculation.

"Rather than have Andrew buy your old parcheesi," I said, "I'll buy it myself. I'll give you \$300 for it."

The little man's face brightened. He didn't either accept or decline my offer. (I was frightened to death that he'd take me right on the nail and bang would go my three years' savings for a Ford.)

"Come and have another look at her," he said.

I must admit that Mr. Roger Mifflin had fixed up his van mighty comfortably inside. The body of the wagon was built out on each side over the wheels, which gave it an unwieldy appearance but made extra room for the bookshelves. This left an inside space about five feet wide and nine long. On one side he had a little oil stove, a flap table, and a cozy-looking bunk

above which was built a kind of chest of drawers—to hold clothes and such things, I suppose; on the other side more bookshelves, a small table, and a little wicker easy chair. Every possible inch of space seemed to be made useful in some way, for a shelf or a hook or a hanging cupboard or something. Above the stove was a neat little row of pots and dishes and cooking utensils. The raised skylight made it just possible to stand upright in the centre aisle of the van; and a little sliding window opened onto the driver's seat in front. Altogether it was a very neat affair. The windows in front and back were curtained and a pot of geraniums stood on a diminutive shelf. I was amused to see a sandy Irish terrier curled up on a bright Mexican blanket in the bunk.

"Miss McGill," he said, "I couldn't sell Parnassus for less than four hundred. I've put twice that much into her, one time and another. She's built clean and solid all through, and there's everything a man would need from blankets to bouillon cubes. The whole thing's yours for \$400—including dog, cook stove, and everything—jib, boom, and spanker. There's a tent in a sling underneath, and an ice box (he pulled up a little trap door under the bunk) and a tank of coal oil and Lord knows what all. She's as good as a yacht; but I'm tired of her. If you're so afraid of your brother taking a fancy to her, why don't you buy her yourself and go off on a lark? Make *him* stay home and mind the farm!... Tell you what I'll do. I'll start you on the road myself, come with you the first day and show you how it's worked. You could have the time of your life in this thing, and give yourself a fine vacation. It would give your brother a good surprise, too. Why not?"

I don't know whether it was the neatness of his absurd little van, or the madness of the whole proposition, or just the desire to have an adventure of my own and play a trick on Andrew, but anyway, some extraordinary impulse seized me and I roared with laughter.

"Right!" I said. "I'll do it."

I, Helen McGill, in the thirty-ninth year of my age!

CHAPTER THREE

"Well," I thought, "if I'm in for an adventure I may as well be spry about it. Andrew'll be home by half-past twelve and if I'm going to give him the slip I'd better get a start. I suppose he'll think I'm crazy! He'll follow me, I guess. Well, he just shan't catch me, that's all!" A kind of anger came over me to think that I'd been living on that farm for nearly fifteen years—yes, sir, ever since I was twenty-five—and hardly ever been away except for that trip to Boston once a year to go shopping with cousin Edie. I'm a home-keeping soul, I guess, and I love my kitchen and my preserve cupboard and my linen closet as well as grandmother ever did, but something in that blue October air and that crazy little red-bearded man just tickled me.

"Look here, Mr. Parnassus," I said, "I guess I'm a fat old fool but I just believe I'll do that. You hitch up your horse and van and I'll go pack some clothes and write you a check. It'll do Andrew all the good in the world to have me skip. I'll get a chance to read a few books, too. It'll be as good as going to college!" And I untied my apron and ran for the house. The little man stood leaning against a corner of the van as if he were stupefied. I dare say he was.

I ran into the house through the front door, and it struck me as comical to see a copy of one of Andrew's magazines lying on the living-room table with "The Revolt of Womanhood" printed across it in red letters. "Here goes for the revolt of Helen McGill," I thought. I sat down at Andrew's desk, pushed aside a pad of notes he had been jotting down about "the magic of autumn," and scrawled a few lines:

DEAR ANDREW,

Don't be thinking I'm crazy. I've gone off for an adventure. It just came over me that you've had all the adventures while I've been at home baking bread. Mrs. McNally will look after your meals and one of her girls can come over to do the housework. So don't worry. I'm going off for a little while—a month, maybe—to see some of this happiness and hayseed of yours. It's what the magazines call the revolt of womanhood. Warm underwear in the cedar chest in the spare room when you need it. With love, HELEN.

I left the note on his desk.

Mrs. McNally was bending over the tubs in the laundry. I could see only the broad arch of her back and hear the vigorous zzzzzzz of her rubbing. She straightened up at my call.

"Mrs. McNally," I said, "I'm going away for a little trip. You'd better let the washing go until this afternoon and get Andrew's dinner for him. He'll be back about twelve-thirty. It's half-past ten now. You tell him I've gone over to see Mrs. Collins at Locust Farm."

Mrs. McNally is a brawny, slow-witted Swede. "All right Mis' McGill," she said. "You be back to denner?"

"No, I'm not coming back for a month," I said. "I'm going away for a trip. I want you to send Rosie over here every day to do the housework while I'm away. You can arrange with Mr. McGill about that. I've got to hurry now."

Mrs. McNally's honest eyes, as blue as Copenhagen china, gazing through the window in perplexity, fell upon the travelling Parnassus and Mr. Mifflin backing Pegasus into the shafts. I saw her make a valiant effort to comprehend the sign painted on the side of the van—and give it up.

"You going driving?" she said blankly.

