

Reading Passages: 9th Grade

The Friendship

by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

1. The little boy had a policeman for a friend. He acquired him out of a clear sky. He ran out of the schoolyard to go home for his noon lunch, tripped over a rough spot on the sidewalk, and fell so hard and so flat that for gasping moments he could not draw a breath. The policeman happened to be passing by. Robert felt himself being lifted and pounded on the back. The first breath that came was agony and wonder, for drawing it had seemed impossible. It was only with the third that he realized his knees were hurting, and he looked down to see them torn and bleeding. He became aware of the policeman and then it was unthinkable to cry.
2. He was not afraid, like the defiant older boys who gave themselves away by bragging of what they had done and intended to do to policemen. His father had often told him that the law was a protector, and if he ever found himself lost, for he was something of a roamer, he was to ask for a policeman and give his name and address. This seemed appropriate now.
3. He said, "My name is Robert Wilkinson and I live on Newton Street. I've forgotten the number."
4. The policeman nodded his head gravely. "I know your father," he said. "Isn't your house the large green-and-white one?"
5. "Oh, yes. With a big snow-apple tree in the yard."
6. The policeman again inclined his head. "My duties take me that way, Robert. I'll walk along with you."
7. The little boy was enchanted. The policeman's gravity was pleasing and complimentary.
8. "That was a bad tumble, young man. Are your knees painful?"
9. "Yes, sir, they hurt terribly."
10. "Will there be someone at home to fix you up?"
11. "Oh, yes; my mother. She's always there when I come home for lunch."
12. "You're lucky, Robert. I didn't have a mother when I was your age. Eight, I'd guess?"
13. "Just six. I almost wasn't old enough to begin the first grade." He glowed with pride that the policeman thought he was eight years old. "I thought everybody had a mother."
14. "Everybody has a mother to begin with."
15. "Even kittens and puppies and little birds."
16. "And colts and calves and baby elephants," said the policeman, and smiled. "But sometimes a mother can be lost."