The ALFRED STORY BOOK

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FOREWORD

The short-stories included in this little collection were written by members of the Short-Story Class of Alfred College, as a part of the first semester's work in that course. These stories are not offered as perfect examples of the art of short-story writing; they have been chosen merely as representative work of the class. The purpose in publishing them is three-fold: to encourage the students themselves to more worthy performance; to make a small contribution to the general reading public; and to fulfill the authors' desire to see their productions in print.

VENGEANCE IS MINE

HARRY J. SMITH

I ran up the dingy stairway of the Weston Block on Main Street, and rapped at a door whose frosted glass bore the legend: "Richard C. Wellington, Attorney-at-Law." In response to an enquiring "Come," I entered and hailed the sole occupant.

"Hello, old pettifogger. what are you plotting now?"

A pair of long legs came down from the paper-strewn desk with a thump, the desk chair screeched harshly, and my friend sat up.

"Hello, old dry-as-dust. How's the Reverend 'Seventhly,' today?" he queried, grinning amiably. "Empty that chair and sit down. Been out comforting the sisters, I suppose."

I closed a couple of calf-bound law volumes, put them on the table, and remarked, looking at the titles,

"Been taking something to make you sleep, I see. They are the best sedatives in the world."

"Barring a couple of the Reverend John Ellsworth Brasted's sermons," he countered, reaching for his pipe.

I parried. "Oh no, they are not sedatives—"

"But anesthetics," he cut in, his grin broadening, and nearly closing the bright blue eyes.

Our preliminary sparring over, we sat back and looked out at the sprinkle of passers-by, made up for the most part of the baby carriage parade, for the day was fine. The hollow punk of a football, and the glad voices of high school lads echoed out over the park, and through the half-opened window came the chatter of shoals of school girls. It needed not the mellow chiming of car bells in the nearby railroad yards, nor the various tall chimneys scattered about, to tell that Elmport was a railway and manufacturing town, for the smoke from engine and chimney made so thick the October haze that the very shadows were dingy and wan.

A battered street-car clanked by, bobbing like a row boat in a choppy sea, its gong sounding stridently. Farmers' rigs clattered along the pavement, and a desultory string of trucks, roadsters, and touring cars, rattled, or hummed, or glided past. Wellington sat amid a cloud of smoke, the grip of his teeth on the pipestem bulging the muscles along his lean jaw. His hands were in his pockets, his feet on the window sill, his stiff, reddish hair rumpled. We had talked for a few moments on the all-absorbing topic of local

politics, when Wellington's form stiffened slightly, his eyebrows beetled yet more, and his teeth came together with a snap. I followed his steady look, wondering. A long limousine had slid up to the opposite curb, and was discharging its passengers. Wellington's voice was almost a snarl:

"You'll ride in a Black Maria, someday, you waddling blimp, and your dirty money won't save you either."

We watched Harrigan as he surged into his Main Street cafe, whose glittering front seemed to keep Wellington continually in a condition of smouldering anger.

"He won't carry himself with such a lordly air after election, old man," I said confidently. "The undercurrent is running strong against him. Of course, the saloon element is making a lot of noise, but if I can judge at all, the decent citizens of the town are going to snow him under. I'll grant you that the better element goes by fits and starts in its reforming, but this is one time when it is fully awake, and ready for business."

"The decent element would be hopeless if it didn't wake up this time," he answered, with heat. "When our penny edition of Tammany Hall tries to make Elmport swallow such a dose as Harrigan for mayor, it's time something dropped."

Wellington was a tall, wiry Airdale of a fellow, with an Airdale's rugged steadfastness, and all its fight and grit. I had suspected that many times he was hanging by his teeth in Elmport, but he had stuck, slowly gaining friends and a clientele, winning his way by his shrewdness, his honesty, and his zeal for civic righteousness. My admiration for him had grown into a warm friendship, which he reciprocated. He was a fine type of Scotch-Irishman, with old Covenanter blood in his veins. My Presbyterians had gained a loyal friend, and the boys of my church a devoted Scoutmaster in Wellington. Bright, ambitious as a Lincoln for legal advancement, he had political and social ideals that were of the finest. There was one thing about him, though, that was troubling me not a little

"Dick," I said, earnestly, "We know Harrigan is bad. We know that he is a crook, and that he has ruined many a man, and many a girl, too, I guess, but I don't exactly like the look on your face when you look at him. I know it's dirty business, fighting right down in the devil's camp, but I wonder if your hatred isn't making you bitter."

He laughed mirthlessly. "I suppose I must take my spiritual adviser's probing with a good grace. I wouldn't wonder if I were getting to be a bit of a fanatic on the subject of Harrigan."

The coming twilight had blurred the outlines of the room, the street was for the moment at peace, and Wellington's face softened.

I continued, quietly: "You can't afford to hate that fellow. Of course I know that you are out for bigger things than merely an Indian-like revenge, but just the same, your hatred will embitter your whole life, Dick, if you give it half a chance."

"John," he answered, his voice almost husky with sadness, "Sometimes I am ready to chuck all my ideals, and just live to get Harrigan. If you knew why I hate him, perhaps you wouldn't blame me so much."

I waited, silent. He paused a moment, then drew a quick breath.

"You've been mighty good to me, and I'm going to be square with you, and tell you just how things are. I lived in this town when I was a lad of fifteen. My father was a good mechanic, but he got to drinking. He used to spend a lot of time and money in Harrigan's place. I had a little sister that we all loved devotedly. My mother worked hard to keep things going, and the good God only knows what we went through with. I had all a boy's sensitive pride, and many's the time I've passed my father without speaking to him, when I was with the bunch. Of course they knew, but I was bitterly ashamed, all the same. Well, things kept going from bad to worse till one time my father went on a long debauch and ended up in Harrigan's place. I went to get him and pleaded with him to come home, and while I was in there, Harrigan came in. He saw what I was trying to do, and laughed at me. I lost my head and called him something. He snarled at me, and called me a damn brat, and kicked us both out. My father went home, fighting mad, and beastly drunk. My little sister ran up to him, and he struck her."

Dick's words dropped slowly, dully, like clods of earth on a coffin. "She died of fright, and the shock of the blow. My father killed himself in delirium tremens, and my mother went insane."

In his voice was the echo of years of bitter sorrow. My heart ached for the fellow. Then I all but shuddered at the smouldering hate that made electric his next words.

"I promised myself then, that if I ever got the chance, I would make Harrigan suffer, moment for moment, what I had suffered, if that were possible. I came to this town partly because I loved it for its memories, partly because Harrigan was here. He persuaded my father to drink, he dragged him down to hell, and he'll follow him, but not, I hope, till after I have given him a good taste of hell on earth."

What could a fellow say to him? At such a revelation as that, in the face of such suffering as I knew he had gone through, I wished, with all my heart, I could tell him to go to it. It seemed futile and a little unjust, to try and turn him from his purpose, but loyalty to Christian principles demanded the words I spoke.

"Dick," I said, earnestly, "you don't know how I sympathize with you, old man, but don't you remember those solemn old words: 'Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.' "

Dick laughed mirthlessly: "You're the preacher every minute, John, but don't forget that the Almighty works through human instruments. Divine justice is a satisfying concept to the philosopher, but down here, where things are less ideal, it's the fellow who does his own dirty work that gets the surest redress for his wrongs."

We might have argued longer, but with an exclamation of impatience he jumped to his feet.

"Don't worry about me. If I get some scars fighting the rummies, I'll try not to whimper about them. I'll guarantee to give good measure in return for all I get. Let's go."

As we went along toward our homes, the pictures of the opposing candidates for mayor stared at us from every side. The fine face of Davis, our candidate, seemed to assure us from his place in the better class of stores, that he was in the fight for decency with all his soul, while from every saloon, and from many stores, the beefy, black-moustached visage of Harrigan leeringly promised violated laws and the reign of corruption. Scraps of conversation floated out to us from the open saloons, maudlin voices extolling Harrigan, or "our Con," as they affectionately called him, in half drunken affection. We passed one disreputable place near the end of the business district. Outside, against a lamp post, his face showing bloated and sinister in the dusk, leaned an ill-kept figure. I recognized it as Carns, one of the flotsam of the city.

"Hello, Jim," I greeted him cheerily. "How are you?"

"All right, Mr. Brasted. Been kinda sick though," he replied, shamefacedly.

Wellington looked in pity at the bum. "Jim's been going it again, has he?"

