

FICTION

Ellis Parker Butler

In Pawn

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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IN PAWN

By Ellis Parker Butler

With Illustrations

Boston and New York
Houghton Mifflin Company

1921



IN PAWN

BY

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

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CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL DETECTIVE," "SWATTY,"
"GOAT-FEATHERS," ETC.

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IN PAWN

CHAPTER I

Lem Redding had a dimple in his cheek that appeared when he smiled. For a boy with a faceful of freckles he was pretty. He had dear, bright gray eyes, and his smile, aided by the dimple, made most folks love him at sight. His hair was brown, as his dead mother's had been; in fact he was much like that mother in more ways than one--far more like her than he was like Harvey Redding, his father. Lem was quick, agile, lively, and Harvey was plumb lazy.

Without an exception Harvey Redding was the laziest man in or near Riverbank. He was one of the heaviest men, too, for he was a glutton. He loved food. He ate too much and he drank too much and he sat too much, all of which increased his girth. He was as huge as Falstaff.

For two or three years Harvey Redding had been meaning to get a new belt, but, somehow, he never "got around to it," and for quite a while the tongue of the belt buckle had been in the last hole, while Harvey himself kept right on enlarging. As a result the belt made a tight band around his middle and seemed cutting him in two. When Harvey leaned forward the belt entirely disappeared under a great roll of fat and his face turned purple.

In most respects Harvey was the best-natured, easiest-going man in the world, but he had fits of intense irritation, when he lost his temper entirely and "dod-basted" like a trooper. These spells came, usually, when he had to do any work. Moving was work for him. He lost his placidity if he had to get out of his chair to close a door, or put a stick of wood in the stove, or do any hard labor of that sort. He also lost his temper over accidents, as when he fell asleep in his chair--as he did every half-hour during the day--and his lighted pipe fell in at the open bosom of his gray flannel shirt and burned his skin. At such times he "dod-basted" everybody and everything, and almost got out of his chair.

The chair he liked best was an ancient hickory rocker which he had braced and trussed with stout wires. On the seat was a round cushion covered with green rep, worn threadbare, and flattened by long use.

Harvey's hair was thin and iron-gray and he never brushed it because brushing hair meant exertion. On the top of his cranium was a spot entirely bald. There were times when Harvey thought that if the world had no flies to alight on that bald spot and no people to make him get out of the chair, he might be perfectly happy. The flies made him ferocious. He slapped at them, when they alighted on his head, with a vigor that would possibly have crushed his skull if his hands had not been like rubber gloves inflated to puffiness. His lips were puffy, too, and of a purple hue.

You can, doubtless, visualize Harvey Redding seated in his rocker, puffing endlessly at his pipe, dropping off to sleep every half-hour or so, losing his pipe, awakening with a start, "dod-basting," slapping flies and picking up his fallen reading matter again, grunting as he reached for it. He was a great reader.

He was indeed an untiring reader. He read dime novels and a certain "Lives of the Saints." He had a pile of three hundred or more dime novels and some of his favorites he had read so often that they were mere rags. The "Lives of the Saints" was a later favorite. He had found it in a pile of waste paper he had bought--he was at that time in the junk business--and he had found its pages fascinating. He had his favorite saints just as he had his favorite dime novel heroes, and he not only read about them, but thought about them. He would sit in his rocker by the hour, slapping flies, smoking his pipe, and thinking what *he* would have done if he had been Saint Francis, Saint George, or Saint Anthony.

His son Lem was a great comfort to him. Lem could feed the horse, run across the street for another package of smoking tobacco, get a handful of matches, and make life fairly endurable by doing most of the work that needed to be done. It interfered with Lem's schooling, but Harvey did not mind that. Lem sat on the seat of the junk wagon when Harvey went out for junk, the string of cowbells clanking on the rope stretched between the two uprights on the wagon. If by any chance a woman signaled the wagon Lem got down and went to see what she had to sell.

Lem weighed the junk and carried it to the wagon and carried the money back to her.

There was just one thing Harvey would not let Lem do. He would not let him drive the horse. He told Lem it was not safe, but a kitten could have driven the old gray wreck. Harvey liked to drive the horse. It was a gentle occupation, suitable for a contemplative mind. It gave him an excuse to sound authoritative. He could shout at the horse if it flicked its tail at a fly, "dod-baste" at it if the tail went over a rein:

"Dod-baste you, you brute! Lem, git down an' lift that line from under that hoss's tail," he would command.

In the few years since Lem's mother had died Harvey had been in half a dozen businesses, all centering around the horse and the small house on the ample vacant lot on Elm Street. He had tried the retail ice business, the milk business, a carter's trade, a vegetable market, a small grocery business, and, finally, the junk business. He had a perfectly good excuse for failure in each--unfair, dod-basted, ruinous, cut-throat competition--and now this same Nemesis was attacking his junk business. The Russian Jews had come to Riverbank--especially Moses Shuder.

At the time when a great pogrom and persecution was taking place in Russia tender-hearted Riverbank had raised a fund to pay the passage of some of the Russian Jews from Poland to Riverbank. Eight came, with their families. Riverbank looked at them, said they were perfectly awful creatures, and kept as far from them as possible, and the

Russian Jews began picking up old bottles, empty tin cans, bits of rags, and pieces of paper. They found wealth--meager wealth at first--beside the fences, in the roads, in vacant lots, where no American would have bothered to look for it.

Presently Moses Shuder was buying the scrap iron and old bottles that his fellows picked up. He hired a vacant lot and built him a rough shed, and from a despised, ignored alien became "competition" and the rival junkman of Riverbank. He bought an old bone-bag of a horse, bought other horses, bought the lot he had rented, bought a small cottage. Poorly clad, meek, shrewd, silent when abused and voluble when bargaining, Moses became a fixture and a feature. He lent money to Russian Jews who came from the old country and sent them out with peddlers' packs of tinware, cheap dry-goods, and profitable small notions. Before he had been in Riverbank many years Mrs. Shuder began wearing a hat and talk-ing of the time when Our People would erect a synagogue.

Before Moses Shuder and his fellows had been in Riverbank long, Harvey began to feel pessimistic about the junk business.

"Dod-basted fleas, hoppin' around everywhere all the time," he said. "Live on a crust of bread an' half a drink of water. Don't know how to live like human folks. If this kind o' thing keeps on I want to get out o' the junk business, that's what!"

The trouble with Harvey was not that Moses Shuder was in the junk business, but that Harvey was not and never had been. The bitter truth about Harvey is that he had never been in any business. He had merely let one or another business frame his copious leisure; his businesses were no more than excuses for being lazy. They camouflaged what otherwise would have been disgraceful sloth.

Harvey had been a farmhand until he married the farmer's daughter. Then he had teased her to sell the farm and they had come to town. Half the price of the farm went the first year, part of it to purchase the lot and shack on Elm Street and the rest to make good the loss incurred by Harvey's mode of doing business. Then his wife put her foot down. She went to a lawyer and had the remaining money tied up in such a manner that Harvey could not touch it, and from thereafter all he ever had was the twenty-five dollars a month his wife allotted to him from the income. While she lived he received that twenty-five dollars a month and after she died he continued to receive it. She had been a weary, weak creature, but he had never been able to change her resolution in this one matter. The money was for Lem.

When the vegetable market dried up and blew away with the last of Harvey's capital, Lem's mother had been dead several years and Harvey turned to his sister. He went up the hill to where she conducted a boarding-house and explained to her the great opportunity that awaited the man who started a grocery on Elm Street at that particular moment. In the end he came away with the money.

"I ain't askin' you to give me it with nothin' to show for it, Sue," he told her. "I would n't ask that. I would n't take it if you offered it to me that way. I aim to give you my note for it, my regular signed note, drawin' seven per cent interest, until paid. A man might go back on his word, but a note is a note. It's got to be paid as an' when specified."

So Sue Redding had the note and Harvey had her money, and for a while he enjoyed sitting behind a counter telling Lem to hand out canned corn and bluing and to weigh out sugar. When Lem was at school Harvey found it more comfortable to sit in the rocker and tell the children who came to buy that he guessed he was out of whatever it was they asked for, and when he had no more money with which to replenish his stock he sold what remained of the grocery and took up the junk business.

The junk business had the advantage of being a slow, sedentary business. When one wished one could sit and smoke; when the weather was favorable one could tell Lem to harness the horse and then take a slow, comfortable drive through bough-shaded streets, nobly heralded by clanking cowbells. There was no money to be made in the junk business as Harvey conducted it, but there could not be much loss. And always, regularly, the twenty-five dollars allowance came to him on the first of the month. It was ideal. Even Moses Shuder, despite Harvey's complaints, was a blessing. He was an excuse for the lack of profit in the junk business and he was something to talk of and grow angry about. Harvey seemed to be, at last, in an ideal business, and one in which he could remain forever. And then the old horse died.

When Lem, sent to feed the horse, came back from the shack at the far end of the lot and reported that the old horse was dead, Harvey "dod-basted" his luck heartily.

"Well," he drawled a moment later, "if he's dead he's dead, an' it ain't no fault of mine. You go downtown, Lem, an' see who you can git to haul him away for about two dollars."

The boy hurried away. Harvey puffed at his pipe and looked out of the gate of the junkyard at the street. It was late June. Now and then he slapped the bald spot on his head vigorously. He was giving things more thought than he had given anything in years. His affairs had reached a crisis. He could not be a junkman without a horse and he had no money with which to buy another horse. He owed Sue five hundred dollars and, the way she had been pressing him for payments recently, he knew she was not likely to lend him more. She was pestering him unmercifully for what he already owed her.

With his twenty-five dollars a month he could get along well enough, with no business to demand part of it, but he saw no comfort in life if Sue was to be continually drumming at him and nagging him for the repayment of the money. Except for Sue he could give up the pretense of being in business and take life comfortable, but Sue had only left him in semi-peace because he appeared to be doing business. When she learned that he was not even attempting to make money, she would be too annoying for comfort. Harvey sighed heavily and took up his book. It was the "Lives of the Saints."

