

Seasoned Timber

By Dorothy Canfield
CHAPTER FOUR

Finally the two girls said good-by, they'd had a wonderful time, thank you so much — they were gone. Remembering that he had not yet so much as opened the day's mail piled on his desk. Mr. Hulme stepped out and walked briskly along the gravel driveway toward his office in the Academy building.

Some one was coming towards him. He looked around to see Susan Barney. She had taken off her hat, and as she walked was swinging it in one ungloved hand. Her forward motion set her hair stirring and lifting around her face like a cloud. Mr. Hulme thought coolly of something he must be sure to say to her before he forgot it, and called, "Oh, Susan, wait a minute." He took off his hat, looked down at her, and said with kindness, "You know I told you yesterday that I seldom could make any kind of guess about what young people are like? Well, as far as your sister Delia goes, I was mistaken. I had a little talk with her this afternoon while you and my aunt were in the kitchen, and I was struck with her brains. She's an unusually bright girl."

Susan cried out his name, turning it into an exclamation of delight. "Oh, Mr. Hulme!" she said fervently.

She gave him, out of her beautiful gray eyes, the long, melting, intimate look which once before had so deeply moved him; but now it was cut short by a rush of happy tears.

It was well towards the middle of November when Timothy Hulme sat down next to the old man one evening, instead of by Mrs. Washburn to whom as a penance he had been pointedly kind for four or five weeks. "It is really true," he cast out his line towards Mr. Dewey with a carefully baited hook, "that as many as fifteen or twenty families used to live up on the Crandall Pitch? Curious, isn't it, a whole community evaporating that way? How'd they ever happen to settle so far away?"

"Far away from what?" Mr. Dewey flung himself unsuspectingly upon the bait. "They settled there because they had sense enough to know it was a good place to live. Why, let me tell you, T. C., that's one of the best pieces of land in this town. Not a sour square inch in it. And up high that way, between the two mountains, they'd get a full hour more sunshine both ends of the day than anywhere else in Clifford. Far away nothing!"

Miss Lane asked, "I've always wondered, Mr. Dewey, why they did leave the Pitch?"

Mr. Dewey looked unsmilingly back into the past. "All kinds of reasons. Women-folks mostly, I guess. They wanted to be where tradin' any time they took a notion to."

"I've heard my grandmother say," Miss Lane added reasonably, "that when the Academy was started down here..."

"We-e-ell, yes, that was another thing," Mr. Dewey admitted. As Susan Barney stood up and began to gather the dishes together to carry out to the kitchen, Mr. Hulme said to Mr. Dewey, loudly enough to be heard by everybody, "Well, I now have a personal interest in the Crandall Pitch. I've just bought a house up on the road that used to go to it. Thought it was time I had a place of my own like the rest of you. The last house on the road. Right-hand side as you go up."

He turned his head from one to another as he spoke, looking steadily at them although he was intensely conscious of Susan behind them standing silent at the door of the kitchen, a pile of plates in her hand. But now he could control his eyes no longer, looked past his questioners at her — and could not look away.

She was smiling at him, smiling as if they were alone in the room.

The Manual Training teacher had an idea. "But isn't that the house where Miss Barney's grandfather—where she was brought up?"

"Why, so 'tis!" Mr. Dewey was struck by this. "Susan!" he roared, "Susan! Listen to this. Come here a minute."

To be continued



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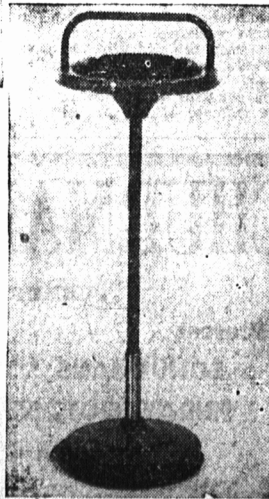


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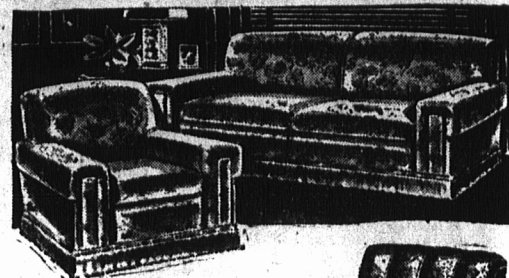
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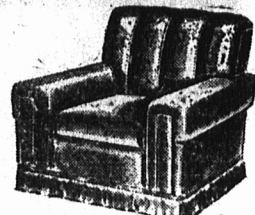
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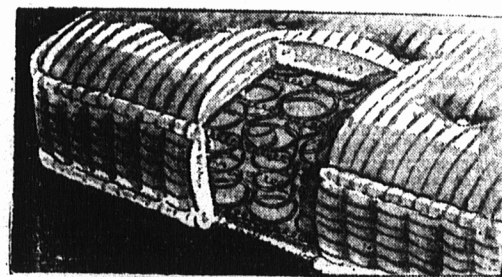
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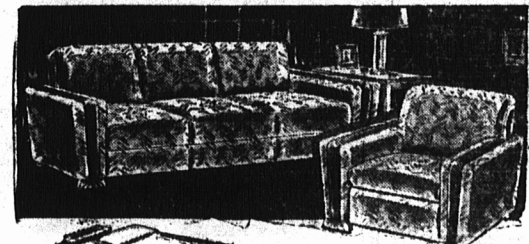
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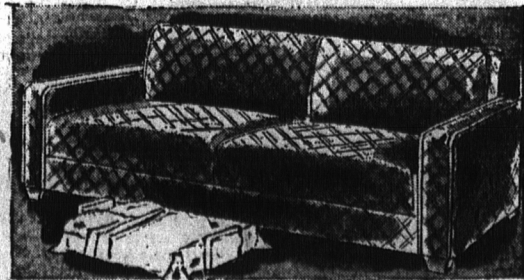


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