"Yes," I replied, "ever since the last week's work he did for me."

Harrigan is handing out cheap whiskey to all the boys, till after election," said Wellington, anger and disgust mingled in his tone. "We'll have a fine lot of tremens patients up at the hospital about next Wednesday."

I looked back. Carns had lurched away from his post and was zig-zagging toward his home in the miserable district of Shanty town, as it was called. Wellington and I parted at the corner, planning to meet each other at the local "Y," the headquarters of the Davis forces.

We were the first ones there, that evening, and were talking with the Boy's Secretary, when who should walk in but Harrigan! He had a couple of low browed thugs with him, and a tricky lawyer on whom he depended to find loop-holes in the law. The ill-starred quartette seemed strangely out of place in the building dedicated to clean manhood. Harrigan waddled up to the desk and spoke in an irritating tone of importance.

"Where's that Davis?" he demanded, pre-emptorily, using an epithet reserved for his enemies.

"What do you want with Mr. Davis," spoke up Dick, truculently.

"None of your business! What are you butting into this political game for, anyway, you young whelp? I'd advise you to mind your own affairs, and stay where you belong."

Wellington jumped to his feet and strode up to the saloon keeper, his face white, his nostrils quivering.

"When I want any of your advice, I'll ask for it, you big rummy. I'll show you, someday, what I'm butting into this political game for, and you won't need any of your shyster friends to explain it to you, either."

Harrigan laughed sneeringly: "Why, such kids as you belong at their mother's apron strings. You'd better be careful, or somebody will spank you."

At the politician's mention of his mother, Wellington's frame seemed to grow an inch, his fists clenched, and he took a threatening step nearer. The two thugs edged up, watching Harrigan. I stepped to Dick's side. "Steady, old fellow," I said, as calmly as I could, sensing that Harrigan planned to get Dick to commit some rash blunder that would make capital for Harrigan's side. I laid a restraining hand on Dick's arm, and felt it quiver like a taut steel cable.

What might have happened, it is hard to tell, but at that moment Davis came in, and Harrigan immediately accosted him. The Davis forces had printed a story in Davis' newspaper to the effect that Harrigan had furnished whiskey to an habitual drinker, in spite of the wife's protest. The poor woman had suffered a beating from her husband, and, unable to obtain redress, had applied to Wellington for help. The story had been well written,

and had been followed by a terrible phillipic against the saloon keeper. Harrigan was threatening all sorts of dire things, when Wellington broke in:

"You can thank me for that deal, my fat friend. This woman came to me with her story, and I thought I'd see what a little 'pitiless publicity' would do. There may be more to it later." Harrigan started to storm something about defamation of character, his lawyer blasphemously corroborating his statements.

"Character! God save the mark!" cried Wellington, while Mr. Davis and his lieutenants made the room ring with ironic laughter. Harrigan left, vowing vengeance, puffing in his wrath, his breath short, almost gasping. His henchmen shuffled out behind him, his lawyer profanely beseeching him to be careful.

"Remember, the Doc said, 'No excitement,'" he counseled, anxiously.

The meeting of the Davis forces that night was tinged with gloom. Things were not as promising as they should have been, and some of the men were clearly discouraged. But under the impetus of their chief's personality, and a snappy speech from Dick, their spirits picked up. Wellington would not hear the mention of defeat. Though just a young and struggling lawyer, he was putting tremendous force into the campaign, speaking with vehemence, and convincing eloquence, counselling the most unrelenting warfare against the Harrigan forces. I could not wonder at the earnestness of his appeal, after what I had heard that afternoon. Surely, this was no ordinary political battle with Dick. His zeal for civic righteousness could not explain the fierceness of his animosity against the opposing candidate. It needed the dynamic of a deep personal wrong such as he had suffered from Harrigan, to motivate his deadly wrath. We broke up, each resolved to fight harder. Dick made a confident assurance that something would break soon, and that we would find a way utterly to discredit Harrigan. When asked for a reason, he merely smiled grimly and said: "Oh, I've just got a hunch, that's all."

We talked for a moment that night before parting. "I'm glad you helped me to hold in tonight, John," said Dick.

"It was the best way, Dick," I replied, "but I wish you could make the distinction between Harrigan and his politics. Hate the politics all you will, but temper your usage of the man with a little more of the milk of human kindness."

"Forget it, John, or else save it till Sunday." He took the sting out of his words by laying his hand on my arm, and smiling with his lips, though I caught a glint in his eyes that warned me that I had said too much.

The Saturday night before election came. Both sides were confident of victory. Harrigan's crowd was working tooth and nail, using every fair means, and a good many foul ones to win votes for their candidate. Most of the churches had put forth a united effort for once, and the town had been thoroughly canvassed. I was putting the finishing touches on a last appeal for the Sunday morning service. There came a quick ring at the bell. I heard a panting, boyish voice ask for me, and I came out of my study.

"Hello, buddy," I greeted a ragged urchin from Shanty Town. "What's the trouble?"

"Oh, Gee! Mr. Brasted, Jim Carns wants you to come right down. He's dyin' or somethin'. He's yellin' like everything, and keeps yellin' for you. I heard him, an' run up here——"

"All right, Billy, I'll go down. Thanks for telling me." He scurried away. I turned to my wife, with a grimace.

"Oh John," she cried, anxiously, "You're not going down in that awful place tonight."

"I can't leave the poor fellow to die there alone, dear. Don't you worry about me." I stepped to the 'phone and called Dick's apartments.

"Hello, Dick, this is Brasted. Say, will you go down to Shanty Town with me? Carns has the D. T.'s, and may kill himself if he isn't taken care of."

Dick demurred. "Oh, call up the ambulance, and let them take care of him."

"But he keeps calling for me, the kid says. I'm going, anyway. Goodbye."

I hung up, slipt into a raincoat, put on a cap and started. I had gone but a few blocks, when I heard someone running behind me, and up dashed Wellington, panting.

"You idiot, why didn't you wait for a fellow? You might know I wouldn't let you go down into that hole alone, this time of night."

We walked rapidly and soon gained Shanty Town. The weird blue glare of an arclight accentuated the sordidness of Jim's home. A wild yell greeted us, as we came in. On a miserable bed, in a room squalid as sin itself, lay a dirty, bloody, quivering heap, from which two wild eyes burned. The pitiful figure hailed us.

"That you, Mishter Brashted?"

"Yes, Jim," I answered, "How are you?"

"Have yer come to help me?" he whimpered.

"Sure, Jim why not?"

The poor wretch grasped my hand and the maudlin tears came.

The form suddenly stiffened. Into the eyes came a look of horror. Then he struck fiercely, screamed hideously, then buried his head in the bed clothes. Seeing his condition I had 'phoned at once for a doctor. There followed a long hour that, as I remember it, seemed only a hellish medley of screams, curses, prayers and panting struggles, as Wellington and I fought to hold and calm the crazed Jim. At last, after a long spasm in which all the demons of hell seemed to swarm round him, and we had been moved almost to tears by his piteous begging, he sank back with a groan.

Dick straightened up, breathing heavily. "We had better try to get another doctor for this fellow," he said.

I seized his wrist. His pulse was racing with quick spasmodic beats, as if the heart were struggling with a task too much for it.

"I guess you are right," I said.

"I'll hold him while you skip out and call up Tilton," answered Dick.

I sped away, but when I had returned, I found Carns weakening rapidly. The poor fellow called me.

"I'm goin,' preacher, it's no use." He lay quiet for awhile, then said weakly, but spitefully: "I'll fix Harrigan! He will kick me out of his swell cafe, will he? I know something. He don't know that I know all about it, but I do——say, boys——"

Then followed a couple of sentences that brought from me a shudder of disgust and loathing, and shot Wellington up, tense.

"What's that, Carns? Do you know what you are talking about?"

"Sure I know what I'm talking about," he averred, doggedly.

"Then give up the whole thing," replied Wellington, aquiver with eagerness.

As Jim talked, Dick wrote rapidly in a small notebook. He finished, and the lawyer said: "Sign this, Jim, can you?" We raised him up. and he signed in a wavering hand. Dick straightened up, his face alight with a terrible joy.

"Harrigan, I've got you!" He turned to me. "John, don't breathe a word about this thing. Give me two days and you will see something worth waiting a lifetime for. A death-bed confession and two witnesses." His big chest swelled, and his eyes glittered.

From the dying bum came a moan. We bent to him. He was going fast. I told him again of the Father, as I had told him when he worked for me.