When Lem returned with a negro and a team of horses, Harvey put his hand in his trousers' pocket and gave the negro two dollars and went on reading. A few minutes later he looked up from his book, for the negro's team had stopped with their noses at his shoulder.

"Say, what you haulin' that carcass out this way for?" Harvey demanded. "Whyn't you take it out the back way?"

"'Cause, boss, de gate ain't wide 'nuff. Got to go out dis yere way."

"Well, dod-baste it! I guess I got to move," said Harvey, and he got out of his rocker, groaned and moved it three feet to the left, and lost himself in the "Lives of the Saints" again.



CHAPTER II

Riverbank in June is beautiful. Climbing the hills above the Mississippi the streets are arches of elms and maples, the grass richly green, and the shrubs are in blossom.

Up one of these rather steep hill streets, the last day of June, Harvey Redding climbed, with Lem now at his side and now falling behind to investigate something that caught his attention. Harvey was hot. He had put on a coat and the sun was warm and the climb stiff for a fat man. He stopped once in a while to take off his hat and wipe his face. When he did he called to Lem with unwonted gentleness.

"Lem, you come here! Don't be strayin' around all over the neighborhood!"

To these mild commands Lem paid no attention whatever.

Occasionally, but not often, some one passed them, going up or down the hill. To some of these Harvey spoke, stopping for long conversations about the weather or similar exciting subjects. Those he did not know went by without speaking. Now and then a boy went by and Lem straightened up and looked at him.

The peculiar thing was that although Harvey was on his way to see his creditor sister his fat, puffy face was strangely placid. Now and then, when he paused for breath he folded his plump hands across his plump belly; when he spoke to a foot passenger it was slowly, with carefully chosen words and in a gentle voice. He was almost meek.

There was something else peculiar about Harvey this day. He was not smoking his old black pipe. You might have said that he knew Susan would give him Hail Columbia, and that he had prepared for it by assuming in advance an attitude of perfect non-resistance, but this was not the secret of his strangely gentle demeanor.

It was rather late in the afternoon, the warmest time of day. Beyond the neatly painted fences and the trimmed lawns the porches of some of the houses were brightened by the white dresses of ladies. In some of the yards the ladies, and now and then a young fellow, were playing croquet, the balls clicking together with a pleasant sound of well-seasoned wood. Lem put his face to the fences and stared in at these games while Harvey puffed on ahead.

At Sue Redding's gate Harvey paused to wipe his face. The place was large, one hundred and twenty feet of white picket fence along the walk, with a terrace of six feet or more rising steeply inside the fence, so that only at the gate and beyond it could a man see those who sat on the wide porch. Harvey looked at the porch anxiously, but even at that distance--the big, white house was set far back--he could see that Sue was not on the porch, and he was relieved.

"Come here, Lem, dod--I mean, come here, Lem," he ordered. "Lemme look at your face. Don't seem to do no good to wash your face at all. Well--"

He opened the gate and climbed the steps to the walk that led between two rows of pine trees to the porch.

Two young women, white-clad, were sitting on the step of the porch. One was one of Miss Redding's boarders; the other from a house across the way.

"Miss Redding?" said the boarder, whom

Harvey did not remember to have seen before. "She's in the kitchen, I think. I'll call her--"

"Nemmine," said Harvey. "Me an' Lem'll go right through. I'm her brother," he added in explanation. He opened the screen door and passed into the cool, deep hall. Lem followed him.

Sue Redding was making cookies, cutting them out of the flattened dough with a fluted dough-cutter. She was a large woman, almost as heavy as Harvey himself, but remarkably quick in every movement for one so heavy. She turned when Harvey entered, but she did not seem particularly pleased to see him.

"Hello, Lem," she said, greeting the boy first. "What you want now, Harvey? I don't suppose you've come to pay that note, it ain't likely."

Harvey seated himself ponderously on one of the kitchen chairs.

"I come to tell you, Sue, that I've given up business," he said gently, as one not wishing to arouse anger.

The effect was magical. Miss Redding turned on him, her face flushing, her eyes gleaming.

"You come here and dare tell me that, in my own kitchen?" she burst forth. "You don't dare give up business! What did you tell me when I let you go out of the grocery business and into the junk business, Harvey Redding? Did n't you say, 'If you let that note stand, I'll keep in business until I get it paid up if it takes all my born days!' All right! I suppose you're here to pay up that note, then?"

"Well, now, Susan--"

"A nice right you have to come and say you are going to quit business! Of all the good-for-nothing--"

"The hoss died on me," said Harvey. "What's that to me?" asked Susan. "I never heard that Moses Shuder ever stopped junking because he did n't have a horse. I never heard that I gave up keeping boarding-house because my cooks packed off without a fare-you-well. Horse, indeed! Harvey Redding, you promised me, when I pushed you for

payment when you gave up the grocery business--"

"I know, Susan, I know!"

"And I know!" she declared. "I know what likelihood I've got to get my money back if you give up the only chance you've got to earn money."

"Of course, I'm mighty sorry," Harvey began.

"What do I care for your sorry?" she snapped. "I don't want your sorry; I want my money."

"Well, I ain't got it, Susan," Harvey said. "I ain't got nothin'. I ain't no good at business. I ain't cut out for it, an' that's a fact. But I got somethin' else in mind."

"I doubt it."

"I got an idee," said Harvey, refusing to be angered, "that if I don't have a business to pull me down all the time, I can save money out of what I get every month an' pay you back that way. I might save ten dollars a month to pay you back, or fifteen, maybe. It's so dod--it's so expensive runnin' a business I just can't save nothin'. With this here Moses Shuder into it, an' hosses dyin' on me, an' everything--"

Miss Redding turned back to her cookies to show that she considered them far more important than anything Harvey might say.

"I dare say!" she said sarcastically.

"So that's what I come up here to offer you, Susan," Harvey said. "I'll save an' pay. You can count on it."

"Oh! I can, can I?"

"I can't do more than give you my word."

"You gave me your note, I remember. I guess your word ain't no better. You gave me your word you'd stay in business, as near as I can recall. I don't take much stock in your word."

Harvey was worried now.

"Susan," he said, "I don't like you should take this here attitude. I'll say to you I've turned over a new leaf. I'll say to you I've got my bear-in's at last. I know what I was born to be. Business is no good for me. I know what I was intended for now, but if you're goin' to harass me day by day about that money--"

"You bet I'm going to harass you!" said Susan unfeelingly. "If I don't I won't get back a cent, let alone interest. I'll harass! Make sure of that."

"If there was any security I could give," said Harvey.

"With your lot all mortgaged up? A nice lot of security you could give!" She turned to him again. "I know you, Harvey. There ain't a bit of anything in you but laziness. Not a mite. You'll promise whatever comes into your head and the next minute you'll go right back on your word and oath and written note."

"Susan, I'll pay you back regular, every month, out of my twenty-five dollars, every cent I can scrape off--"

"I don't believe it!"

Harvey looked around helplessly.

"If I had any security to give you," he said; and then his eye fell on Lem, standing by the window, looking out at the chickens in the back yard. "I'll tell you what I'll do Susan," he said. "I'll leave Lem with you. I'll leave him with you until I get that note paid up in full. He can do chores an' help you out one way an' another. I'll leave Lem with you until I get you paid up." The boy at the window turned and looked from his father to his Aunt Susan. Young though he was he felt as if the solid earth had fallen from beneath his feet. He had a sickening feeling that no one wanted him or cared for him.

"He's like to be mine forever, then," said Susan grimly. "But I'll take him, although, goodness knows, he'll be more of a care than a help. It just shows how worthless you are, Harvey Redding, offering to pawn your only son like he was a piece of junk. You wait until I call Miss Percy. I want a witness, I do!"

"Now, wait!" said Harvey; but she was gone. When she returned she brought the boarder Harvey had seen on the porch.

"Now say it," Miss Susan commanded.

"All I said was I would leave Lemuel--that's my boy yonder, Miss--to Susan here, to keep until I got a sort of note I owe her paid up."

"Note and interest," said Susan.

"Note an' interest," agreed Harvey.

"That you would leave Lemuel with me, like he was my own, with no fussing or interfering from you, Harvey. That's the understanding. Like he was my own son. Until that note and interest is paid up."

"Only you ain't to harass me," stipulated Harvey. "I'm to be left alone. I ain't to be everlastin'ly nagged."

"That's part of it," agreed Miss Redding grimly, "if you pay on that note regularly."

The smile that had beautified Lorna Percy's face when she entered the kitchen was gone now. She looked at the boy by the window. Harvey did not dare look at him, nor did Miss Susan. There was something monstrous in thus putting the child in pawn.

"Well, then?" said Harvey, rising heavily from his chair.

Lem looked at him, his eyes filling with tears. "Am I goin' to stay here?" he asked for-sakenly.

"Oh! you'll love it here," cried Lorna, going to him suddenly and kneeling before him and putting an arm around him. "Such cookies! Such a yard to play in!"

"Yes, I guess you'll stay here awhile, Lem," Harvey said slowly. "You'll be a good boy for your aunt, won't you? You won't cut up any ruckus? You be a good boy, Lem, an' I dare say I'll get you again before long."

Lorna looked up at Miss Susan. There were tears in the girl's eyes, too.

"May n't I take him out on the porch until the cookies are baked, Miss Susan?" she pleaded.

"Do so," said Miss Redding grimly. "I want a couple of words with my brother."

"Well, good-bye, Lem," Harvey said hesitantly.

"Good-bye," the boy answered, and Miss Percy took his hand and led him away.

Miss Susan finished cutting her cookies, placed them in the pan, pushed the pan in the oven, and slammed the oven door before she turned to Harvey.

