

Chapter One

YOU COME BACK HERE, Dwight Moody! What in the world do you mean? Set me to work—and then just walk off!" Young D.L. Moody turned and saw his brother George drop his ax to the ground. George sputtered again, "You can't get away with it. You set me to work like I was a hired hand. Then you stand around and—."

"And organize," D.L. said, grinning.

"Organize! Huh—another word for pushing work off on another fellow. I heard you talk before, Dwight. You grab that ax and start chopping."

In another moment, his big brother would start after him. But it was too nice a day for a real squabble. So D.L. walked toward the woodpile, reluctantly. "One's enough for this job," he started to explain. "You follow my system, George, and you—."

"Chop!" George said.

For the next few moments there was no sound in the back yard of the Massachusetts farmhouse but the steady thud of ax on wood and the instantaneous splitting of pine. Overhead a bluejay rasped, and D.L. thought in irritation that the bird was mocking his sweat. When the jay scratched out a last remark, curving away over the trees, D.L. hated the bird for flaunting its freedom. He lifted his ax more slowly, slamming it down with force but no bounce.

"Chop wood in the fall," he grunted, half to his brother, more to himself. "Hoe corn in the spring. Pick beans in the summer. That ain't no life."

George straightened up, pulling the sweat from

his forehead with the back of his hand. "Why don't you organize something better?"

"Sick and tired of being squeezed into this valley." Now the ax swung fiercely. "Sick and tired." Up with the ax. "Sick and—," down with the ax, fiercely, "—tired."

"You got growing pains. You're but sixteen, Dwight. I had 'em too."

D.L. rested his ax, leaning on the handle. "These growin' pains are gonna grow me right off this farm and out of this valley and over them hills."

"You're too big for your breeches, Dwight."

He flung down his ax. "Then I'll get me new breeches. Fancy ones. City ones. Not wood-chopping breeches." A chunk of pine splintered off from George's ax and hit him sharply against the shins. He sidestepped but he didn't look down. Instead, he studied the low hills in the distance, as brown against the sky as the turkey gravy his mother was sure to serve at dinner. Crossly he flung the thoughts of his mother and the family's Thanksgiving dinner out of his mind. "A man is only so much muscles and blood and brains," he told his brother. "It's up to him what he makes out of that raw stuff. Well, I'm gonna make something, something big. You wait and see."

It was Thanksgiving Day, 1853. Later at the table, young D.L. hunched up his shoulders, ducked his head and, protecting his plate with a curved arm, gave his full attention to the turkey, mashed potatoes, and squash. When he had almost come to the end of his second plateful, he began to listen to the conversation between his mother and his Uncle Samuel, up from his Boston shoestore for the holiday.

"He comes up and stuffs himself fat on our victuals," he thought as his uncle belched behind his napkin. "Then he goes back to the big city, shaking the dust of the road in our faces and thinking us all poor country relatives." The rings on his uncle's hands glittered. If only *he* could get to that city on the other side of the hills, he could get rich too.

Uncle Samuel patted his mouth politely and belched again. "I declare, Betsy Holton Moody, this pie of yours is richer'n Beacon Hill."

D.L. leaned down the table. "Uncle Samuel, them folks on Beacon Hill—," he began.

But his mother rapped the table. "Dwight, your uncle's plate. Pass it like a good boy."

D.L. paid no attention. "They're all rolling in money, huh?"

"Dwight! Your uncle wants another piece of pie."

He handed down the plate and kept on talking. "I'm figuring on being rich some day, Uncle Samuel."

His mother drew in her breath, but his uncle beamed and nodded. "That's a good ambition. It's a free country, Dwight."

"I'm figuring on coming down to Boston."

"Dwight." His mother's cheeks were getting pink, a sure sign of trouble ahead.

But Uncle Samuel clucked pleasantly. "Now, Betsy, dreaming never hurt nobody."

So D. L. persisted. "Right away."

"What's that!"

The prongs of D. L.'s fork drew a wild circle in mid-air. "Figure you need a new hand to help out with winter trade."

His uncle's chair scraped the wood floor. "Why, Dwight, boy, I'd be happier than a clam at high tide to oblige you, but it just so happens—."

"I don't aim to work for you long," D.L. hurried on. "Just till I get my bearings and decide what I

really want." His uncle said nothing. The chair squeaked back and forth. Elatedly, D.L. thought, it must be settled. Easier than he'd hoped!

Suddenly, across the table, George's chin jutted out. "You hire old Dwight here, and he'll be running your store before you know it."

D.L.'s chair shot back, and he grabbed for his brother. But George was halfway out of the room, his pie in his hand. From the doorway, he taunted, "Watch out, Uncle Samuel. You watch out for old Dwight. He'll run the store right out from under you."

D.L. let him go, concentrating on his uncle. "Strike a bargain, Uncle Samuel. I'll go back to Boston with you tomorrow." His uncle had to see he could not stay there on the farm, chopping wood for the rest of his life. "You can hire me for less wages'n you pay anybody else. That's a bargain."