"Mister Brasted, I believe it," he whispered, "God be merciful —to me—a sinner."

A shudder, and the broken spirit had fled away to the Healer of souls. A moment later the doctor came.

Wellington worked in feverish haste the next two days. He went out of town on a mysterious visit, and had many conferences with the sheriff. He turned up Tuesday morning, calm, but smiling grimly at times, and threw himself into the whirl of election day. The vote turned out, almost to a man. There were exciting times around the polling places, our watchers coming into conflict time and again with the repeaters that the Harrigan crowd tried to work in on us. There were fist fights galore, and the police station was full. Whisky had flowed like water, and it had needed all possible persuasion to get some of our men to brave conditions around the polling places long enough to vote. As evening came, the excitement increased. Harrigan's followers were loud-mouthed and confident, and mostly drunk.

Coming to me near midnight, while we were waiting for the votes to be counted, Wellington said grimly,

"John, do you want to see the big show tonight?"

"What do you mean, Dick?"

"The stage is all set, the sheriff and a United States marshal are here, and we are going to pinch Harrigan in about fifteen minutes."

Dick's eyes were gleaming, and his lean frame seemed almost tiger-like, as he strode toward Harrigan's place. It was his hour. Two of the saloon habitues had mysteriously disappeared that afternoon and were lodged in the county jail. He met and greeted the sheriff and the marshal, introduced me, then continued his rapid pace up Main Street. The trap was ready to spring.

The four of us entered the milling crowd in Harrigan's saloon and forced our way through to the bar. Men peered drunkenly through the haze of tobacco smoke, their faces all blank wonder as they recognized the sheriff, the lawyer, and the Presbyterian minister. We heard maudlin voices, evil remarks, profane questionings. Finding that Harrigan was in a back room, we pushed on and entered. He and a couple of his ward heelers looked up in amazement. Harrigan's face was flushed, and his beady eyes glittered. His heelers were half under the influence of liquor. Without ceremony, Wellington came close to the desk behind which the saloon keeper sat, and spoke with deadly coldness:

"Harrigan, you asked me, one time, why I was butting into politics in this town. I'll tell you. Fifteen years ago, I lived here, with my father and mother and little sister. You remember Judson Wellington—I thought so. He was a good patron of yours. Because of that fact, we went hungry more than once. You may remember that I went into your saloon one night to try and get my father to come home. You laughed at my whining, as you called it. You called me a brat, and kicked us both out. You may remember that my father killed himself in delirium tremens later. You perhaps even remember my little sister's funeral. I'm quite sure you do, Harrigan, for I remember very well how you looked when I tore up the flowers you sent, and threw them in your face. You probably did not know that my little sister died from the effects of a blow my father gave her when he was filled up on your whiskey. We kept it hushed up pretty well. Probably you wouldn't have been interested in such details, or in the fact that my mother went insane from grief. Well, anyway, Harrigan, I swore a solemn oath over my little sister's body that someday I would make you suffer for your part in the deal."

Dick's voice was quiet, deadly quiet. The words came slowly, almost without emotion. The heelers gazed with startled eyes at the sheriff, at Dick. The marshal listened, his eyes down-cast, a stern pity on his face. Harrigan's puffy face showed anger, a trace of fear, simulated amusement at Dick's manner and words.

From the outer room came a sudden burst of drunken cheering. It swelled, grew riotous, then the door burst open and a wild torrent of humanity poured in.

"Hooray! Horray! Con's elected! We win! Hooray for Harrigan!"

Men rushed up to shake him by the hand, to pat him on the back, protesting thickly their love and admiration for him. It seemed as if we had been completely overridden and ignored.

But the sheriff and the marshal soon made their presence felt. They shoved men back right and left, the sheriff using a wicked looking blackjack with telling effect on some especially recalcitrant ones. The marshal lifted his voice authoritatively above the din.

"Shut up, you fellows, or we'll lay a few of you cold."

Within the room. the noise subsided. Their wonderment, and their fear got the better of their drunken enthusiasm, and they hushed. Wellington spoke again.

"As I was saying, Harrigan, I've been waiting a good many years for the day when I could make you sweat a little blood." Dick's voice raised a trifle. "That day has come. The United States marshal here, the sheriff, and I would like to know what you know about Mamie Gilleran."

The crowd gasped. One fellow snickered. Then a hush.

Harrigan sat up, his face livid, a great oath exploding from his lips. Dick stopped him with upraised hand.

"Sit still, Harrigan, and listen. Jim Carns died the other night. We have his sworn confession. The marshal has pinched the others in the deal, and they have just gone through the third degree and have confessed, too. We have the evidence that will put you in a Federal prison for violating the Mann Act. All right, marshal, let's cut it short."

Dick snapped out the last words and stepped back. A great gasp from the crowd, a circle of wide, startled eyes, wondering curses. The marshal stepped forward, and a pair of handcuffs jingled. Harrigan got up suddenly, horror and fright making his face livid.

"You lie, damn you, you lie —— Ah —— ah ——"

He strangled, clutched spasmodically at his throat, his head wobbled forward, his fat body plumped over the desk and slid to the floor. We stood petrified. Amid a babel of noise, the sheriff leaped forward, turned him over, felt his pulse, his heart, tore his shirt open, listened carefully at his chest.

He stood up. "He's dead," he said, simply.

A stream of panicky humanity poured out into the bar room. The ward heelers, trembling, took a stiff drink from a bottle. Wellington, as if in a dream, stared and stared at the bloated face that sneered even in death, with its eyes horribly upturned. I laid my hand on my friend's arm.

"Come on, old man. He's gone to face the court higher up." And into my mind flashed those august words of the sacred book: "'Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord, I will repay."

TWO AND A CHAMELEON

MURIEL STEVENS EARLEY

"On October 1, 1919, Johnnie Ryan and Philip Cook made a fine rabbit bait in the Ryan woods." A very simple statement of a simple natural act. It was in consequence of watching the outcoming ripples of influence of some similar pebble thrown into the waves of daily activity that years ago a seer of facts wrote the analogy:

"Because of the nail the shoe was lost,
Because of the shoe the horse was lost,
Because of the horse the rider was lost,
Because of the rider the battle was lost
And all for the want of a horse shoe nail."

In consequence of the waves set in motion by the seemingly inconsequential rabbit-baiting of Johnnie Ryan and his playmate, there appeared in the "Carlton Inspector" of October 10th, a notice to the effect that "Mr. Herbert Hadden of Verney, who has been spending sometime in this community, has gone to take charge of the Gladstone Cheese Business in Gadsby. Pa." But before that notice had come casually before the public's newspaper eye, in consequence of the same exciting force that set the waves in motion, the soul of a man, quite unknown to Johnnie Ryan, winked into oblivion, or began to live in another incarnation, or, if it please you better, went to begin an endless Immortality. That is not all. A lady, equally unknown to the rabbit trapping enthusiasts, put a rose shade on her piano lamp and began to play Schumann again.

* * *

The air was unmistakably that of a hotel bed room, plus the contribution of an active cigarette and a smoldering half-dead cigar. Herbert Hadden lay on his back on the stuffed lounge, hand-covered with brussels carpet,—an atrocity of pink flowers and red back-ground. The light from a kerosene hanging lamp, that went up and down on brass chains with surprising alacrity when one manipulated a side contrivance, was too faintly yellow to show up the flowered couch. It would certainly have annoyed Hadden if he could have seen it. At present all that lay within the vision of his eye was a picture, hung on a very long wire, at a forty-five degree angle toward the floor, and an expanse of shadowy ceiling.

His mind's eye was busy with a different picture, one that was growing decidedly tiresome. He shifted to his left side, and the physical eye reported different impressions: a fat man asleep in a red and pink upholstered arm chair—first cousin to the couch,

—with a paper on his lap and his feet on a straight backed chair pushed to a convenient location. The sleeping man still clenched between his teeth a short cigar which was smoldering a little and tipped with a full load of ashes. The far corner of the room was disorderly with an open trunk whose contents appeared to be trying to climb over the sides. A large traveling bag stood open but not unpacked on a chair by the table and lamp.