"And I don't want any interference with the way I mean to raise him," she said. "If so be you ever get me paid back you'll have him again. But not until then. And all I can say is I'll do by him as if he was my own child. So that settles that! And now, Harvey, what do you mean to do with yourself if you don't mean to do business?"

Harvey cleared his throat.

"I ain't come to this decision sudden, Susan," he said defensively. "I've thought it over a lot. I've read a lot on it an' studied it over, an' I feel it is what I was meant for. There ain't any reason why there should n't be one now, any more than in old times if only somebody was inclined that way an' took to it serious enough. I've studied how all of them did, an' what they did--"

"For the land's sake!" exclaimed Miss Susan, "whatever is it you mean to be?"

"Well," said Harvey, folding his fat hands across his stomach, "I've been studyin' up about saints in a 'Lives of the Saints' book, Susan, an' if I can have a fair show at it I'm goin' to be a saint, a regular saint, Susan, like them they had in the old times."

"Great land of goodness!" Miss Susan cried, and she looked at Harvey with amazement, but it was evident he meant it.



CHAPTER III

In many respects Harvey's desire to be a saint might be considered rational and even praiseworthy. If there are no officially recognized twentieth-century saints, it is probably because other lines of high endeavor have seemed more attractive to those who might more or less easily qualify. It must be admitted that there is nothing essentially impossible in the idea of a twentieth-century saint. In reading the "Lives of the Saints" that had been his companion so long, Harvey had seen this quite clearly. To be a saint it was only necessary to be absolutely good, to be free from all great and small sins and faults, and to be strikingly distinguished for acts of piety, grace, abnegation, and for nobility of soul.

Harvey considered that his peculiar position in life, now that he had given up the junk business, gave him exceptional opportunity to be a saint. For one thing he had no wife, and a wife is often a real impediment in the path of a man who wants to be a saint. He had no business cares to distract his thoughts from the higher things, and he had twenty-five dollars a month, less what he might find it necessary to pay Susan on account of the note. In many ways, as Harvey recognized, a small but regular income might be of great assistance to one who wished to be a first-class modern saint. Even Susan's act of demanding that Lem be left in pawn with her had its compensations, for while Harvey had not thought of Lem as a drawback, he realized now that since he was relieved of the care of Lem he was practically free from everything in the way of worldly ties.

While we may speak lightly of Harvey's announced intention, it must not be thought that he was taking up the life of a saint in any light spirit. He was most serious. Although the deeds of Cap. Collier and Dead-Eye Dick had thrilled him, he had never seriously imagined himself becoming a detective or a bad man of the plains. He knew he was not so constituted as to follow either career successfully. He admired Cap. Collier, but he did not imagine himself becoming a Cap. Collier; he liked to read about a Dead-Eye Dick, but never wanted to be one. He felt he did not have the necessary vigor. A saint was, however, something he felt himself peculiarly fitted to be.

In reading the book that had turned his thoughts toward sainthood, Harvey had admired the saints as fully and whole-heartedly as he had admired Cap. Collier and other heroes, but he had, in addition, continually imagined himself in the place of the saints of whom he was reading. He saw himself undergoing trials and tests and emerging triumphantly. He felt--as is true--that a saint is the greatest hero of all heroes, and the most deserving of praise, and the surest to receive worship and admiration.

Harvey did not admire all the saints in his book equally. He preferred the sweet-hearted, non-resisting type to that which went forth seeking trouble and martyrdom, and the first suggestion of sainthood in connection with himself came with the thought that it would be extremely pleasant to have nothing to do but be kind and good and gentle and sweet-tempered, doing no evil and thinking no evil. With about twenty-five dollars a month, a comfortable rocking-chair, a good-enough shack, and a sunny ex-junkyard, being a saint would be a pleasant job. Later came the thought that it would be doubly pleasant to be known, to all Riverbank, and in time to the whole world, as "the good Saint Harvey of Riverbank." He feared Riverbank did not consider him of much importance now, that it rather scorned him, but if, by combining the austerity of a Saint Anthony and the sweetness of a Saint Francis of Assisi, he became known for his saintly qualities, there would be real tears shed when Death came to claim him.

"Great land of goodness!" exclaimed Susan, when Harvey had spoken. "A saint? Are you going crazy, Harvey Redding? You look like a saint, don't you? What do you mean by such talk?"

"Why, dod-baste it--" Harvey said angrily, and then, realizing what he had said, calmed suddenly. "I take that back, Susan. That swear was a slip-up. It come out because I ain't fully used to bein' a saint yet. I ain't rightly started at it yet, but I'm goin' to be if I can manage the job, an' I don't know why I can't. When I say saint I mean saint, an' that's the whole of it. I hope to live an' die clean an' sweet an' proper, free from sin an' evil, doin' no wrong--"

"And doing nothing else, I guess," said Susan scornfully. "Well, it's none of my business. If you don't lazy at one thing you 'll lazy at another, and I guess it don't matter what it is. Be all the saint you want to, but don't you forget I'm expecting regular payments, once a month, on that note, saint or no saint. Has Lem got any other clothes?"

"No. Nothin' but another shirt. His shoes ain't worth fetchin'."

"I did n't expect he had. He looks like a ragamuffin, poor boy. Who do you expect to do your chores when you have n't got him?"

"I will, myself. I would anyway. A saint ought to."

"Well, I don't know what a saint ought or oughtn't, but a boarding-house-keeper has to get supper the same one day as another," said Susan meaningly, "and now's when I begin, so I won't keep you any longer than need be. You get that money every first of the month, don't you?"

"Every fifteenth," said Harvey, taking up his hat.

"All right. If you ain't here with a share of it every sixteenth you'll hear from me and mighty dear hearing, too," said

Susan. "If you want to say good-bye to Lem you can go out the front way."

Harvey went toward the kitchen door.

"It might set him off cryin'," he said. "That would n't be no use. Well, so long, Susan."

"Good-bye," she said, turning her back on him to look at her cookies.

Harvey went out. Any twinge of conscience he might have had because he was leaving Lem was made less by the combined thought that Lem would be well cared for by Susan and that it would be a great relief not to have to worry about him. From now on he could give his time and his mind entirely to the job of being a saint, with nothing to annoy him.

As he walked down the hill he considered the saint business from all sides. He walked more rapidly than was his custom, for he was eager to get home and begin being a saint. He meant to be gentle and kind, saying no harsh word, avoiding anger and profanity, eating little and drinking only pure, sparkling water, dressing simply and doing good in a noble, unobtrusive way.

One matter that he had dwelt upon now and then, but had put aside as too difficult of solution while his mind was still occupied with a junkman's cares, now demanded attention. A saint must specialize. One point had made itself clear to Harvey while he was reading his "Lives of the Saints"--that it was not enough for a saint to *be* good; a saint must *do* something. For a while, vaguely, Harvey had thought he might take up the specialty of being kind to all children. Now this seemed unsuitable. A saint who began his career by shifting the care and keep of his own son on to another could hardly expect to win praise by petting other children.

Somewhere between Susan's house and his own place the great solution came to him--stray dogs! The tender phrase, "Little Brother to the Stray Dogs," formed itself in his mind as the one by which he would be known, and he saw himself done in marble, after his regretted death, with a small, appealing dog in his arms and a group of large, eager dogs grouped at his feet, their eyes on his face. One of his hands would rest on the head of one of the dogs protectingly. He would be thin, of course. His long fasts and his diet of bread and water would fix that.

Riverbank would be quite able to furnish the stray dogs. There were more stray dogs in Riverbank than could be counted. Since the City Council had withdrawn the bonus of twenty-five cents per dog that had formerly given the Dog Warden Schulig an active interest in dog-catching, Riverbank seemed to have become a haven for all the stray dogs in Iowa. There were plenty of stray dogs. The junkyard was a fine place in which to shelter stray dogs. It was quite possible that in time the rumor would get around that because of the purity of his heart, Harvey had come to understand dog language and could converse with dogs as one man converses with another. He might even be able to do it. Dod-baste it all, he *would* be a saint! He would do the job proper. Harvey was eager to reach the junkyard and make his final arrangements and begin.

"The minute I get inside my gate," he said to himself; "the minute I get inside my gate!"

He turned the corner into Elm Street. He perspired with eagerness and haste. He reached the gate. He stopped there and looked up and down the street and made a gesture of renunciation with his fat hands, like one putting aside the world forever.

Harvey pushed open the gate with something like solemnity and stopped short. Moses Shuder was sitting on the step of the shanty, the skirts of his long, black coat dabbling in the dust while his hands toyed with the ears of a spotted dog. Shuder looked up, his eyes appealing, as Harvey entered. He clasped his hands at his chest in the fashion that was one of his characteristics and a meek smile wrinkled his face without relieving the anxiety that showed on his countenance.

"Misder Redink," he said, arising.

Then Harvey saw that at his feet lay a large, roughly squared chunk of lead. It was of a weight of some thirty pounds. Harvey knew it well. It had been his last purchase as a junkman, Lon bringing it to the yard in company with two boys known to Harvey only as Swatty and Bony. The chunk of lead should not have been at Moses Shuder's feet; it should have been at the far end of the yard, where Lem had carried it.

"What you doin' with that hunk o' lead?" Harvey demanded.

"Misder Redink, please!" begged Shuder. "I want no trouble."

"Then you take that chunk o' lead back where you got it," said Harvey, his face flushing. "I don't sell you nothin'. I don't sell nobody nothin'. I'm out o' this junk business--"

"Misder Redink, please!" begged Moses Shuder, more meekly than before. "I do not ask you to sell. Only my rights I ask it of any man. It is my lead. Misder Redink, please, I do not say you are a thief--"

"Well, dod-baste you!" cried Harvey, swelling. "Zhust a minute, please, Misder Redink," begged Shuder. "Mit my own money I bought this lead, I assure you, and put it in my junkyard, Misder Redink, but that I should get you arrested I never so much as gave it a thought, Misder Redink, believe me! Why should I, Misder Redink? Do I blame you? No! If your boy stoled it from me--"

"What?" Harvey shouted, taking a step toward Shuder.