"Yes," I said, and fled upstairs.

I always keep my bank book in an old Huyler box in the top drawer of my bureau. I don't save very quickly, I'm afraid. I have a little income from some money father left me, but Andrew takes care of that. Andrew pays all the farm expenses, but the housekeeping accounts fall to me. I make a fairish amount of pin money on my poultry and some of my preserves that I send to Boston, and on some recipes of mine that I send to a woman's magazine now and then; but generally my savings don't amount to much over \$10 a month. In the last five years I had put by something more than \$600. I had been saving up for a Ford. But just now it looked to me as if that Parnassus would be more fun than a Ford ever could be. Four hundred dollars was a lot of money, but I thought of what it would mean to have Andrew come home and buy it. Why, he'd be away until Thanksgiving! Whereas if I bought it I could take it away, have my adventure, and sell it somewhere so that Andrew never need see it. I hardened my heart and determined to give the Sage of Redfield some of his own medicine.

My balance at the Redfield National Bank was \$615.20. I sat down at the table in my bedroom where I keep my accounts and wrote out a check to

Roger Mifflin for \$400. I put in plenty of curlicues after the figures so that no one could raise the check into \$400,000; then I got out my old rattan suit case and put in some clothes. The whole business didn't take me ten minutes. I came downstairs to find Mrs. McNally looking sourly at the Parnassus from the kitchen door.

"You going away in that—that 'bus, Mis' McGill?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. McNally," I said cheerfully. Her use of the word gave me an inspiration. "That's one of the new jitney 'buses we hear about. He's going to take me to the station. Don't you worry about me. I'm going for a holiday. You get Mr. McGill's dinner ready for him. After dinner tell him there's a note for him in the living-room."

"I tank that bane a queer 'bus," said Mrs. McNally, puzzled. I think the excellent woman suspected an elopement.

I carried my suit case out to the Parnassus. Pegasus stood placidly between the shafts. From within came sounds of vigorous movement. In a moment the little man burst out with a bulging portmanteau in his hand. He had a tweed cap slanted on the back of his head.

"There!" he cried triumphantly. "I've packed all my personal effects—clothes and so on—and everything else goes with the transaction. When I get on the train with this bag I'm a free man, and hurrah for Brooklyn! Lord, won't I be glad to get back to the city! I lived in Brooklyn once, and I haven't been back there for ten years," he added plaintively.

"Here's the check," I said, handing it to him. He flushed a little, and looked at me rather shamefacedly. "See here," he said, "I hope you're not making a bad bargain? I don't want to take advantage of a lady. If you think your brother...."

"I was going to buy a Ford, anyway," I said, "and it looks to me as though this parcheesi of yours would be cheaper to run than any flivver that ever came out of Detroit. I want to keep it away from Andrew and that's the main thing. You give me a receipt and we'll get away from here before he comes back."

He took the check without a word, hoisted his fat portmanteau on the driver's seat, and then disappeared in the van. In a minute he reappeared. On the back of one of his poetical cards he had written:

Received from Miss McGill the sum of four hundred dollars in exchange for one Travelling Parnassus in first class condition, delivered to her this day, October 3rd, 19—.

Signed
ROGER MIFFLIN.

"Tell me," I said, "does your Parnassus—*my* Parnassus, rather—contain everything I'm likely to need? Is it stocked up with food and so on?"

"I was coming to that," he said. "You'll find a fair supply of stuff in the cupboard over the stove, though I used to get most of my meals at farmhouses along the road. I generally read aloud to people as I go along, and they're often good for a free meal. It's amazing how little most of the country folk know about books, and how pleased they are to hear good stuff. Down in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania...."

"Well, how about the horse?" I said hastily, seeing him about to embark on an anecdote. It wasn't far short of eleven o'clock, and I was anxious to get started.

"It might be well to take along some oats. My supply's about exhausted."

I filled a sack with oats in the stable and Mr. Mifflin showed me where to hang it under the van. Then in the kitchen I loaded a big basket with provisions for an emergency: a dozen eggs, a jar of sliced bacon, butter, cheese, condensed milk, tea, biscuits, jam, and two loaves of bread. These Mr. Mifflin stowed inside the van, Mrs. McNally watching in amazement.

"I tank this bane a queer picnic!" she said. "Which way are you going? Mr. McGill, is he coming after you?"

"No," I insisted, "he's not coming. I'm going off on a holiday. You get dinner for him and he won't worry about anything until after that. Tell him I've gone over to see Mrs. Collins."

I climbed the little steps and entered my Parnassus with a pleasant thrill of ownership. The terrier on the bunk jumped to the floor with a friendly wag of the tail. I piled the bunk with bedding and blankets of my own, shook out the drawers which fitted above the bunk, and put into them what few belongings I was taking with me. And we were ready to start.

Redbeard was already sitting in front with the reins in hand. I climbed up beside him. The front seat was broad but uncushioned, well sheltered by the peak of the van. I gave a quick glance around at the comfortable house under its elms and maples—saw the big, red barn shining in the sun and the pump under the grape arbour. I waved good-bye to Mrs. McNally who was watching us in silent amazement. Pegasus threw her solid weight against the traces and Parnassus swung round and rolled past the gate. We turned into the Redfield road.

"Here," said Mifflin, handing me the reins, "you're skipper, you'd better drive. Which way do you want to go?"

My breath came a little fast when I realized that my adventure had begun!

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