A thought burst in upon Hadden's brain and for a moment the tiresome picture which the mind's eye persisted in projecting whisked away. The thought that offered the welcome diversion was merely this: "I wonder if the cigar ashes will burn his shirt" —followed by "It will be time enough for me to move and throw the cigar in the tray if they do." Then the old train of thought closed in again. The purport of the everlasting circle was someing like this:

"It's a big mistake—she isn't half appreciated—I know what she is worth—it wasn't fated for me to have had her, or I should have had her. Fate is giving me a bad turn. I am going to stop this thinking in a circle immediately—unusual to find a woman with a mind like hers—'Stanny' is a good fellow—too bad they couldn't get along better. No, it is a good thing—no it isn't doing me any good either way. Fate isn't treating me white—hasn't for a long time. Rotten luck!"

Suddenly Hadden sat up and pushed back his rumpled brown hair, which immediately parted in three directions. "Look here, now," he said to himself, "this is about the hundredth time you have gone over the thing this time. Whenever you see him, you do the same thing, and wherever you see her it's worse. Do you have to think of things you don't want to? Are you going to let this go on forever? Think it out once for all and be done with it!" Hadden leaned his elbows to his knees and put his chin on his palms.

Naturally he began with Marion. Clearly she was good to look upon and more intelligent than the ordinary woman. He wondered if she were more intelligent. At least she knew how to manage things well for herself. She might have been a ripping concert pianist if she had gone on. Almost too bad she hadn't. Marion was talented. She could say the cleverest things, and she had the most surprising philosophy, all her own, a sort of a welding together of DeRetz, Oscar Wilde and Bob Ingersoll, a bit shocking but quite workable. He remembered her standing in front of the long mirror of the Hotel Burveille in Gadsby, frankly admiring herself in a new gray something or other, and her turning to him with an engaging smile and the words, "One should

either be a work of art or wear a work of art, you know." And his answer, "Marion, you're stunning, you're doing both." And then there flashed upon his mind the playful mocking seriousness of Marion's face one warm summer evening not many weeks ago when he had said something about "Poor Stanny," and it was rather hard on him. And she had said like a little prophetess, "O John, thinking about that again! Morality is simply the attitude we adopt toward people we personally dislike."

Hadden pulled himself up. This wasn't getting anywhere. The facts of the case were, she belonged to Stanny. He stared long at the figure in the chair. The sleeper had dropped the cigar, and it had rolled to the floor, leaving a trail of ashes over the old hunting clothes. Why, he had no right even to think of the matter. He was Stanny's guest, and she was Stanny's wife, even though they didn't manage to keep the peace when both lived under the same roof. Marion had had her chance. She might just as well have taken his offer as Stanny's. Well then, Marion had no right to complain, and he—well,—why kick against the pricks after all? Chance was the real Divinity. All right, if Chance threw Marion in his way, or Marion helped Chance to put herself in his way—he subconsciously felt with a thrill of pleasure that maybe Marion did help Chance now and then,—the pleasure of seeing her was a free gift and not to be despised. He would fill the hours with happiness and leave no time for psychological cross examination. But then,—Stanny. He was a friend worth having, not very refined nor unusually keen except where deposit slips and bank drafts were concerned, but stolidly, dependably true.

Hadden was through with the inquisition. He stood up, removed his coat, and folded it carefully, lining outside, over a chair. His face was whimsically amused. He had the happy gift of being able to laugh at himself when he had been indulging too long in psychological theatrics. The mental jury had reported; a rapid decision due to the fact that the same line of reasoning with variations had been presented before. "Don't worry; don't do anything rashly; don't want anything and then you won't be disappointed." And then the words of the good law of Buddha, which he had come across in a feature article in "Present Day Religions and the Near East:

"Existence is suffering.
The cause of pain is desire.
Cessation of pain is possible through the suppression of desire.
The way to this is through the knowledge of the Good Law of Buddha.
The end is Nirvana, the cessation of existence."

Hadden slapped the sleeping Stanny on the knee. Now he was ready to talk. Stanny waked up with a start and, as chair-sleepers usually do, misjudged the time he had passed in unconsciousness. He murmured something about "having dropped off for a minute," sat up, and reached for a fresh cigar. He picked up the conversation where he had left it almost an hour ago.

"I wish I could sell you the Gladstone. That is, if you are really thinking of quitting the newspaper game. There isn't any money in it in the long run, at least not for your end of it. Now, Gadsby is a right kippy little town, and the cheese business down there is on the map, the Gladstone especially."

"It is a good proposition all right, Stanny, and I would just as soon start in on wholesale cheese as anything else; little rather because I know a bit about the business. You knew that of course before you tackled me, but well,—I haven't got the figures to my credit in my bank book. That's all there is to it."

Stanny considered a bit.

"Might just as well be frank about it, Hadden. I'd sell it cheaper than it's worth; just now, I need the money. High prices these days,—no news to you of course. I'm not meaning to criticize Marion, but—well, you know her. She doesn't understand much about business, and she doesn't seem to realize anything about money, except its purchasing power. I got a letter from her this morning, and she makes a pretty good case for herself that she needs more allowance. My finances are safe and sound all right,—no cause to worry you know,—but I've been investing a lot lately, and I would like to let loose on something and give the money a chance to circulate. Oh, by the way, did you know Marion has gone back to Gadsby again? Taken an apartment, I guess, at the Burveille."

Of course Hadden knew it, but he said politely, with an inward twinge of conscience: "Oh, then you didn't open up the house?"

"No, Marion isn't very fond of housework, and she says she can't find any decent service."

Stanny looked a bit gloomy for a minute. Then the business man in him came to the front again.

"But about the Gladstone, now—"

"I have decided," Hadden broke in, "that if I am going hunting with you tomorrow, I am going to bed tonight." He grinned amiably and began to unlace his shoes.

At promptly ten o'clock Hadden and Stanny, armed with rifles and the necessary hunting paraphernalia, tramped out of

Room 17 at the McCormick and down the plush stair carpet from which dust rose like grey snuff, if one stamped too heavily. They marched through the tobacco smoke bath of the lobby,—the daily town council of sitters had already arrived, although there was no longer the possibility of a "half-and-half" or "Old Crow,"—and emerged on to the narrow cement porch. Clark disappeared for a moment into the lobby again.

"Most forgot the lunch" he beamed, "Mamie, the cook's girl, said she would pack us a bite for dinner and set it back of the door. We'll be hungry today, real snappy out. I'd call it downright cold if it weren't for the sun."

Hadden was full of the exhilaration of the first breath of fresh air. The ventilation system of Room 17 was the admission of of fresh air via the hall transom, and thence through the private sitting room into the tiny bed room, if one did not wish to leave the hall door open all night. Evidently the windows had been nailed down for the winter. A red and gold autumn morning like this always gave Hadden a feeling of restless elation, like making some kind of unheard of original music or talking in poetry,—anything to give vent to the restless something inside him that wouldn't keep still. He felt very full of the joy of living.

They were walking down Chapin Street, which changed its name at the corporation line and became the East Pike.

"By the way," continued Stanny, "this cold weather reminds me that I'll be having a birthday in a day or two,—day after tomorrow, if that's the third; that is, if I live and have my health." Stanny always added that when he spoke of things in the future.

"Not much doubt but that you will," said Hadden, pulling himself out of a reverie. "You look pretty healthy today. Honestly, though, I can't see how you stand the board and company at the McCormick for a full month, just for hunting."

"Oh, I dunno. Nothing bothers me very much when it comes to eating. I am as tough as a boiled owl. Why, I never had a doctor in my life since I can remember. I manage to keep pretty fit and I sure do enjoy hunting."

Stanny's plump figure and ruddy face looked more like that of a prosperous farmer than that of a bank cashier.

About eleven-thirty the two men left the East Pike, climbed through a stump fence and a hedge of tangled blackberry briars into a patch of woods. Hadden had felt unusually quiet and busy with his own thoughts as they trudged along the road in the clear autumn sunlight. When they went into the wood lot, and rustled about among the leaves, depression settled upon him. There

would be no partridge hunting until they reached the Ryan woods on the other side of Kimble Hill, and they could not possibly get there before early afternoon. At noon they ate Mamie's lunch, seated on a half rotten log on the top of Kimble,—two pieces of raisin pie, eaten first because it looked most appetizing, two sandwiches, a hard boiled egg and an apple apiece. Eating out of doors after a long brisk uphill walk made Hadden rapaciously hungry.