"Please, Misder Redink! Should I say it if I did not see it with my own two eyes? Climbing over my fence."

"You're a liar."

Shuder shrugged his shoulders.

"No, Misder Redink; Rebecca could tell you the same story. I ain't sore, Misder Redink. Boys would be boys, always. It is right I should watch my yard. But my lead is my lead, Misder Redink. That your boy Lemuel should steal it from me is nothing. But I should have my lead back, Misder Redink. Sure!"

Shuder put his hands on the chunk of lead. At that moment a vast and uncontrollable rage filled Harvey and he raised his fat hand and brought it down on Shuder's hat, crushing it over his eyes. He grasped Shuder by the shoulders and ran him out of the yard, giving him a final push that sent him sprawling in the street.

Then, still raging, he turned while Shuder got to his feet. The spotted dog caught Harvey's eye. He drew back his foot and kicked the dog, and the surprised animal yelped and leaped out of the yard and down the street.

"There, dod-baste you!" Harvey panted, shaking his fist at Shuder, who stood safely in the middle of the street. "That'll show you! An' don't you or your dog ever come into this yard again or I'll handle you worse, a big sight!"

Moses Shuder looked at his damaged hat. "Two dollars," he said, and shook his head sadly. "But I should complain! What you do to me and my hat the law will take care of, and my lead the law will take care of, if you want it that way, Misder Redink, but that a man should kick a dog--"

"An' I'll kick your dog out o' this yard every time it comes in," shouted Harvey.

Moses Shuder raised his hands.

"It is not my dog," he said. "It is a stray dog."

The saintly career of Saint Harvey, the "Little Brother to the Stray Dogs," seemed to have begun inauspiciously.



CHAPTER IV

While Lorna Percy was in Susan Redding's kitchen acting as a witness to the compact that placed Lem Redding in pawn to his aunt for a period that seemed likely to be extended indefinitely, another lady had come down the front stairs, and after greeting the young woman on the front porch, had occupied one of the chairs. This was Miss Henrietta Bates.

"I thought Lorna was here," she said, as she seated herself. "Did n't I hear her voice?"

"Miss Susan called her into the kitchen," said the other. "I think she will be out in a moment." Miss Henrietta held up an envelope.

"See what I've got?" she said, smiling.

"Not another letter from Bill?"

"Just that," said Henrietta. "And the dearest letter! There's a part I want to read to you and Lorna. I don't bore you with my Bill, do I, Gay?"

"Bore? What an idea!"

"Sometimes I'm afraid I do. If it wasn't that his letters are so intelligent. They don't seem to me like ordinary love-letters. They don't seem to you like the common wishy-washy stuff men write, do they?"

"Well, you know I have no experience in love-letters--"

"Poor Gay!" said Miss Bates, and laughed. "But I do think I'm fortunate in having a man like Bill choose me, don't you? I do wish he could come East this summer. I wish you and Lorna could meet him. He's so--so different from the men here."

The three, who had become close friends, were school teachers, and that was how two of them happened to be boarding at Miss Redding's, which was an exceptionally pleasant boardinghouse. This was the third year Lorna Percy had boarded with Miss Redding. Miss Bates had a year more to her credit. Gay Loring lived at home, across the street, with her parents.

In their quiet, small-town lives the love-letters of Henrietta's William Vane had been important events. William was the first and only man to propose to any one of the three, and although Gay and Lorna had never seen him they had seen his portrait and they had heard a vast amount about him. Henrietta spoke of her William Vane most frankly. She was evidently deeply in love with him.

Gay and Lorna were unequivocally glad on Henrietta's account. Of Gay and Lorna it is enough to say here that they were still young and fresh and attractive. Of Henrietta it may be said that she was no longer quite young, but that she was still fresh and attractive. In many ways she was livelier than her two friends, and had as youthful manners. Although she was at least forty, she had never taken to the type of garb that a woman dons when she is willing to advertise the fact that her youth has fled. Nor had Henrietta Bates any great reason to advertise that. She was still vigorous and bright-eyed, not a gray hair was to be seen on her head, and her face was full and her complexion clear and pleasing.

When Lorna came from the kitchen, bringing young Lem, she noticed immediately the square envelope held by Henrietta.

"What, another?" she exclaimed eagerly. "Henrietta, you are the luckiest girl! What does Billy say this time?"

"I'm going to read part of the letter to you," said Henrietta. "Sit down and be a good girl and listen. Who is the young man? Isn't it Lemuel?"

"Yes, mam," said Lem shyly. "I'm Lem."

"He is going to live here now, too," said Lorna gayly, "are n't you, Lem?"

"Yes, mam."

"So you see!" said Lorna, seating herself on the steps and drawing Lem down beside her. "You may not be the only one with a sweetheart, Henrietta. Lem is going to be mine, are n't you, Lem?"

"I don't know," said Lem, with a boy's diffidence.

"Oh, you must not say that. You must say, 'I'd love to, Miss Percy.' Only you must say, 'I'd love to, Lorna.' My name is Lorna. I'll call you Lem and you 'll call me Lorna. Will you?"

"I don't care."

Gay erupted from her chair in a protesting billow of white and seated herself at Lem's other side.

"Now, I'll not stand for this at all, Lorna Percy!" she complained. "You shan't kidnap him all for yourself. I have as much right to him as you have. You'll be my sweetheart, too, won't you, Lem?"

"Yes'm, I guess so."

"There, you mean thing!" Gay laughed at Lorna. "You see! He's as much mine as he is yours."

It was pretty play and Lem did not mind it much. He had a boy's deep-grounded belief that all girls were silly, and these were only older girls.

"In this letter Bill says--" said Henrietta Bates.

Gay and Lorna turned their heads.

"Oh, excuse me, Henrietta!" Gay cried. "We are truly just crazy to hear what your Bill says, but having a really, truly sweetheart of our own is such a new experience--"

"Come down on the steps and be comfy," added Lorna.

"No, I'll read it here," said Henrietta, and she opened the letter. "Well--there's part I can't read to you--"

"Of course."

"And then he says, 'I thought of you a hundred times while on my fishing trip. Some day you must learn to cast a fly so we can make some of these trips together. You would be the best of companions. And now, dearest girl, I want to ask you the most important question of all. Do you think you can make your preparations so that we can be married in August?'"

"In August!" cried Gay. "I thought it was going to be impossible before next year, Etta?"

"It is a change in his plans," said Henrietta. "Shall I read the rest?"

"Do, please," said Gay, and "Yes, indeed," said Lorna.

"I'm asking this, dear, he goes on," said Henrietta, "because I have just had most wonderful news. I'm to be sent to Africa. A big job--the biggest I ever had. It is wonderful country and I want you to enjoy it with me. It is too far to go without you. So it must be an August wedding because we have to sail in September!"

"Henrietta! How grand!" Gay cried.

"Isn't it?" Henrietta agreed. "Africa, girls! Just think of it! Am I not the luckiest thing?"

"Think of it, young Lemuel," Lorna said.

"Her sweetheart is going to marry her and carry her off to Africa, where the lions are. You see what I shall expect of you, young man. The very least you can do is to get ready to carry me off to Europe."

"And me to Asia," said Gay.

Lem said nothing. He knew they were teasing. "And listen to this, girls," Henrietta continued. "'You'll forgive me, Etta dear, for asking you to agree to such an early wedding. I know it is apt to find you unprepared and you must let your crude lover do the unconventional this once. I want you to tell me I can send you a few of my miserable dollars--ten hundred, let us say, so they may be made happy dollars by aiding your preparations.'"

Henrietta folded the letter.

"What do you think of that, Gay?" she asked. "Should I let him? Would it be right?"

"Of course! Why not, under the circumstances?" Gay answered.

"When he asked you to go so far and so soon," said Lorna.

"I hoped you would say so," said Henrietta. "I only wanted your approval. You know what it means to me. It will let me use what I have saved--the money I would never touch--and I can pay you both all I owe you, and what I owe Miss Susan. It makes everything so much easier and happier for me. And of course you'll help me get ready; I'll have so much to do!"

"As if we were n't mad to," said Gay. "You must write him at once, Henrietta; tell him it is all right."

"I'm going right upstairs to do it this minute," Henrietta answered, and she went into the house, humming happily.

Gay looked at Lorna quizzically. Lorna laughed.

"What do you think of it now?" Gay asked in a low tone. "Did you notice? She would not come down to the step to read the letter."

"I did notice. And did you see the ink spot on the back of the envelope? The same spot that was on it when she read the last letter from her 'William' and the one before that?"

"Yes, I did notice. I'm positive it is the same envelope. I believe you are right; I believe she does write the letters to herself. Is n't it *funny*? Is n't it amazing?"

"Or sad or something?" Lorna said. "Gay, what do you think of it, really? What does it mean?"

"Did she try to borrow some money from you this morning?" Gay asked.

"Yes, twenty-five dollars, but I did not have it."

"I did have twenty. She got that," Gay said and giggled.

"Then you'll see! She'll get another present from her dear William to-morrow," Lorna said. "Is n't it just as I said;

every time she borrows from us she gets a present from dear William? You'll see. It will be something worth about twenty dollars. Say, Gay--"

"Yes?"

"You know I said I did not believe her William was really engaged to her at all?"

"Yes?"

"Well, I don't believe there *is* any William. I don't believe he exists. I think Henrietta made him up entirely. I believe she invented him."

"Oh, lovely!" Gay cooed. "Is n't she wonderful? But why, Lorna? Why should she?"

"That's what I've been wondering. Not just to get money from us, because she uses it to buy the presents she says her William sends. She has no need to buy presents for her William to send. We would believe in her William quite as easily without the presents."

"Is n't it exciting?" Gay cooed again.

