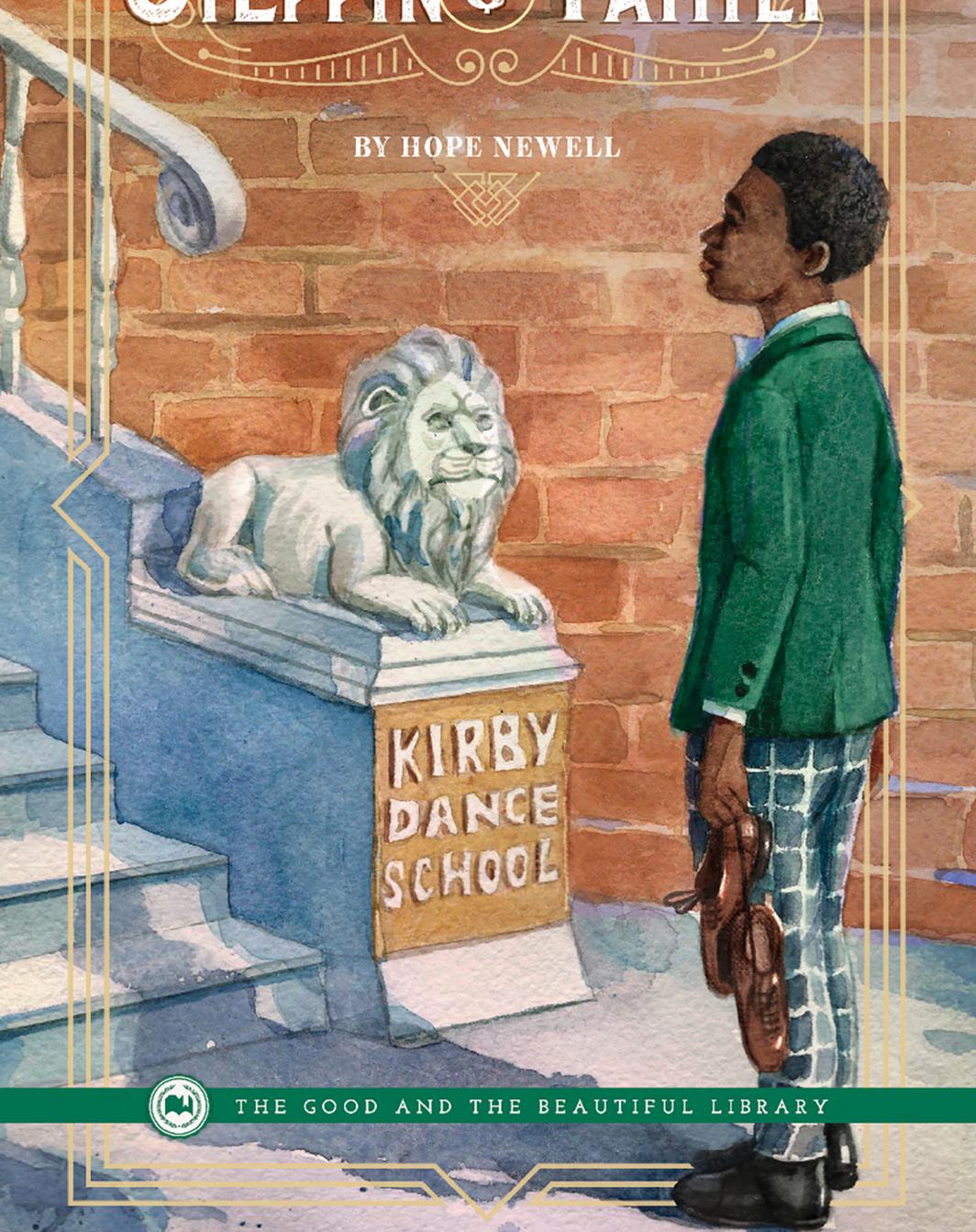
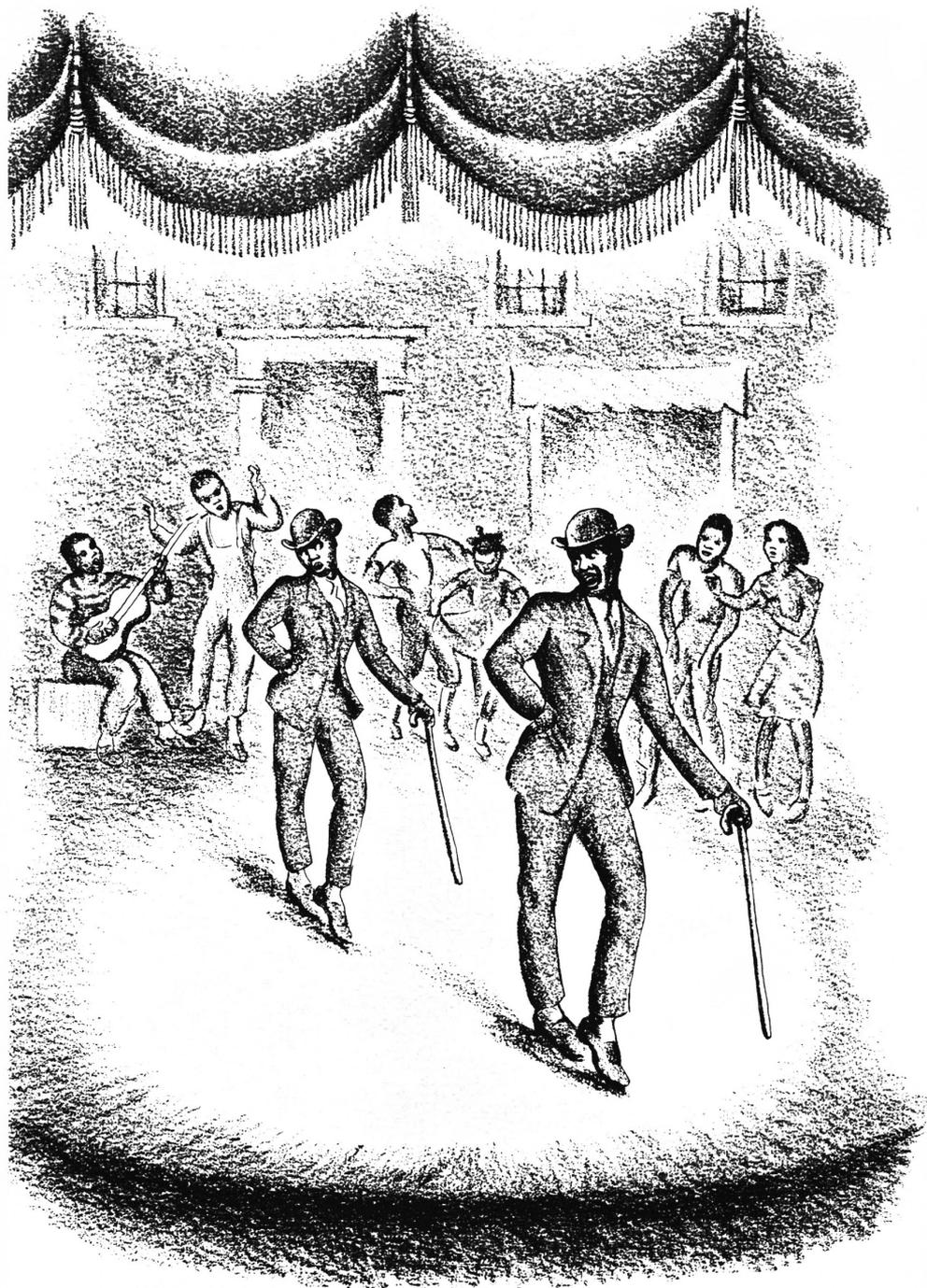