"I feel like a cave man that has had only poke berries to eat" he thought to himself. The thought **cave man** suggested to him a picture of himself artistically swathed in a lion's skin, dragging his lady love away from a cave man number two and putting her safely in a cliff den with a boulder door. That was a primitive idea, carrying off one's woman even if she did have another male protector. He could do that, too, if he wanted to. He felt that his lady love wouldn't need to be dragged off by the hair of her head either. And what did cave men usually do with the other troublesome male? They hit him on the head with a big prickly club and put him out of the way. Well, this was the twentieth century, and he couldn't do that with Stanny. **Couldn't?** Well,—wouldn't. How very absurd and child-like he was anyway. Just the same he did want Marion. He wanted her, faults and all. Maybe she was extravagant; maybe she was selfish and just a bit deceitful—but that was where Stanny was concerned; maybe she wasn't domestic, —well, neither was he. Just the same, in spite of everything, of fat old Stanny especially, he wanted her. After a moment the wave of emotion passed, and Hadden was heartily ashamed of himself. He kicked the empty pail into the leaves and waited for Stanny to start on across the ridge of the hill and down into the dense woods on the other side.

The hunting began very well. Stanny brought down a beautiful male partridge within the first fifteen minutes after dinner, and Hadden dropped a ruff grouse hen bird. Then for the next hour the woods were quite devoid of wild life, as if the dead partridge and grouse had been the last of the flying things. A rail fence cut the woods in two parts, and, as Hadden came over it after Stanny, he sat down astride it to look around a bit. He wasn't as accustomed to tramping as Stanny, and he was beginning "to feel it."

The other rambled about aimlessly, on the watchout for anything stirring, but keeping in the vicinity of the fence until Hadden was ready to come on. The latter, astride the fence rail, was amusing himself taking quick aims at imaginary marks and sighting along the gun barrel for practice. He snapped the gun up to

his shoulder. Stanny was in direct range, standing back turned toward him, slightly bent over, evidently doing something to his gun. Hadden perspired; the suddenness of the thought shook him; the awful insane idea was like a hot wave. All he had to do was pull the trigger. He sat like a wooden man, rigid for the space of half a minute; then he heard Stanny's voice saying,

" 'Most ready to be jogging on? It is about two o'clock, and we have a long road to travel. You won't get any game sitting there."

Simultaneously with his friend's voice there came into Hadden's consciousness, clear cut and impelling, the thoughts by which he had ruled his impulses before. **"Don't do anything rashly; don't dare to interfere with Fate."**

He elevated the muzzle of the gun slowly until it pointed innocently at a patch of bright blue sky, lace patterned through the branches. Circumstances had offered the chance, but Fate had decreed otherwise. Hadden sat gazing stupidly along the gun barrel. The sense of deliverance was strong upon him. Then he laboriously climbed off the fence and started on.

By four o'clock the two had pretty well scoured the Ryan woods. They were close to the edge of a clump of woods which fringed out gradually into elderberry bushes, blackberry briars, and milkweed stalks into a bald, stony pasture. No need of staying out any longer. It would be dark by the time they were home, as it was. Evidently they had not chosen a very good hunting ground, or else the wild things were away for the day. They were standing in an elderberry patch made doubly hard to thread by a host of dry, rank weeds with a wealth of seeds and prickers. And then in the space of a minute it happened. There was a whirr of wings straight ahead and close by. Hadden shot, and Stanny fell forward, so close to him that in the shock the younger man almost trod upon him. The bird did not drop. Stanny lay twisted and cramped on one side. His face showed more blank surprise than pain as he stared with big fixed eyes at Hadden.

"My foot——I'm caught——turn me over."

The big fixed eyes shut and greyness came over the face. Hadden was paralyzed for the moment, looking at the soaking red on Stanny's right shoulder, the shirt was taking it up like blotting paper. Stanny's face twitched convulsively, but he did not open his eyes. Hadden tried to turn him over so that he would lie more easily on his back, but the best he could do was to lay him squarely on his stomach. Stanny's foot was caught in a rabbit trap and the first thing to do was to let him loose and be quick

about it. Stanny was going to need a doctor and soon. Hadden ran to the edge of the clearing. There was a house as he had hoped, a little wood colored frame building in the lot on the other side of the pasture. He had to get Stanny there. Stanny was a load to carry, and Hadden, without much idea of the proper way to carry a wounded man, lifted the unconscious figure to his back and stumbled out through the thorn bushes and milkweed.

At four-twenty-five, a grey-faced man carrying another strangely limp, grey-faced man, who seemed to be asleep, walked through the open door of the little weather beaten house in the lot, went slowly through the kitchen, and laid his burden down upon the bed in the room adjoining. A scared little boy went somewhere to telephone for a doctor, and one grey-faced man took off the other man's shirt. He had to cut it and tear it to get it off, because the sleeping man didn't help himself at all. Then the doctor came and brought a nurse with him, and the tall, haggard man went out and sat in the late afternoon sunshine on the bench outside the kitchen door. The scared little boy, feeling sorry for the big sad man, pushed along the milk pails and the wash dish and sat down too—just a little way off because he wasn't very well acquainted.

The doctor and the nurse went into the bedroom and shut the door. The little boy's mother was doing things in the kitchen very noiselessly, and pretty soon the boy had to go pump water, and the tall man sat alone. He hadn't noticed that he had had a companion on the milk pail bench anyway.

After a long time the nurse came to the kitchen door and said, "He is asking for you, sir." That was all. Hadden followed her into the room where his friend lay. Stanny's eyes were open, but his face was grey and queer. His bandages were fresh but already quite stained. Hadden could not think of anything to say: he was all one dull, heavy ache. All he could do was to sit down on the edge of the bed and press Stanny's free hand, which lay outside the coverlet.

Then Stanny began to talk. His voice was not very strong, and he seemed a bit labored for breath, but he went straight to the point, just like the Stanny who had walked the East Pike that morning and had never had a doctor, used to do. He said:

"I'm not going to pull through—it isn't possible—Doc says so. Charley Morton is my executor, and he's with the regulars in Texas—hasn't been discharged yet. Marion won't know how to manage things. I don't like to have her worried—would you mind looking after things—just for awhile? There won't be any trouble about getting you appointed."

The doctor and the nurse signified silently by nodding at Hadden that they witnessed the request. Of course Hadden would do it; he wanted to say so, but he only managed a throaty "Yes" and a convulsive hand pressure. His throat made a couple of gurgling sobbing noises, and, ashamed that his self-control was leaving him, he turned his face toward the window so that Stanny wouldn't see him. No one spoke in the room for several moments. The doctor counted Stanny's pulse but made no comment.

Stanny spoke again. He didn't look at anybody or anything when he talked—just stared straight ahead; but his voice was calm, if hesitant.

"I'm not minding so very much. Life couldn't give me much more to make me happy. I mean, it would have to be more of the same. I read once about life being like a multiplication table—turn it any way and it'll balance. I do hate to——go——and——on Marion's account."

A pause.

"It makes it easier because—I feel it's Fate."

Hadden started; words came in a rush.

"I never knew you thought about things like that—Fate—and those things."

He felt a great surge of admiration for Stanny; he had never really known him—**his friend,** and he could look death straight in the face and "not mind so very much." Stanny had a conviction he could **die** by.

The doctor motioned to Hadden that he had better not encourage Stanny to talk any more, but Stanny was determined to make the most of his time.

"It don't hurt me to talk, Doc." His short breathing was making speech more and more of an effort. "Last chance." Then, to Hadden:

"I didn't ever say much about my notions. Marion didn't like——preacher talk——most folks don't——she can't stand highbrow stuff——I used to think a lot though——been alone lots lately. I wish she——here——now."

The light in the room was very dim, and the doctor could scarcely see the face of his watch. His matter of fact voice jarred upon the silence following the sick man's words.

"Miss Holmes, a lamp if you please, and another basin of hot water."

The smell of bacon frying gushed into the room as the nurse opened the door into the kitchen. Strangely Hadden remembered that afterwards—the odor of hot bacon fat connected with a nausea at the thought of food. Hadden didn't think of much of anything

during those hours; he felt only partially. and the strong sense of unreality that was upon him tried to misinterpret his sensations.

Stanny died that night about nine o'clock.

* * *

The death of the stranger made no perceptible gap in the village life, but the "Carlton Inspector" officially recognized the passing of Stanny in a front page article giving the details of "an unfortunate accident which resulted in the death of Mr. Stanton Clarke, a well known and respected resident of Gadsby, Pa., who has been staying in our village during the hunting season." It also proceeded to state that "Stanton Clarke, deceased, has been for ten years cashier of the Gadsby First National Bank, owner and manager of the Gladstone Cheese Business, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Gadsby Artificial Ice Company." The obituary ended with the fitting words: "Mr. Clarke is survived by a wife and mourned by a large circle of friends."