"Well, *I* never knew anything like it, I'll say that," agreed Lorna. "When you think of the trouble she has gone to, and how she has kept it up. Gay, do you think she has any idea we don't believe her?"

"Of course not! But isn't it the strangest thing for anybody to do?"

"I don't know," said Lorna thoughtfully. "I've been thinking about it a lot since I first had a suspicion, and it is n't really so strange. You know what Henrietta is like. She loves to shine. She hates to play second fiddle. Do you remember when we first heard of her dear Billy?"

"When she was at Spirit Lake, where she said she met him. She wrote about the engagement from there."

"Yes," said Lorna; "and do you remember what was going on here in Riverbank just before she went on vacation?"

"I don't remember."

"Don't tell me you don't remember how Carter Bruce was rushing you then!" scoffed Lorna. "I remember perfectly well that Henrietta and I agreed you and Carter would be engaged before the summer ended."

"Oh, Carter Bruce!" admitted Gay. "Of course, he was fussing around. He is always fussing around. Or was."

"Yes, and we thought he was going to steal you, Gay. Well--that's the answer!"

"You mean--"

"Of course! Henrietta just couldn't stand having you engaged when she was not. So she invented Billy Vane while she was at Spirit Lake, and told us he had gone out to Colorado, where he would be out of the way."

"But who writes her the letters from Colorado?"

"How do I know? She may have a brother out there. That is easy. She would have dear Bill go wherever there was some one who could write her a letter now and then. And Henrietta does the rest. It is n't so impossible when you think of it that way, is it? After she had invented dear Bill it was natural enough that she should keep him alive and interested, when we were so interested."

"Lorna, it is the greatest thing I ever heard of!" exclaimed Gay. "And I think you are a wizard to discover the truth."

"No, I'm not," said Lorna. "Just think back, Gay. The strange thing is that we did not hit on it sooner. Think! Can't you remember a hundred things that should have made us suspicious?"

"Yes," Gay admitted. "Especially the presents, and the way she borrows just before the presents come."

"And never letting us see a single letter, and always moving away when we come near her when she is reading them to us, and never getting another photograph from Billy '--and a thousand things."

"Yes," said Gay again; and then, "Are you going to do anything about it?"

"Do? No, why should I? If she enjoys it I'm sure we do. Only--we must not lend her any more, if we can help it. There's no reason why we should lend her our hard-earned money to buy presents for herself with."

Gay giggled.

"How much does she owe you now?" she asked.

"Almost two hundred."

"And me over one hundred and fifty! Is n't it rich?"

"It's peachy!"

In her own room Henrietta Bates was looking at her comely face reflected in her mirror. She was pleased with it, and she glanced down at the three framed photographs on her dresser. One was the picture of the imaginary William Vane, the others were of her dearest friends--Gay and Lorna. To William's portrait she gave only a careless glance. She lingered over Gay's and Lorna's.

"Stupid dears!" she thought. "So you have found me out? It has taken you long enough, I'm sure. I wonder what

next."



CHAPTER V

As Lorna Percy, Lem, and Gay Loring sat on the porch a jaunty straw hat came into view above the terrace, and, as it reached the gate, proved to be on the head of a man as jaunty as the hat. The man paused at the gate to look up the street.

"There's Freeman," said Lorna. "He's home early."

"Not so very. It is getting toward supper-time."

Gay answered. "I'd better be getting home to help mother set the table."

"Poor excuse!" teased Lorna. "But run along if you want to have a nice little session at the gate all by your lonies. Gay--"

"Yes?"

"I *do* think Freeman is in love with you."

Gay colored.

"Why?" she asked.

"The way he acts, and everything. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Well--he's persistent enough. He's never said anything outright. Not anything much. I don't know whether he loves me or just wants to see how far he can go, Lorna."

Lorna was silent for a moment.

"I'd say I was glad if he was n't such a--you know, Gay. Flashy. Don't you think he is rather flashy? Not very heavy. He's fast, too. I'd rather have you like Carter Bruce."

"For all I know he is a thousand miles from thinking anything serious," Gay answered. "I'm simply not going to take him seriously until he is serious."

"How old do you suppose he really is?"

"Twenty-five. Don't you think so?"

"I doubt it, Gay. He may be. It is hard to judge. He's queer. I don't like him. He *is* queer sometimes. He--"

"Sh!" said Gay, indicating Lem, who was listening with all his ears.

"I forgot. You're such a quiet little boy," she said to Lem. "Are you a little pitcher with big ears?"

"Yes'm," said Lem. "I guess so."

"What I meant," said Lorna to Gay, "was L-i-q-u-o-r. Have you suspected it?"

"Ellicker," said Lem. "What's that mean?"

"Hush!" said Lorna. "He's coming in." Freeman Todder, the young man of whom they were speaking, climbed the terrace steps slowly. He carried a cane, which was an unusual bit of dandyism in Riverbank, and he was what Miss Redding called "dressy." Very few young fellows in Riverbank were "dressy" and almost none of the older men. Trousers seldom or never were creased on week days, for the "Sunday suit" held sway on the Sabbath and at parties and dances. To be well dressed on a week day was almost a sign of ungodliness, because the few who were well dressed were certainly apt to be ungodly. They were thought to be interested in poker, woman, and wine.

Freeman Todder, when he arrived in Riverbank, had almost immediately affiliated himself with the dozen "dressy" young fellows. He was seen in Alberson's drug store, in the Smokeorium, in front of Weltschaffel's clothing store, and wherever the young bucks gathered. It was said that his first labors in Riverbank were in the nature of holding a handful of playing cards in Alberson's back room, in company with a number of other young fellows, and it was some time before he had found a job. The job he found was serving soda water in Alberson's store. In the winter, when the soda trade was slack, he was behind Alberson's cigar counter.

Some wondered how Freeman Todder could live and dress on what Johnnie Alberson paid him. Some guessed that Freeman "knocked down" some of the change that passed through his hands, but those who knew Johnnie Alberson best did not believe that. None who knew Johnnie ever believed he would let even a penny that belonged to him go astray.

That Freeman could dress as he did and board at Miss Redding's--which was not the cheapest place in Riverbank--and have silver dollars to dink in his pocket, and do it on what Alberson paid, was manifestly impossible. The answer that most of those who thought they were knowing gave was "poker." Even the other "dressy" youths said, "Poker." Freeman played a careful, not showy, game and did win now and then. No one ever bothered to foot up his winnings and compare them with his losses. As a matter of fact, Freeman Todder's net poker winnings would not have paid for his showy shirts, the gayly striped cuffs of which always showed liberally below his coat sleeves.

As he came up the walk toward the two girls on Miss Redding's porch steps, he raised his hat, and then let it hang in

his hand.

"Hello, one and all," he said. "Who's the young gent you have clamped between you there?"

"This is Lem," said Lorna. "Lem's going to be among those present here after this, are n't you, Lem?"

"Yes'm," said Lem; and then to Freeman, "What's 'ellicker'?"

"Now hush, Lem!" said Lorna.

"Well, I want to know. What is it?" Lem insisted. "It's about *you*," he said, looking up at Freeman. "*She* said it. She said she expected it about you."

Lorna reddened. Freeman Todder's eyes narrowed for an instant; then he smiled.

"I expect it is something devilish, then, son," he said, "but it's probably not half as bad as the truth. You'll learn that, if you associate with this wicked man long. I'm a 'horrid example.' That right, Gay? They'll take you by the hand, Lem, and point at me and say, 'See that man? Beware! Do not be like him. He is a lost soul. He uses cigarettes and blows the smoke through his nose.'"

"Hah! I can do that!" scoffed Lem.

"You're both of you wicked men, then," said Gay, but lightly.

Lorna took Lem's hand.

"Come around the house with me," she said. "I want you to help me pick a lot of syringas for Gay," and she dragged Lem away. Freeman seated himself beside Gay.

Freeman Todder was not twenty-five, but something hard in his face and eyes made him look older at times. His face was thin and his mouth like a healed wound, so thin were his lips. He did not have much chin. He did not look wholesome. He looked unsafe and cruel.

"L-i-q-u-o-r," he spelled, and looked at Gay and laughed. "C-a-r-d-s. Also d-i-c-e. I'm a regular Satan, ain't I?"

"Oh, Freeman!" she said reproachfully. "Don't be sarcastic. We were only--"

"Only talking me over. Well, that's something, anyway. That's a sort of flattery."

He laid his cane across his knees.

"You *have* been drinking, Freeman," Gay said.

"Yes. I've had a couple too many. Do you know how I feel? Like this--whoops!" He flung his hat off to the left on the lawn. "Whoops!" He threw his cane to the right.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gay, as if he had intentionally hurt her. "Why do you?"

Freeman spread out his hand on his knee and looked at his fingers one by one, raising each in turn. On one finger he wore a large, flashy ring. He moved the finger so that the light flashed from the facets of the stone. Suddenly he looked into the girl's eyes.

"Keep away from me, Gay," he said seriously. "I'm no good. I'm warning you, understand? Don't have anything to do with me. I'm bad business. I like you, but I'm bad business."

"But, Freeman--"

"Not yet. You can 'but Freeman' me all you like when I get through, but this is my hiss, this is the rattle of my snake buttons. You keep away from me. I'm bad for you, and I'm saying so now because after this I won't care a damn. This is my warning. After this you'll have to look out for yourself. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Yes, but you don't really mean it."

"I do mean it. I'm warning you. If you know what is good for you, you'll never speak to me, or let me speak to you again: Once! Twice! Third and last warning! Warned!"

He waited a moment. When he spoke it was no longer seriously, but in his usual flippant tone. "Who is the Lem kid?" he asked.

"Miss Redding's nephew. His father left him here awhile ago. And--what do you think? Henrietta's Bill has set the wedding day. I'm so glad for Henrietta. She has been so sweet about waiting."

