

### Seasoned Timber

By Dorothy Canfield

CHAPTER THREE

Continued

She cut him short, impatient with his misunderstanding. "That's what I was afraid you thought. It was not generous. It wasn't even Mrs. Washburn I was thinking about. It was my sister Delia and me. I'd always thought that nobody cared, not really, about anybody but his own folks. So when I saw you being nice to that silly old woman, why, it seemed to me all of a sudden that maybe we weren't so all by ourselves, Delia and I. But when I tried to tell you, couldn't seem to think of any way to say it that wouldn't sound as if I was asking you to be sorry for us..." She held her head high, her gray eyes sternly bade him pity her at his peril.

"It doesn't sound like that. Not in the least!" he assured her, his heart pounding in the sympathy she had not asked for, and stopped short, his eyes fixed on the knob of the door. It was slowly being turned.

The door opened, revealing the janitor in faded overalls stooping to pick up a pail. He had plodded several steps into the room before he saw that the superintendent was still there, in the visitor's chair, and the teacher on the platform behind her desk. "Oh, I didn't know as anybody was here, Professor Hulme," he said, setting down the pail. "I better do some other room first, mebbe?"

Mr. Hulme stood up, reaching for the hat he had left poised on the geography globe. "No, go ahead, Elmer," he said easily. "I'm just about through with what I had to say to Miss Barney. To the teacher he added in all confidence, "I think I'm going your way, Miss Barney. We could go along together and finish this matter on the way."

But she, bending her head over the papers on her desk, murmured with a sudden shyness, "Thank you, Mr. Hulme. I have a little work to do before I go."

"Good afternoon," he said stiffly, put his hat on, went through the door, shut it behind him and walked down the corridor, his steps echoing dimly in the empty building. He was furious.

He had just laid his hand on the front door knob when he heard the click of a lifted latch at the other end of the hall. Susan Barney's voice called, "Mr. Hulme!"

He halted, said gruffly, "Yes!"

Turned around and took off his hat as if grudging the gesture.

She came close to him. She was breathing rapidly, but she said at once, "Maybe there isn't any more kindness in the world than I thought. But there's more honorableness."

He felt it was the first time he had ever seen her, the first time he had ever seen anyone. Turning away rather quickly she walked back to her classroom, shutting the door behind her.

Lying on his bed that night, Timothy Hulme knew very well what was happening to—what was likely to happen to him. The clock in the tower of St. Andrew's sounded out an indifferent two, not caring what sleepless ears might hear it. But sleep was almost within reach now. He began to feel drowsy. And turning his head on the pillow was surprised to see the sun framing his drawn

shades with a sparkling line of gold. He must have been asleep for hours. He stretched, rolled out of bed, yawned, let his shades snap up to the top, and looked out.

"What splendid, what sumptuous Venetian magnificence our Vermont Octobers are," cried Timothy Hulme, "and what a pity we don't live more intimately with the autumn while it lasts." Why had he never thought to take advantage of the absurdly low cost of real estate up here and buy a piece of land of his own—perhaps build a shack on it, up in one of the Hollows of Hemlock Mountain? Or if not that, one of the abandoned farms on a back road, that sold for nothing. It would be a retreat, a week-end hermitage.

Exhilarated, Timothy Hulme raced down the stairs, three steps at a time, found the coffee not too bad and told Aunt Lavinia about his plan.

"Susan Barney's sister's here for the week-end," remarked Aunt Lavinia. "I've asked them both for tea today at four."

"Very well then," he agreed, getting up from the table.

"To do decent honor to Aunt Lavinia's guests, he came back to the house after his last afternoon recitation, washed his face and hands and changed his clothes. It was a becoming outfit, and he was not surprised by the admiration, respectful, almost intimidated, in the eyes of the two country girls when he joined them before the hearth fire.

Susan had a hat on, not a good hat. It hid most of her spun-silk hair, and coming down too far on her head, covered the broad arch of her brow. She looked almost plain. That must have been a dream last night. The much-talked-of sister Delia was a chubby,

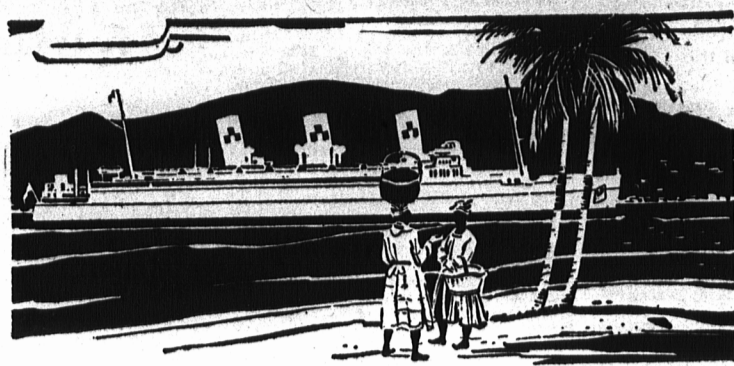
black-haired dowdy adolescent. Susan and Aunt Lavinia soon went into the kitchen to get the tea things. Left with the sister, the Principal prepared to get out the series of key questions he used for diagnosing adolescents.