A briefer notice marked the subsequent departure of Hadden for Gadsby.

* * *

In the following months, Hadden managed to keep the thread of Stanny's affairs from getting too tangled. Indeed he did remarkably well, considering that he had been more accustomed to penning columns of words than of figures. And Marion was grateful to be relieved of the responsibility and worry of money matters—so grateful. She made it as clear as possible to Hadden that she appreciated him fully; that he was to her quite indispensable and "the rock that is higher than I." Surely Hadden must have understood it; but Marion didn't understand him at all lately. He had suddenly turned into the pleasant, impersonal, business friend and quite refused to respond to feminine psychology. If Marion had asked Hadden what was the matter, why he seemed so composed and disinterested, he would probably have said something about "happiness through suppression of desire," that is, if he had felt inclined to answer directly.

Perhaps Hadden didn't respond to feminine psychology any more, but he felt that he understood it in a particular case very well. Perhaps he would have explained what he had come to know, if he were writing an article on the subject, with the analogy of the chameleon. Marion's intuition told her that plainly the "femininity plus literature" interest wasn't working any more. How about domesticity or music? A fine idea, why not the combination?

And so the lady put a rose shade on her piano lamp and began to play Schumann again.

SATISFIED

RUTH ALBERTA STILLMAN

Sophronia dropped her fork and eagerly broke open the seal of the letter the post boy had brought her. I noticed from across the table that her hand trembled a little as she read, and a tear stole down her cheek.

How beautiful she was, Sophronia! How unblemished and unscarred after long years of disappointment, sacrifice, and toil! As I watched her sitting there, white hair parted softly above faded eyes of blue, something wet splashed down my own cheek; and my thoughts carried me back to yesterday.

We were little girls again, Sophronia and I. Stiffly-starched and shining with cleanliness, Sophronia had come over to play. Radiant with happiness for having someone with whom to "play house." I would array my doll in her best, and watch for motherly admiration to shine in Phronsie's eyes. But toys that delight the ordinary child held no attractions for my little guest. It was always "Come on, Susie, let's play orchestra!" Consequently the dolls would remain undisturbed for the rest of the afternoon, and forgotten by Phronsie, who with happy anticipation in her laugh would scramble quickly over the fence into the orchard and wait for me, who—alas!—followed a little regretfully.

Two small branches from an old apple tree constituted Phronsie's violin; another stick of generous diameter afforded me a cornet; while both of us manipulated with our feet imaginary drum attachments. I used to suggest sometimes that my mother's dishpan would make a wonderful drum; but Phronsie would frown in disagreement. "O my, no! that wouldn't be harmonical!" I can still see her stamping her little foot for emphasis. I never pressed my point, for Sophronia was leader and I was follower in everything.

It was the same when I went to Phronsie's to play. Because she was a polite little hostess and wished me to be happy, she would suffer herself to be a martyred mother for a time; and then with a great sigh of relief, she would cry eagerly, "Susie, I know where there's a stone that looks just like a truly piano. Come on! You can play it part the time,—honest!"

As Sophronia grew into girlhood, her love for music increased. By herself she would pick out little tunes on our piano (there was none in Phronsie's home); and though she never played truly diffi-

cult music, there was an appeal in the little melodies she improvised which even my unmusical ear could not fail to appreciate.

"Sue, dear," I can hear her saying, a bright flush in her cheek, "When I finish High School, I'm going away and just live on music! I'm starving for it!"

Dear girl! How brave she was during those dark days following her mother's death! What an indispensable source of strength and comfort to her stricken father and little brothers! I used to think, as I watched her wave a laughing goodbye to the three young responsibilities as they trudged to school, "How can she do it!" I knew Sophronia was making a tremendous sacrifice.

When Phronsie was twenty-two, her father married again. But something had died or fallen asleep in Sophronia. Her love for music was still there, but the former enthusiastic ambition to study her beloved art was gone. She was tired. Responsibilities far beyond her tender years had robbbed her step of that elastic spring of youth, and had taken from her eyes their effervescent sparkle.

"No, Susan—there's a dear girl—don't talk to me about it now," she would beg after I had been urging her to go away and study. "The struggle looks too big, and I'm too tired to attempt it alone. Father can't help me now, you know."

Yes, I know. Her step-mother was demanding the money now and making life so miserable for my Sophronia at home that she had decided to tell Jim "Yes" and get away from it all.

"Maybe the old desire will come back after I'm married," she would add a little wistfully. "If it does, I'm sure Jim will let me go to the city once a week for a lesson."

But Sophronia in her married life was still more widely removed from the realization of her dream. Jim was a practical man who bought his bride a piano and considered his duty done. Then, too, children came.

Sophronia was a conscientious mother, but she did not glory in motherhood as I did. She kept her babies sweet and healthy, and loved them, but not passionately as I loved mine. When I watched my youngsters in their play, a halo symbolizing the culmination of my happiness must have shown about my head; while Phronsie could not conceal the yearning anxiety that clouded her eyes as she regarded her romping boys and girls. I knew the meaning of those troubled eyes. They reflected the fear that haunted Sophronia's breast, the fear that her children would never love music, never cry "Let's play orchestra!" Was she to be denied the realization of this last and dearest hope?

Then Joseph came. Perhaps it was his dreamy baby eyes that gave suggestion of a different personality than had been granted to the others; perhaps it was that fine emotional temperament that began to reveal itself as he grew out of boyhood; or perhaps it was only the clinging, passionate love for his mother that brought conviction of the difference. At any rate, Joseph was different. He rarely played with the other children, whose noisy, boisterous ways quite tired the little fellow. He loved to play by himself in some sheltered nook, where his imagination would build for him a little world full of beautiful music. He loved to sit close by his mother when she played for him her little singing melodies. No matter how long she played, the little boy never tired of listening.

Sophronia was no longer the listless, anxious mother she had been before Joseph's birth. Her eyes regained their sparkle; her cheeks their flush; her laugh the happy ring of her girlhood. She had a new interest in life now—to give to Joseph that of which she had been robbed. She had gathered from the hands of her muse a few scattered crumbs; Joseph should have the whole loaf. Fate had removed from her lips the cup of her desire; Joseph should drink his fill.

When Joseph went East to study, his mother was a widow. Her children had settled about her, contented, normal men and women. The old house was very, very quiet now, but Sophronia still lived there to make a home for Joseph when he should return. She had lived there alone for five years now, Joseph's frequent, enthusiastic letters bringing her sufficient happiness.

I glanced across the table again at Sophronia. She still clasped in her hand the letter, but her eyes looked far away, a strange light in them.

"From Joseph?" I asked quietly, though I knew it was from him.

She started, and turned eyes still wondering upon me. Her voice was uncertain, as though she struggled to suppress emotion.

"He graduates next month,—and I'm to see him!"

"See him graduate, Sophronia?"

She nodded. "He wants me with him all Commencement week. But I'm not to think his part is big or important, for he's only one of many. He says he can't play even a little part though, if his mother isn't there to hear him." Her face glowed with pride.

"Bless my boy," she said softly. "Do you know, Susan, to hear him play his violin will be my greatest happiness!"

We talked excitedly as we cleared away the dinner things. We had decided just what dress Phronsie should wear on the train, and were in the process of discussing whether or not her old bonnet would do with a bit of color added to liven it up, when Sophronia exclaimed, "Susan"—and then stopped.

It was the wistful tone in which she spoke my name that suggested to me her unexpressed desire. In a twinkling, my mind was made up. I placed my arms around my dearest friend and cried eagerly,

"I'm going, too, Phronsie!",

Our journey East was a most successful one. We made every connection and conducted ourselves like born travelers. It was the biggest lark Phronsie and I had ever indulged in. The candy and magazines with which the porter, at regular intervals, tempted us; the strange people who scrambled in and then out at every station; and the swift retreating scenery all equally fascinated us.

It was late in the afternoon when our train drew up in the city of our destination. Joseph was there to meet us. No wonder his mother clung to him and wept. Great, fine boy that he was, looking down into his mother's face with love and adoration! It made me, plain and ordinary and unemotional, turn away my eyes from the sacredness of such a meeting. Separated for five long years, these two, between whom there was the most perfect understanding, a mutual appreciation for the artistic and beautiful, and a love like which there was no other, were again united. When I looked again, Joseph, with an arm about his mother, was extending his hand to me.