It was evident that Gay had not taken Freeman's warning as seriously as she might have taken it. Freeman raised his eyebrows with an effect like that of shrugging one's shoulders. He had warned her, and seriously, and that was more than he need have done.

"That so?" he said indifferently, referring to Henrietta. "Henrietta and her Bill give me a pain."

"Why? Do you know anything about them?" asked Gay eagerly.

"I? No. Why should I?"

"Haven't you suspected anything?" asked Gay.

Freeman turned and looked in her eyes.

"What do you suspect?" he asked as if the whole matter interested him little.

"Well, we may be doing her the most awful injustice," Gay said, "but Lorna and I have been wondering if there *is* a Bill. We wonder if Henrietta is n't just pretending there is a Billy Vane--and all."

Freeman seemed more bored than interested.

"Why should she pretend a thing like that--a crazy thing like that?" he asked indifferently.

"Don't you know how girls love to wear rings on their engagement fingers?" asked Gay. "It's that sort of thing, Lorna and I think. It gives her a romantic hue. She thinks it makes us feel she is fortunate. Is n't it killing!"

Freeman looked at the ants scurrying across the walk at his feet.

"I don't know anything about it," he said. "You girls may have seen a lot I never saw. You would n't think of such a thing unless you had some reason. How about all the presents she says he sends her?"

"We think she buys them herself," Gay said. Freeman turned his hand and looked at his long, well-kept nails.

"Can you keep a secret?" he asked.

"Indeed, yes!"

"Do you remember the silver-backed hand mirror Billy Vane sent her? With her monogram engraved on it?"

"Yes."

"All right! Johnnie Alberson ordered that for her from Chicago. I saw it when it came and I saw her when she came into the store to pay the bill."

"Why, Freeman Todder! And you just this minute said you didn't know anything about it!"

"About there being no Billy Vane," he explained. "There might be a Billy Vane who did not do his duty in the way of presents. He might be a close-fist. Your Henrietta might be afraid you would think he was a cheap skate if presents did not come along regularly."

Gay considered this.

"Yes," she said, after a moment, "that might be, but we suspected there was no Billy before we thought of the presents at all. Of course, the presents she has to buy explain why she never has any money--why she is always borrowing--but that is not all. You won't say a word, will you, Freeman?"

"No. It don't interest me at all," he said. Miss Redding, rosy-cheeked, came to the door then, and tinkled a small supper-bell. Gay, with an exclamation, jumped up and went to find Lem and Lorna and the promised flowers, and Freeman Todder picked up his hat and cane. He hung the hat on the rack in the hall and stood his cane in the umbrella jar and then climbed the stairs. As he reached the top Henrietta Bates's door opened and she came out. They met just outside her door and she slipped something into his hand.

"There's twenty dollars," she said in a whisper. "It is all I could get. And I can't borrow any more. They are suspicious now."

"But, my God, Et," whispered Freeman Todder angrily. "Twenty dollars is n't going to do me any good."

"All I could get," said Henrietta shortly, and she hurried down the stairs to greet Lorna and Lem with the smiling face of a woman whose lover has just set the happy day.



CHAPTER VI

The next morning Miss Redding held a brief conversation at the breakfast table regarding Lem's immediate future, the important question being whether Lem should be sent to school. With two school teachers at the table Susan felt she was sure to receive good advice. To Lem's delight the unanimous opinion was that it was hardly worth while for him to go to school during the brief tag end of the term remaining. When Henrietta Bates said this, Miss Redding had no further doubts, for she had a very high opinion of Miss Bates. There was something safe and solid about Miss Bates that gave weight to her opinion.

Henrietta Bates had made an excellent impression on Miss Redding. Henrietta was one of half a dozen out-of-town teachers who had hastened to Riverbank at the time when, following the trouble over a certain Mrs. Helmuth's case, the school board had arbitrarily decreed that never again should a married woman teach in Riverbank's schools. The "foreigners," as the intruding teachers were called, had immediately become the subject of some of the most ardent hatred and abuse, and some of them had made replies that made them exceedingly unpopular, but Miss Bates had, by good-natured diplomacy, avoided all this. The others had been sent packing as soon as local talent was available to supplant them, but Henrietta had not only remained, but had been rapidly promoted, and was a real favorite with all.

"She's the kindest and affectionatest woman I ever knew in all my born days," Miss Susan often said. "Just look how she does for Mr. Todder. It's like he was her son. She sews on his buttons and mends his socks, and never a sign of flirting with him or anything. I do admire Henrietta Bates highly, and that's a fact."

Every one admired Henrietta. She was so large and so cheerful and, withal, so "safe." She was so wholesome and healthy and free from complaints.

"It's a wonder to me," Miss Susan often said, "that no man has grabbed her long ago. If I was a man I'd marry her in a minute. She's the best there is, to my notion."

Miss Susan had rejoiced openly when Henrietta's news came from Spirit Lake.

"Well, I'm glad!" Miss Susan said. "If ever a woman deserved a fine man, Henrietta does."

As a rule Henrietta was cheerful. She would play the ancient piano any time she was asked, or sing in her very fair voice. She was always ready to make up a set at croquet; she even tried tennis, but had to give it up. "I'm too aged," she laughed, meaning--as every one knew--she was too heavy.

When she did have her short periods of depression it was because she had not heard from Billy Vane, she said, or had had a letter that was not satisfactory.

"I don't know what I'll do when she gets married and goes away," Miss Susan said. "She's almost like a sister, the way she helps out. I guess folks don't know how many things can come up in a boarding-house to set everybody cross at each other, but Henrietta just keeps the front part of the house all nice and friendly all the time. I don't know whatever I'll do without her."

It was so in this matter of Lem.

"It is quite useless to send him to school for the short time there is left," Henrietta told Miss Susan. "He wouldn't fit into any class, and he'd be unhappy and make work for the teacher and be so far behind his class that the schooling would n't do him any good. Let him wait until the fall term. Gay and Lorna and I can tutor him a little this summer."

"If you ain't too busy getting ready to get married and quit us," said Susan. "You'll be so busy getting ready--"

"I'll have a little time for Lem, I hope," Henrietta said brightly, smiling at him. "And Gay and Lorna will be here."

"Not being lucky enough to have our Billy Vanes," said Lorna.

"Now don't be jealous of a poor old maid," Henrietta teased.

"But we are," said Lorna, and smiled inwardly. "Nobody loves us."

She glanced at Freeman Todder, but it was one of his bad mornings, of which he had a great many. He was pale and heavy-eyed and his hand shook. No one at the table knew when he had come in the night before, but it had been after three in the morning. He had had a long session of poker, with bad luck, and his pocket held just eighteen cents. He kept his eyes on his plate.

"What do you think, Mr. Todder?" Susan asked.

"What?" he asked, looking up suddenly.

"Do you think Lem ought to wait until fall to start schooling?"

"What do I know about it?" he asked. "It's nothing to me."

There was an unpleasant pause. Rudeness, even when coming from a man as evidently out of sorts as Freeman was, kills lively spirits. Henrietta came to the rescue.

"Did you ever see a lovelier day?" she asked. "Just see the sun on that vase of syringas! This is the sort of day I

wish I was a Maud Muller. Lem, it is a crime to be in school a day like this, isn't it?"

"Yes'm," said Lem. "I guess so."

"So we won't make you go," she said gayly. "Lorna and I are poor slaves. We have to go whether we like it or not."

She arose and went to the door, humming.

She went into the hall and stood a moment at the screen door, looking out, and then went out upon the porch and walked slowly down toward the gate, stopping to pick a dandelion. At the top of the terrace steps she stood, waiting. Freeman Todder, taking his hat and cane, followed her. To any one seeing them at the top of the steps they would have seemed to have met there by chance.

"Well?" Henrietta asked. There was no lightness, no affection in her voice; no anger either.

"It went against me last night. I lost the whole twenty. The dammedest luck, Et."

"I don't care the least about your luck," Henrietta said. "You are an ungrateful, inconsiderate wretch. I'll say it plainly. I'm utterly disgusted."

"Oh, quit it!" said Todder rudely.

"I feel like quitting it--like quitting everything--forever," she said. "I get so tired. God! how tired I get! And you never show the least consideration."

She looked toward the house.

"We can't stand here," she said. "Walk along with me. We must settle this now, Freeman."

"Settle nothing!" he growled, but he walked beside her, going down the steps and turning down the street.

"It is not fair to me, Freeman," she said. "I owe both the girls so much already, and Miss Redding for weeks and weeks. It has been hard, letting them think I am a silly old fool, and planning to make them think it. I don't know how much longer I might have gone on with it. Now that is ended."

Freeman said nothing.

"I could n't have gone on with it much longer, but now it has come to an end," Henrietta continued. "For one reason they simply can't lend me any more. No matter how amused they may be over thinking that I am a great silly, buying myself presents and pretending I get them from my Billy Vane, they can't spare the money. And you make me so furious, doing as you did last night, getting rid of even the few dollars I could get. You might at least spend the money sensibly. You might try to help me, when everything I do is for you."

"A lot you'd do for me if I did n't scare it out of you," Freeman scoffed, and turned his hard eyes on her. "And you'll do a lot more for me, too. You've got to. I'm in bad."

"What do you mean?" she asked, frightened, turning to look into his face.

"I'm in bad, I say," he answered. "I've been tapping Alberson's till and he knows it. You think you've been keeping me going? What could I do with the scraps of money you've been giving me? Chicken feed!"

Henrietta was very white.

"You've been stealing?" she whispered.

"Yes, and got caught; that's the worst of it. And I've got to make it good, for Johnnie is going to put me through. Now you know it; what are you going to do about it?"

"Oh, Freeman!" she moaned. She dared not weep, for Gay, or any one, might be watching her. Mrs. Bruce, in one of the houses across the street, did come to her door and Henrietta waved a merry hand. "How much did you take?" Henrietta asked Freeman.