STEPPIN' & FAMILY

BY HOPE NEWELL



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY







CHAPTER 1

Steppin's First Public Appearance

To see Steppin Stebbins racing down the street one warm afternoon in June, no one would have believed that he was on his way to school. Every other school day in the whole year, it had taken his mother's warning, "You'll be late," and his little sister Mary Ellis' constant scolding to get Steppin through his lunch and back to his desk before the tardy bell rang. But this day was different.

It was the last day of school. No more lessons, no more homework, no more scrambling out of bed in a hurry, nothing but fun for two blessed months! But it was not so much the

thought of freedom to come as the great event of that very afternoon that made Steppin hurry. For he was to do a solo tap dance at the closing exercises of his class. "My first public appearance," he thought proudly as he ran down the street.

A changing traffic light on Eighth Avenue brought him to an abrupt halt. Hopping up and down on the curb, Steppin stared impatiently at the stream of automobiles, trucks, and streetcars roaring by. The thunder of the elevated trains overhead, the clank and clatter of streetcars, and the honks of taxis went unnoticed. His ears were tuned to city din.

"School is out
Hear me shout,"

he crooned under his breath while his feet beat out a tap in the same rhythm. Brush, brush and hop with his right foot, and brush, brush and hop with the left foot, over and over. While he danced, Steppin kept an eye on the green signal. Was it going to stay that way all day? Wouldn't it ever turn red?

At last it changed, and Steppin darted across the street like a flash and scurried down the street. Out of habit he looked up at the street clock, which generally told him he was in danger of being late. But today he saw that it had taken him only five minutes to come this far. As school was only two blocks away, Steppin slowed down to a walk and stopped before his favorite window, the pawn shop.