His uncle said nothing as he pushed his chair back from the table, giving his napkin and his lap a little shake that spilled crumbs of turkey and stuffing to the floor. He belched. "I'm fuller'n a healthy hog, Betsy," he said ponderously. Then he turned to D.L. "Settle down there, boy. I never struck no bargain. I reckon you'll call me mean as goose grease, but the truth is there's no place in my Boston shoestore for you. You stay put right here in this valley and look after your widow mother."

But D.L. had caught hold of an idea and he was not going to be pried loose. Uncle Samuel could help him escape from the valley, and there was no reason why he should not. But later, when he faced his uncle out by the woodpile, his uncle made his reasons very plain. "What about your mamma, Dwight? You got some obligation to Betsy, after all. The way she's brought up all of you. Why, you were but a four-year-old tyke when your papa died."

"I'd send money home," D.L. murmured.

As his uncle fiddled with his waistcoat buttons, his rings sparkled in the fall sun. D.L. could not take his eyes from them. "'Tisn't just your mamma, Dwight, that makes me say no. 'Tisn't just the way I feel about a country boy knowing his place and staying there. But, Dwight—." His uncle puffed out his cheeks. "Dwight, you're a hotheaded, unlearned young fool. You're wild. Who pinned up the notice for the temperance meeting last month?"

"But—."

"Gathered up a crowd' of hard-working farmers to hear the lecture and there wasn't no lecture at all."

"Can't a fellow have some fun?"

"Fun and tomfoolery—that's what your wildness is in the country. But the city's different. A hundred ways for a young fellow to go wrong. Especially one that's got a wild streak in his nature. He'd get out of hand. Disgrace himself—."

D.L. interrupted. "I could take care of myself."

"—and disgrace the good name of the Holton Shoestore." Uncle Samuel puffed out his cheeks again and then sucked them in. "No, sir, Dwight. You're bright as a button, but you're headstrong. You stay right here in the valley and grow up to be a sensible farmer."

Then the sun went in. Everything in the world looked as sad and dirty as the brown hills beyond. In the distance, a train hooted twice and labored down the Connecticut River valley toward Boston. D.L. began to speak then stopped and, tossing back his thick black hair, he started for the house.

So his Uncle Samuel went back to Boston without him. D.L. stayed in the narrow little valley that every day seemed to get narrower. Some day it would

squeeze the breath out of him. It was not just the wood chopping. It was the farm, and it was the school. He felt as if he must burst right out of them to keep on breathing. One day, when the valley had smelled like spring for a week, he did. He packed an extra shirt and a change of underwear and, kissing his mother good-by, started for a town that he did not even consider second-best to Boston. But it was beyond the valley.

"Well, now, what is your considered opinion of our town of Clinton?" The old newspaper man who had hired him to address envelopes teased him every day with the same question.

"It ain't Boston," D.L. answered, not looking up from writing addresses.

The old newspaper man shrugged. "And you ain't Mr. Lowell or Mr. Cabot, either. Don't forget that, Mr. Moody, when you're feeling uppity."

One day there was a commotion in the outer offices. D.L. heard cross voices and then the old editor out-shouting everyone. He went on with his humdrum job. He was sick and tired of writing addresses but he consoled himself that Clinton was only temporary. Some day, he would be writing "Boston."

"Moody!" The old editor stamped up behind him. "That fellow that just come in, he tells me the papers have been going to the wrong houses."

D.L. looked at the editor, then at his list. "Huh?"

"Says it's the half numbers what's been complaining."

What in the world was the old man talking about? "Half numbers?" he repeated.

"Yeah, 51½ Walnut Street; 19½—."

"Oh, them. Why, I been figuring them in, all right."

The old editor stared. "Figuring them in?"

"Yeah. Adding them on."

"Adding!" The editor was shouting.

"Isn't $51\frac{1}{2}$ the same as 52?" D.L. explained patiently.

"But $51\frac{1}{2}$ is somebody's house. Somebody's paper."

D.L. was confused. "What kind of a house comes in half?"

"You never heard of tenements?" The editor didn't wait for an answer. "That's what I get. Hire a country bumpkin and that's what I get— $51\frac{1}{2}$ is 52! I should have known better. Country boys are hopeless. Moody, you're through!"

D.L. ran his fingers up and down the list of addresses, as if the smooth paper would reassure him. But the paper was flat and cold beneath his hand. "Half numbers," he said dumbly. "You'd fire me over a mess of fractions?"

"Once a farm boy, always a farm boy— $51\frac{1}{2}$ is 52. What in tunkit can I do with somebody that stupid?"

The road from Clinton ran two ways—back into the Connecticut River valley and ahead to Boston. For a long time that afternoon D.L. stood looking first one way and then the other. Then he turned and began to walk—away from Boston—back to the farm.

Chapter Two

WHETHER D.L. WAS CHOPPING PINE or picking beans, he could hear the hoots of the Boston train as it rushed down the green valley, away from