"Three hundred, I guess, but old Johnnie don't know it. He says it is two hundred. That's what I have to make good. 'Make good or go to the jug,' was what he said. And he'll do it. I'm nobody, you see. I'm none of the ancient and honorable Riverbank families. Nobody'll stop trading with Johnnie if I'm jugged. It will be 'whoof!' and I'm gone."

"Oh, Freeman! How could you? And so little I can do. What can I do? Do you think, if I saw him--" questioned Henrietta.

"If you saw him? Yes, with a roll of cash in your fist," laughed Freeman. "What would you do? Kiss him? The best thing you can do is hunt up two hundred ducats."

"That's impossible, of course," Henrietta said flatly. "How long will he wait?"

"He'll be quick enough, don't fret!"

"Freeman, if I think I can do some good by seeing him, may I?"

"I don't care a hoot what you do," Freeman Todder said. "And I don't care a hoot what happens. That's how I feel."

Henrietta put her hand ever so briefly on his arm.

"I know. And I'm sorry. It is all my fault. I'll do the best I can. I must go back now."

"So long," Freeman said, and went on down the hill.

Henrietta turned and went toward the house, trying to make her step springy and her face bright. She felt very old and worn. As she neared the gate Gay came across the street and Henrietta waited for her and slipped her arm through Gay's and forced a smile.

"*You* look happy," Gay laughed.

"Happy? Why shouldn't I?" asked Henrietta. "I feel like a Pippa ready to chirp, 'All's right with the world,' this fair morn."

"I honestly believe you're the youngest thing I know," said Gay, and she meant it. She was a bit jealous. She had seen Henrietta place her hand on Freeman Todder's arm and, as such thoughts will come, had come the thought that Henrietta might be in love with Freeman.

What more the two women might have said was interrupted by the rattle of a cart that drove to the gutter and stopped at the Redding gate. In the vehicle were Harvey Redding, the newly self-appointed saint, as fat as ever, and a man of spare and awkward construction whose long neck suggested that of an ostrich in the act of swallowing an orange. He was in his shirt sleeves, without a waistcoat, but on one of his suspenders straps he wore one of the largest nickel-plated stars that ever adorned a human being. This star bore the legend, "Riverbank Municipal Police; Canine Division, No. 1," and had been presented to Officer Schulig by a group of playful citizens with a speech. While properly credentialed as a deputy member of the Riverbank police force and as full and complete Dog Warden, Officer Schulig now received no pay and considered it fitting to do no work except when driven to it by direct orders from the Town Marshal. As he said himself, he had "soured onto the schob" when the City Council took away the twenty-five cent fee for capturing and impounding stray dogs. He had even given up wearing his star in public, except when it was absolutely necessary, because it had become the custom of the lighter-minded to shield their eyes when the star approached, as if its glory was too great. At the same time these ungodly rascals would read the badge, saying, "Rifferbangk Muntzipple Poleetz. Canine Divitzion. No one," this having been the manner in which Officer Schulig had read it upon its presentation. What made it more annoying to Officer Schulig was that when any one read "Canine Divitzion. No one," some one always chanted, with surprise, "What, no one at all?" and the answer, apologetically given, was, "Well, hardly any one."

The custom of teasing Officer Schulig when he was performing any police duty had become so common, and made him so angry, that he no longer waited to be teased; he became angry as soon as he was called upon to perform any official task. And he was angry now.

"Got a hurry mit you, und out from my buggy get. By gollies, I ain't got all day yet for fooling aroundt. I shouldt take a club to you if I ain't left it to home already," he ordered; and Saint Harvey hefted his huge bulk from the seat and clambered out of the cart backward. When he turned toward the house he, too, was red with anger and with the unusual exertion. On his fat wrists were a pair of glittering handcuffs.

"Dod-baste you!" he exclaimed whole-heartedly to Officer Schulig. "You ain't got no right to drag me into my sister's house with these here things on me. Take 'em off!"

"Stop now! You don't say to me dot you baste me!" shouted Schulig, white with rage. "Nobody hass a righdt to baste me. Baste yourself! Und I don't take hand-cuffers off from any man vot says he bastes me. Und anyhow I don't. I leaf my keys by my house. So shut up once!"

CHAPTER VII

What on earth is the matter?" Henrietta asked Officer Schulig. "What have you got those handcuffs on Mr. Redding for?"

"Why this dod-basted lunatic went an' arrested me," sputtered Harvey. "I whanged him on the head an' you'd 'a' whanged him on the head, too, if he'd come arrestin' you when you was n't doin' nothin' but sittin' in your rockin'-chair meditatatin'--"

"Meditate!" exclaimed the red-faced Officer Schulig. "What it is 'meditate' I don't know. Iss it chumping up und schlogging an officer on der head mitout notice? Yes? In der yard I come und klop! goes his fist on my head, und no notice beforehand. Is it to meditate, such a business? Yes?"

"Sittin' there. An' meditatatin'," said Harvey. "Like a saint should. Doin' no harm to nobody. Out in the fresh sunshine with a gentle heart, just startin' in to be a saint, an' up *he* comes--"

"Starting in to be what?" asked Henrietta.

"A saint, dod-baste it," said Harvey angrily. "Livin' a life of purity an' gentleness, bein' kind to stray dogs an' one sort of thing an' another. Mortifyin' my flesh on bread an' water, and here *he* comes. Dod-baste it, a man can't set up in the saint business without a dod-basted dog police comin' an'--Why! dod-baste it, I got to begin all over again. I got to start new, an' begin all over, an' all because *he* come fetchin' his red face an' pokin' it at me--"

"I neffer!" cried Schulig indignantly. "Neffter do I poke my face. Fetch it along mit me; yes! But poke it? Neffer! I tell you who poked my face: you poked it! Mit your fist. Und you blame *me!*"

He frowned ferociously.

"I got a right to fetch my face vere I go, aind't I?" he demanded.

"No, you ain't," said Harvey angrily. "What right you got to poke a face at a man that's just set out to be a saint, temptin' him, an' angerin' him all up, an' settin' him to swearin' an' cussin' like a pirate, an' gettin' him so mad he starts beatin' up a fellow human? What right you got to bust into a saint's first day, spoilin' the whole dod-basted business, an' arrestin' him an' pokin' faces at him an'--"

"What did he arrest you for, Mr. Redding?" Gay asked.

"Receiving stolen goods. Und grooldy to animals. Und assaulting a Chew, und also schloggin' me by my head afterwards," said Schulig promptly.

"An' me tryin' to be a saint," complained Harvey. "Me settin' there an' tryin' to be a saint. It ain't no wonder I got mad at him. Who ever heard of a saint gettin' arrested for all them things, I'd like to know? It ain't right. It ain't normal."

"But receiving stolen goods!" exclaimed Gay. "That's serious."

"Und mebbly for conspiracies together to have such stealings go ahead," said Schulig. "I bet you he gets yet into a blace I don't poke my face into! Chail. Goundy chail!"

"Don't laugh, Gay," Henrietta urged. "This is serious. What is it you want here, Mr. Schulig? I suppose you want Miss Redding to furnish bail."

"Bail is none of my business," said Schulig.

"No; better I like it should he rot by der chail. I come for der boy."

"The boy? Not Lem!" Henrietta exclaimed. "What did Lem do?"

"Beddy larceny," said Officer Schulig. "A schunk of lead so big as my head he stole. From off of Moses Schuder, out from his chunkyard. Und sold it to his papa here. Yes!"

"Oh! just junk!" said Henrietta, greatly relieved. After all boys will be boys, and she had been a teacher too long to have a violent belief in the innate depravity of boys who steal junk. She inclined to the belief that no one could expect old iron, copper bottoms of wash-boilers, and other cashable metals to be entirely safe unless nailed down and bolted fast, when boys were around. The thoughts of a small-town boy turn to junk as the sparks fly upward. "Is that all!" she said.

When the group reached the house Susan Redding was at the door, for Lorna had seen the four approaching and had called her.

"Well," Susan exclaimed bitterly to her brother, "you're making a nice sort of saint, ain't you? What's all this ruckus about, I want to know? What you been doing this time?"

Lem, peering wide-eyed from behind his aunt, felt his conscience at that moment as he had never felt it before. It felt as big as a house. He turned to slip quietly away, but Officer Schulig saw him.

"Shtop him! Shtop dot boy!" he cried, and sprang for Lem, but not loosening his hold on Harvey's arm. The handcuffs clinked on Harvey's wrists, but Harvey was too heavy to be jerked about casually. His hat fell to the porch

floor.

"Dod-baste you!" he exclaimed, and jabbed Schulig with his elbow.

Miss Susan put her hand on Lem's arm protectingly.

"Now, don't you be afraid, Lemuel," she said. "Nobody's going to harm you whilst I'm here, I tell them that! What you want, Rudolf Schulig? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, scaring the wits out of a poor child, I won't be a mite surprised if Harvey has got into some shape of devilment, for I will say to his face I've been expecting it this long time, but this boy never did a mean thing, I'll warrant."

"Does he or don't he, is none of my business," said Schulig. "Der chutch makes dot outd. Chutch says it, und I go und do it."

"Judge who?"

"Chutch Bruce," said Schulig. "Says to me der chutch, 'Schulig, go und get me Harfey Redding und such a boy is called Lempuel Redding.' Und I get them. Else is not my business. I go und get them."

"But you can't. You have to have a warrant," said Henrietta. "Is n't that what you have to have--a warrant? Have you got a warrant?"

"Sure I got von," said Schulig, and he produced it. "I don'd know you vant it. Here iss."

"What's it say?" Susan asked, and Gay, leaning against Henrietta's arm, read it.

"It says Lem and one boy known as Swatty Swartz, together with one boy known as Bony, did steal, and so forth, a chunk of lead metal, of a value of three or more dollars, from the junkyard of one Moses Schuder," said Gay.