"Well, Mrs. Susan." he said, with one of his rarest smiles, "I'm mighty glad you came along with mother. We're going to have a wonderful time together, we three!"

He patted his mother's shoulder gently. "Tired, little mother?" he asked.

"Tired, but O, so happy!" she breathed.

Joseph had engaged a suite of rooms for us in a hotel near his boarding house. He did not stay late with us that evening, for I think he was anxious lest his mother had been overtaxed by our long journey. I, too, was afraid that she was much exhausted. We were equally strong, physically, but while excitement and extreme happiness never failed to leave Phronsie weak and tired, I was never affected.

However, the following morning found Sophronia looking as strong and rested as ever. Joseph came early to breakfast with us and remained at the hotel nearly all day.

"Tomorrow," he said, pinching his mother's cheek, "We'll do the town. But today you must get thoroughly rested for all the events of the week. There's a concert in the Hall tonight. I thought perhaps you'd like to attend. A young violinist, who gives some promise of a bright future, is to play."

Not Heifetz?" Sophronia asked eagerly.

"Not quite," laughed Joseph. "But at any rate, he promises to give a worthwhile entertainment. Want to go?"

The question was addressed to both of us.

"We want to take in everything," I replied laughingly.

Sophronia was gazing thoughtfully out of the window. "I wonder," she mused, "if he can beat my boy."

Joseph gave her a consuming hug and laughed delightfully. His mother's belief in him was his greatest joy.

In the afternoon, Joseph made an excuse to go down town. At the door he beckoned to me cautiously and whispered a bit in my ear. My face must have betrayed my surprise, for he looked at me warningly, and said, "Not a word now, Mrs. Susan!"

Joseph was back in time for dinner. He was in the highest of spirits, and talked incessantly from the time we began the meal until we climbed the steps of the Auditorium two hours later. He had selected three adjacent seats in the Hall, which commanded an excellent view of the stage, and from which, at the same time, the music could best be heard.

There were few people there when we arrived, but in brief time the great room seemed to be alive with human forms. They sat in front of us, in the rear of us, below and beside us. I had never before seen so large a crowd in one building.

Joseph excused himself for a moment. He had just seen his professor come in, and he must speak with him before the concert should begin. Sophronia and I did not feel like talking. We interested ourselves in studying the dimly-lighted faces about us, and in wondering how many thousand of them there were.

Suddenly there was a burst of applause, a great indrawn breath of suspense,—and then silence. My heart beat rapidly. I looked quickly at Sophronia. She was leaning forward in her

seat, her hands clenching tightly the back of the one before her. Her eyes were like stars. Incredibility, astonishment, wonder and worship were in them. She breathed fast. Her lips moved as though she would speak and could not.

And then, penetrating that depth of intensified silence, carrying its plaintive note to the remotest corner of the theater, satisfying that human sigh of hushed expectancy, came the mellow, exquisite tone of a violin—of Joseph's violin. I forgot Sophronia; I forgot the massive audience; I was lost to everything save that rich, angelic music which thrilled and enchanted me until I was no longer plain old Susan. I was a bird singing to welcome lovely spring; I was a little brook laughing at the morning sun; I was an autumn leaf dancing with the shadows beneath the trees. And then, I was a mother weeping by the body of her departed babe; I was a father pleading for his son; I was a sinner at the foot of the cross. I was carried into strange and mystic realms that knew not disease and pain, but life beautiful, eternal, everlasting.

When I awakened from my trance, I heard a voice deep, tender, emotional. I turned and saw Joseph bending over his mother. The people were noiselessly leaving the building. The concert was over. There had been no applause at its close, only a long, lingering sigh of suppressed emotion.

"Little Mother," Joseph was saying his lips close to her ear, "Little Mother, are you satisfied?"

But no response came from Sophronia's quiet lips. Her hands were clasped peacefully in her lap; her head was inclined forward in an attitude of prayer; her eyes were closed. Satisfied, Sophronia had fallen into her last, long sleep.

PETER'S BURGLAR

WINIFRED GREENE

The family were at supper, the family, that is, except Peter. Father Wardner looked up from the happy absorption of his hot biscuits and honey.

"Where's Peter?" he questioned. "That boy's always late to meals lately. This can't continue. Better make him come, Mary!"

Mother Wardner's boy-understanding was big, I think a little bigger than father's. She rose in defense of her oldest son.

"Peter's so interested in machinery, just now, father. Maybe he'll do something wonderful some day, if we don't bother him. He has been working so hard now for nearly a week on some contraption up in his room. He hardly takes time to eat. I—I do hate to tear him away, though I have called him twice." But to the little girl at her side, she said, "Polly run and call Peter again. Tell him father says he must come to supper."

As Polly flitted obediently from the room, father went back to his biscuits and honey; but mother had prepared the meal; she was not so hungry.

"Seems as though I can't ever wait until Hetty gets here," sighed mother. "I guess we never did have so much winter sewing to do. The children grow so fast; seems as though we can't even hand down things any more. And Christmas is only six weeks off. I've told Hetty I'm all ready for her any time. I do wish she'd be more definite about when she's coming."

Father reached for another biscuit, looking sympathetically at his wife as he did so.

"Well, Hetty's pretty busy sewing for other folks, I suppose. But then, I think she'll be coming right along now. She always likes it here, and it's more than likely she'll stay for Thanksgiving, which can't be far from two weeks off."

"No, that's so—two weeks from today," smiled mother at her family, happily, but a trifle wearily. So many tasks were hers.

Polly suddenly appeared with Peter sheepishly in her wake. Flushed and untidy, he slipped into his chair, and began eating with accustomed appetite but unaccustomed silence.

Peter's mother's boy-understanding took in a great deal that the others did not notice as they continued to talk of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Aunt Hetty's intended visit; but Peter's mother did not reprove, this time, the unbrushed hair and absent tie.

When supper was done, with a smile at his mother, Peter slipped silently to his room. He was an ambitious youngster of twelve with the secret longing to do something great, which is the rightful and happy possession of every normal boy. This indefinite idea of something great had crystallized in Peter's mind into the two absorbing desires of his heart: to catch a burglar, and to make some truly noteworthy invention,—the latter of these, the greater. Fortunately, he was of a mechanical turn of mind; unfortunately, for the satisfaction of this turn of mind, large families with limited incomes have but little to offer in the way of opportunities at raw material. Peter begged, borrowed, and somehow created. A clever device which Mother Wardner hung on the clothesline every Monday morning, and which passed out clothespins just as they were wanted; a little tin box on Father Wardner's cigar tray, which clipped his cigar, raised up a match, and lighted it, all at one stroke;—these and numerous other small nick-nacks gave evidence of Peter's mechanical ability.

What a boy's room Peter's was, to be sure, at any time! Just now he was exceedingly busy. He believed he had about completed something which would serve both his purposes. The room was strung from one end to the other with wires of uneven sizes and uneven lengths. The center of it all seemed to be an old plate camera.

Peter's scheme was this: It would be in the dead of night, of course, and all very dark. A burglar would come in at the front door. (Do burglars come in front doors? Peter hoped his would, anyway). The camera would be set with a good view of the door, its shutter open. The burglar would stumble over a wire stretched across his path, just inside the door. This wire, by an ingenious device, (it was really very simple Peter would have told you modestly), would cause friction between two steels. (Peter could have explained it to you much better than I can, for he understands such things). This friction would produce a spark, which in turn would set off the flash-light powder, and presto! before the burglar could take a step the camera would have a picture of him. What matter then if the creature did escape,—his capture and identification were certain.

The closing of the camera shutter after the exposure, Peter was still working on. Somehow that took more wiring and thought than anything else. He worked long and hard all evening, but by ten o'clock he was pretty sure he had it so that it would work easily. He would have tried his invention upon himself, only that he was afraid of being overheard and his secret guessed.

He could hear his father and mother preparing to come upstairs to bed, sounds he had been waiting for. With deceptive purpose, he turned off his light, and waited in darkness and in silence. The house was soon still. Then stealthily Peter began his trips down stairs. It took a good while and a great deal of care and patience not to get his own legs and arms tangled in the dangling ends and loops of the wire, and thereby bring about a catastrophe which might end all his hopes. Peter was not quite sure of his father's sympathy.