Treasures of all kinds were heaped together in the dusty shop window: guns, tennis rackets, telescopes, banjos, roller skates, and jack knives. Steppin always played a game before that window. He picked out the things he would most like to buy if he had all the money he wanted. He usually spent a long time over that choice, weighing values carefully. But this day he paid no attention to the wonderful display. He had caught sight of his reflection in the gilt mirror that stood at the back of the showcase.



He eyed himself proudly. "Boy, I sure do look like a professional," he murmured, strutting a little and grinning broadly. His coffee-brown face, shining with the scrubbing he had given it, grinned back at him, showing all of his ivory-white teeth. His hair under the tight skull cap he wore was slicked so close to his skull that it looked as if it was painted on. His big black eyes took in the navy-blue coat of his Sunday suit, the stiffly starched white shirt with a little black bow tie, and the white duck trousers which his friend Charley Kee, the Chinese laundry man, had pressed for him in exchange for errands. Steppin sighed with satisfied approval.

Steppin had pored over the pictures of black celebrities who performed in night clubs and theaters, and this costume was the best imitation of his idols that he could manage. Except for one thing, Steppin was greatly pleased with the elegant entertainer he saw reflected in the mirror. His shoes were all wrong. He had no soft, flexible slippers with metal taps on their tips like a real dancer. He wore a pair of old sneakers and had stuck a cluster of thumb tacks in the tip of each sole to use for taps. They did pretty well, but Steppin was not satisfied with them.

"Oh well, you can't have everything at once, I suppose," he consoled himself. "Anyway, when I get to be a professional, I'm going to have six dozen pairs of dancing shoes at a time, with solid silver taps on every single one of them. Even platinum, maybe, if I want to."

Steppin's dreams of the future carried him happily on to school. A few boys were playing ball in the playground. They called to Steppin to join them. "Not a chance," thought Steppin, not when he was about to make his first public appearance as a dancer. He must keep his clothes in order for an occasion like this. So he entered the large brick building and ran up the stairs to his classroom.

Steppin hardly recognized the familiar room; it looked so festive with garlands of evergreens on the walls and bowls of

flowers on the window sills. Some of the girls who were helping the teacher, Miss Blair, decorate the room looked festive too, in their frilly dresses of pink and blue and white, their hair gay with bows of bright ribbons. Miss Blair herself, in a blue silk dress, with her blond hair fluffed out around her face, looked as young as a girl, Steppin thought.

Miss Blair's desk had been taken away, and two big jars of lilacs stood one on each side of the platform. A bright poster painted by some of the children served as a backdrop. Steppin surveyed it with approval. It looked almost like a stage.

But suddenly he thought of the moment when he would have to step up there before all the boys and girls. Cold shivers went up his spine. A strange, sinking feeling gripped him in the stomach. He was scared! Steppin had never thought of that.

"Oh boy, I've got to make good, and here I am as jumpy as a cat," he thought as he slid into his seat. His own name, Stephen A. Stebbins, seemed to jump at him from the neatly printed program on his desk. He stared at it and clenched his clammy hands under the desk.

While the other boys and girls, demure and solemn in their best clothes, took their seats, Steppin anxiously went over in his mind the dance routine he had so carefully worked out. He counted out the steps to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia" which his sister, Mary Ellis, was to play for his accompaniment. Brush, brush and hop; and brush, brush and hop; heel and toe and break. "Gee, I'd like to have a tune with some snap to it," he thought. But the few selections which Mary Ellis could play by ear on the wheezy old organ at home did not include pieces with snap.

In a daze, Steppin heard Miss Blair make her little opening speech and then announce: "And now we will have the first number on our program, a recitation of Kipling's poem *If* by Martin Burns, Junior." Martin had been speaking that piece on every school program since he was in the fourth grade, and never yet had he been able to get through all the "ifs" without



STEPPIN & FAMILY

As Steppin stood and read the familiar sign, he felt his heart pounding. At last, he was on the verge of his great adventure. A painted wooden hand attached to the sign pointed up to the second floor. Steppin stepped into the narrow hall and slowly climbed the bare creaky stairs. He drew a long breath and opened the door.

So began Steppin's journey toward the life of his dreams. He knew he was born to dance, but to make that dream a reality and to truly be a great dancer, he was going to need lessons.

Filled with humorous adventures, heart-warming family love, hilarious mishaps, hard work, and determination, Steppin's journey leads him to form many wonderful friendships and ultimately overcome the hurdles in his path in a way he never could have imagined.



www.thegoodandthebeautiful.com

ISBN 978-1-949062-63-2
\$7.99
5 0799



9 781949 062632



SKU 4504