He had little to do with the conversation after the tea came in. Extinguished under the graceless hat, Susan was passing him the plate of toasted crackers. He took one and gave her his perfunctory company smile of thanks, delighted to see that she was plain. Susan incautiously started Aunt Lavinia by remarking, "I wonder if I didn't see your nephew here once. Mr. Hulme, when I was a student at the Academy. One Sunday afternoon when you were reading aloud, there was a young man here who looked a little like you. He called you Uncle Tim, I think."

"Very likely. When he was at college, Canby often used to come up for week-ends. But he is not," said Timothy Hulme with unnecessary firmness, "in the least related to me. He is my sister-in-law's nephew. I think you must be mistaken about his looking like me." He liked Canby Hunter well enough, perhaps more than any other of the innumerable boys he had helped educate, he liked his ugly face with its undershot jaw and its hit-or-miss assortment of inharmonious features inherited from God knew what conflicting strains of ordinary people. Canby was all right. But to say that he looked like a Hulme...

To be Continued

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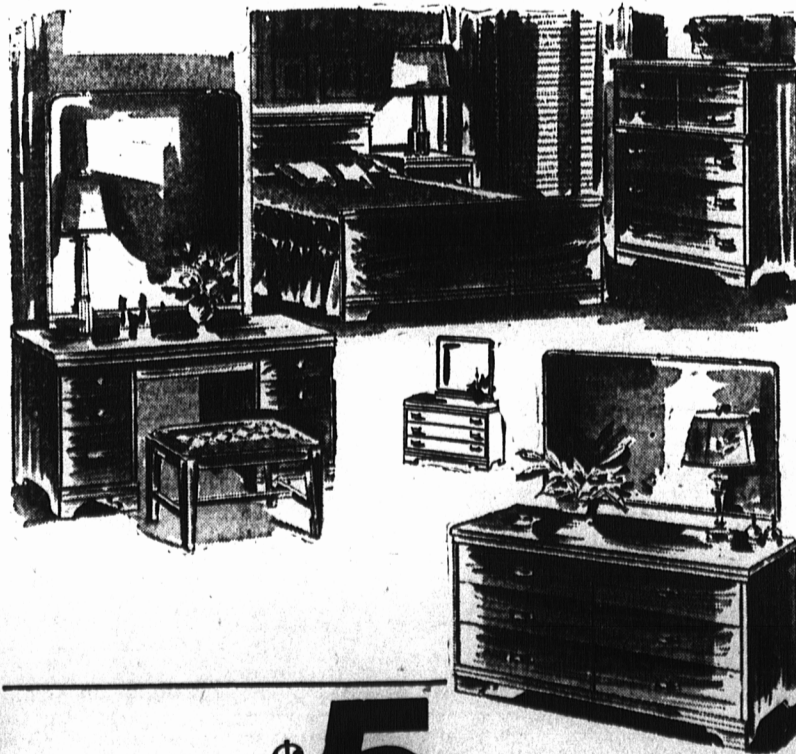
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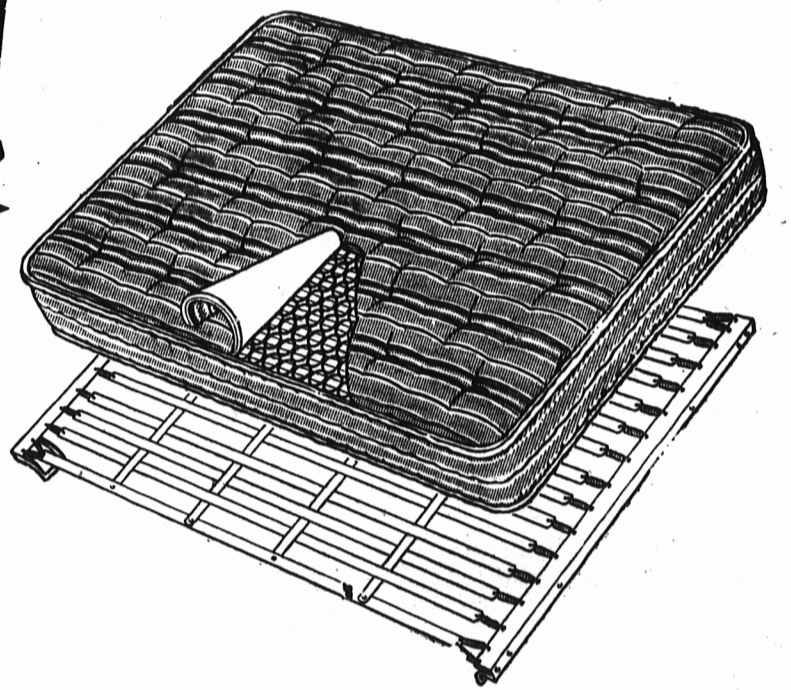
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