According to his plans the camera was stationed in the sitting room doorway facing the front hall door, a good three and a half feet in front of which ran the perilous wire.

A little breathlessly Peter crept to bed. It was too much to expect that any trap, however excellent, should snare a burglar the very first night of its trial, and somehow he just had to wake up before his family in the morning, and remove all traces of a burglar-trap. Peter was a tired boy, and tired youth is hard to keep awake when it should sleep, in spite of resolve and effort. Soon he was in dreamland.

For how short a time! With a sudden sickening of the heart Peter sat bolt upright in bed. It must have been simply the click of the door which awoke him, for now there followed the "swish" of the flash; then an instant of stillness as awful and uncertain, to Peter's mind, as the stillness of death. With an indefinable terror, Peter hugged his knees and listened. There was a gasp,—wild, fearstricken, stifled; Peter thought it a moan of hopelessness. Another brief second of deathlike stillness; then the front door opened and closed swiftly, softly, and—was it shakily?

Peter wriggled his toes in pleasant anticipation of results, but could not prevent the cold sweat of nervousness, which broke out at the thought of a burglar actually so near at hand. For two hours sleep refused to come, and Peter was as wide awake as on the night before Christmas, or before some wonderful, unknown delight promised on the morrow. As the time slowly ticked past, however, he began to turn over nervously in bed. Once or twice he sat up. Finally he gathered up all his courage and crept noise-

lessly down the broad stairs. Carefully he took away all signs of his inventive triumph, and just as noiselessly he crept back to bed. This time sleep caught him before he began to think, and bright beams of sunlight slanting through the east window the next morning found him rubbing eyes puzzled as with the remembrance of a strange dream. A moment later he was out of bed.

Breakfast was hurriedly completed, and in short order Peter was dashing down the street with the precious camera in his close grasp. He was breathless, but contained, as he reached the photographer's.

"Please, Mr. Kendall," he burst out, "there's a plate in there I want finished up right off. Please make two prints. They're very important. Send one to me, and the other please send to Police Headquarters with this. Will you please send this, too?"

He drew forth from the unknown recesses of a boy's pocket, a little flat note explaining his invention and calling attention to the enclosed photograph of a burglar, who had visited his house that very night. Mr. Kendall was decidedly obliging, and evidently saw nothing strange in the request of his young patron.

How long the hours seemed! The next noon at dinner there was a letter for Peter, who took it quietly, knowing it to be the print, and longing to open it in the seclusion of his own room. He ardently hoped the family would forget to inquire about it, which they straightway did in the stir over the discovery of a more important letter.

"Here's something from Hetty," said father, tossing it over to mother. "Perhaps she is coming tonight."

Mother cheered up perceptibly and ripped open the envelope. "My dear Sister," she read aloud to the family, "I have changed my mind suddenly, but none the less irrevocably. I cannot possibly come to sew for you. Doubtless you fully understand my reasons by now. If not, I will perhaps explain later, Hetty."

Surprise was written on every face.

"Now what under creation can have happened!" shouted Father Wardner, nearly spilling his coffee in his astonishment at the curtness of the brief note.

"I don't know, I'm sure," breathed mother faintly. "I might have known something like that would happen. It's just like Hetty to get disgruntled over something nobody else ever heard of. I don't know what we're going to do. We aren't going to get any sewing done, that's sure. What will the children wear? O, dear!" and her tired voice broke.

Peter had forgotten his letter. He was extremely sorry for his mother, and slipped from his own chair to stand beside hers, with a quick smile and caress. "I wouldn't be surprised if I could learn to sew some, mother," he offered. "And Polly's most big enough."

His mother smiled and patted him on the shoulder. "My little man," she said. "You'll do plenty of big things some day."

Peter suddenly bethought himself of important business upstairs and fled from the table, but his mother's disappointment was still on his mind. "I've got to make Aunt Hetty come, that's all! I guess my mother is about as important as any of her plans. She didn't need to be so sort of grumpy, either."

With anticipation he sat down to his important correspondence. With trembling fingers he removed the print from the envelope. For a long two minutes he stared in awful and open-mouthed astonishment.

"By gum!" he cried, "Aunt Hetty!"

There she was, traveling bag and all, a most bewildered and terrified expression upon her face, her hand scarcely off the door-knob.

"By gum!" cried Peter again, and this time he smiled a little. With a sudden flash the truth came to him. Aunt Hetty, wishing to surprise the family and to begin work as soon as possible, had taken the late train, only to arrive after the family had retired, and to be met by a terrible surprise, intended, doubtless, for a joke, for whom it did not matter. It was Aunt Hetty the camera had caught, had terrified and infuriated!

Peter's heart began to sink and sink. What a fool thing he had done! Perhaps he could not appease Aunt Hetty. Suppose he never, never could! Then think of the picture and note he had so confidently mailed to the police office. Would he ever hear the last of it? Aunt Hetty as a criminal! It was no longer funny; it was tragic!

Peter sighed a little heavy sigh, took paper and ink, and painfully penned the following letters:

Dear Aunt Hetty,

It was I, really it was, Aunt Hetty. And I didn't mean to scare you. I was only inventing, and I wanted to catch a burglar, but I didn't, and I'm not going to invent any more, 'cause it hurts

folks I guess. Please do come and sew, 'cause I can't sew very well and my mother needs you awfly. I am sorry, really Aunt Hetty. That's all. Please come.

Your affectionate nephew,
PETER WARDNER.

He folded it solemnly, thrust it into the waiting envelope, licked the flap, and with another heavy sigh, laid it aside to begin the next.

Police Office,
Dear Sirs:

You may please not use what was sent you yesterday. O don't use it. It was all a mistake. I am not planning to invent any more, but it worked fine only it got my Aunt Hetty who was coming to visit us, and no burglar, and now she won't come. Please burn that picture, but I'm awful sorry not to be an inventor because I think I could. However, it is now best not to be. I am sorry I bothered you. Please do this and oblige.

Yours truly,
PETER WARDNER,
222 South Bend Ave.

With a deep sigh, triply heavy, for an unpleasant, completed task, an unknown outcome, and a lost profession, Peter sealed his last letter. and went to drop it and its sad companion into the mail box. There was another day or two of uneasy waiting.

It was Monday, and the family were again at supper. Peter was here this time, but a nervous and appetite-less Peter. No letter, no forgiveness to his earnest pleas. Was Aunt Hetty so hard-hearted? Was she never to forgive? What were they going to do at Police Headquarters? Could they possibly punish him for his innocent intrusion into their affairs? Peter bent his head and ate his little in silence

"Letters," said his father, hearing them fall inside the front hall window. "Run get them, Polly."

"Master Peter Wardner," read father, tossing a slim envelope across to Peter's place. Peter grabbed it, still in silence.

"Aha!" said father, "Aunt Hetty again. Well, it can't be much worse than before. Read it quickly, mother."

"My dear Sister, I have again changed my mind. I am getting to be a foolish old woman, as your oldest son has taught me.

Of course you did not understand, but Peter is truthful. He will tell you. He is a bright boy, Mary. I have always known it. Don't destroy his inventive opportunities for one little mishap. You know I never did like the dark. In fact, I have a terrible fear of it. Why I ever came after dark I am sure I don't know, but I had been busy all day, and wanted to begin with you early the next morning. Tell Peter I didn't have to pick or break the lock. I have a latch key, you remember, so I can be a burglar most any time. Well, I got a fearful fright, I surely did, and I'm just getting over it. But Peter's a dear, good boy. Please remember that. By the way, I'll be with you Monday night. Lovingly, Hetty."

"Peter, what does this mean?" demanded his father, not unkindly, before his mother could speak.

Peter hung his head for a minute, then lifted it bravely, and poured out the whole story, of camera and burglar and police office; of the mistake and the two painfully penned letters. "I meant it all right, father," he finished. "I won't try to invent any more."

Father and Mother Wardner looked at each other over their son's head, with a smile of perfect understanding.

"It's all right, Peter," said his father, and his mother nodded.

"Peter, didn't you get a letter? she asked.

Peter came to and reached into his pocket. He blushed hot as he read the brief note through, and hid behind his napkin self-consciously as his father read aloud:

"Dear Master Wardner,

Your first and second notes were both very interesting to us; we are still most interested in the first one. We are needing a boy about twelve—is that anywhere near your age? At any rate we should like to have you drop in and explain to us a little about your very clever device. Believe us truly interested.

Sincerely,

EDWARD J. MURPHY,
Chief of Police."