"There!" said Miss Susan triumphantly, "I knew it! You've got the boys mixed up, somehow. Lemuel don't steal. He ain't that kind of boy. You don't know anything about it, do you, Lem?"

Lem looked up into his aunt's face. "Yes, mam," he said.

"Well, maybe you do," said Miss Susan. "I dare say that Swatty boy and Bony boy fetched the lead to your pa's junkyard. It's like enough they did. But you never knew it was stole, did you, Lem?"

"Yes, mam, I did know," Lem said. "I knew it."

"But you did not help them steal it," said Miss Susan sharply.

"Yes, mam," said Lem again. "Or, anyway, I did n't help them. They were the ones that helped me."

There was no bravado in the boy's voice. He was frightened. His face was so white with fear that the freckles stood out as if they floated above the skin and were not on it. Miss Susan was almost as white, but with shame, indignation, and anger, and her eyes were hard now.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "Well, indeed! A nice sort of boy I have had boosted onto me. A nice sort of boy you put into pawn, Harvey Redding! A thief, and he admits it, and brags about it! A nice sort of boy--going off with a lot of hoodlums and leading them to steal and rob! And I suppose," she said, turning on Lemuel, "you went right to your saintly father and sold that lead to him!"

"Yes, mam," said Lem, swallowing a lump in his throat. "I--I sold it to him for three dollars."

"And you and the other young rascals divided the money amongst you!"

"No, mam. Or--yes, mam. Or--we did n't divide it. I got one half an' Swatty an' Bony got one half. I got a dollar an' a half an' they only got a dollar an' a half for both of them. Because I was the one that thought of gettin' it back from Moses, an' I was the one that sold it to pop. So I got half."

"And you went and planned that all out beforehand, in cold blood--like--like criminals?"

"No, mam," said Lem faintly. "The' was n't nothin' planned out about dividin'; not beforehand. I had to fight 'em for it, afterward. I licked 'em, an' they let me have half."

Henrietta Bates, had it not been for the way in which Miss Susan was taking all this, might have laughed, although her own situation and her morning talk with Freeman Todder had left her little inclination to laughter. Miss Susan, however, was taking the affair with deadly seriousness, and it was not an occasion when a laugh could lessen the tension. Miss Susan stood motionless, looking toward the street, her fingers wrinkling the hem of her apron. When she spoke her voice was hard.

"Take him along," she said, not looking at Lem. "I'm through with him. I don't want to have aught to do with a thief."

"Oh! Miss Susan!" Lorna exclaimed. "He's only a boy!"

"He's a thief, I'm through with him," Miss Susan repeated, and turned to enter the house. Schulig stepped forward.

Lem looked then, not at Gay, not at Lorna, not at his father, not even at his aunt or at Schulig, but at Henrietta Bates, and in his eyes was an appeal.

"I don't want to go to jail," he said pitifully. "Don't be afraid; you'll not be there long, Lem," Henrietta said, and as her heart bled for him she stooped to wrap her arms around him.

The boy's eyes fastened on her face eagerly as if they could not leave it. He swayed slightly and closed his eyes.

"Look out! He's falling!" Lorna cried, and Henrietta caught him in her arms as he fell, and lowered him to the porch floor.

"He's fainted!" Gay exclaimed, and bent to help Henrietta.

The boy's face was white as death, and his eyes were closed, but his head did not droop and he seemed to breathe. Gay, taking his hand to chafe it, looked up in alarm.

"Why--why--he's all stiff!" she exclaimed. "He's dead!"

Lorna, too, was on her knees at Lem's feet now, and Miss Susan, her face now white with fright, was grasping the boy's other hand and crying, "Lem! Lem!"

Henrietta, calm, as one might have known she would be, bent forward and raised one of Lem's eyelids. It remained open and the uncovered eye stared glassily. She gently closed the eyelid and arose.

"He is not dead and he has not fainted," she said. "I have seen such cases before. It is a cataleptic fit, I think. Has he ever had them before?" she asked Harvey.

"He ain't, but his ma used to," said Harvey.

"You see!" Henrietta said. "I think you had better put him to bed, Miss Susan, and you had better send for a doctor. His heart is strong and I am sure there is no danger. He may be thus for an hour or a week."

She turned to Gay and Lorna.

"We must go," she said. "We will be late for school as it is. Miss Susan can carry him to his room."

"I can and will," said Miss Susan grimly.

"And we will stop and tell Dr. Grace to come at once," said Henrietta.

Miss Susan raised the boy in her strong arms. Gay touched his face with her soft fingers.

"Poor kid!" she said. "Poor little Lem!"

From Saint Harvey of Riverbank came a sound like a mighty sob. He raised his linked hands high above his head and there was a jangle of steel chain. When he had raised his hands to their utmost reach, Saint Harvey brought his united fists down upon the top of Officer Schulig's unprotected head with a blow that made the porch floor palpitate and the dog policeman's knees to bend.

"Dod-double-baste you!" cried Saint Harvey of Riverbank. "You get away from me, an' get away quick!"

Officer Schulig was willing. He tried to. He made a leap for the porch steps, but Saint Harvey's linked hands had encircled the officer's neck and the two men tottered to the edge of the steps.

"Chail!" yelled Schulig, pushing at Harvey's chest. "More chail for this, I bet you!"

Then they reached the edge of the porch and fell and rolled down the steps together, locked in a close but most unaffectionate embrace.



CHAPTER VIII

What Henrietta said to Dr. Grace, who was young and had a twinkle in his eye, does not matter, but when she returned to Miss Susan's for dinner, at noon, Lem was still seemingly unconscious and as rigid as before. Miss Susan said the doctor had agreed with Henrietta's diagnosis in general, and had added that the shock of the fear of jail had probably reacted on the supersensitiveness of the boy. The doctor had said, Miss Susan told Henrietta, that the boy's pulse and temperature were normal and that there was nothing to fear. There might, he had said, be recurrences of this cataleptic state from time to time. The only treatment, he said, was to leave the boy alone while in these trance states and to see that as soon as he came out of them he was fed plenteously.

Henrietta smiled secretly as she turned away from Miss Susan, so well had Dr. Grace played the game.

Lorna was later arriving for dinner. She had, with Gay, purposely avoided Henrietta in order to call on Dr. Grace, for she had a question to ask him.

"Doctor," she said, when she and Gay stood in his office and had spoken of Lem, "we wanted to ask you something. About Lem. He's in no danger?"

"Not a bit."

"And--you'll know we would not ask this without a good reason--he is not hypnotized. Miss Bates did not, you think, hypnotize him?" The doctor threw back his head and laughed. "Hypnotized?" he cried. "You don't have to hypnotize that boy. No; Miss Bates did not hypnotize him. He was not hypnotized, unless it was by the devil himself. That's all the hypnotizing any boy is entitled to. Do you want to know the bitter truth? He's playing 'possum."

"Lem is--"

"To keep out of jail," the young doctor laughed; and then Gay and Lorna laughed too.

After dinner Henrietta went up to see Lem, Lorna going with her. They stood beside the bed and looked at him. His color was quite normal now and his freckles had gone back where they belonged.





**HENRIETTA GLANCED AT HER QUICKLY, AS IF
SUSPECTING SOMETHING**

"Can he hear us?" Lorna asked.

Henrietta glanced at her quickly, as if suspecting something, but Lorna's face was innocent enough.

"Not directly, I think," Henrietta said, "but it is better not to say anything we don't want him to remember. It might be heard by his subconscious mind and held there. Is that what you mean?"

"I suppose so," said Lorna. "I was just thinking that he must be so tender-hearted! He did not seem to feel the blow until Miss Susan said she would have no more to do with him. It was then he fainted."

Henrietta looked at Lem. Not an eyelash moved, but she knew he heard all they were saying.

"Yes, you are right," she said. "He is a dear boy. And Miss Sue loves him; I know she loves him very dearly. Of

course it was a great shock to her, having a policeman come to the house, and she said things she did not mean. You saw how worried she was, just now. She does love him."

The words were meant for Lem's ears. So were Lorna's words when she answered.

"And you don't think he will be sent to jail, do you?" she asked.

"Indeed not!" said Henrietta. "Miss Sue will never allow that. She loves Lem too well. Look! He looks as if he was about to come out of his trance, Lorna! Can't you see a better color in his face? Listen, Lorna; run down and get some flowers. It will be brighter here if he sees flowers when he wakens."

Henrietta wanted to get rid of Lorna. She knew how the healthy boy's appetite must be raging as the pleasant odors of food came up from the floor below. When Lorna was gone, Henrietta closed the door and shot the bolt. She went back to the bed and bent over Lem. "Lem!" she called. "Lem, wake up!"

The boy did not stir. He lay as rigid as before. She took one of his warm, tanned hands and rubbed it.

"Lem!" she called again. "Wake up, Lem!" The boy opened his eyes. For a moment he stared at the ceiling and then sat upright with the brisk liveliness of a healthy boy.

"Hello!" he said. "I been asleep, I guess."

"Yes, you had a good nap," Henrietta said.

"Do you remember what happened just before you went to sleep?"

He pretended to be puzzled for a moment. Then memory seemed to return gradually. "That old Schulig came for me," he said. "Yes, but he's not going to bother you. We're not going to let him. You did n't mean anything wicked and you shan't be pestered. Lorna was here a minute ago. She has gone down to get you some flowers. She likes you. So does Gay."

"They're bully, ain't they?" said Lem.

"I think your Aunt Sue likes you too, Lem," Henrietta said, but the boy's eyes grew sulky at once.

"No, she don't," he declared. "She hates me."

"I think she likes you. Perhaps she does not know it herself yet, Lem, but I think she does like you, in her heart."

"No, she hates me. An' I hate her. I'd rather be in jail than in her house. She's a--" Henrietta leaned a little forward.

"No, she likes you. And you like her. I know you do, Lem. You are very fond of her. She has a good heart and would love to be kind to you. And she will be if she thinks you like her."

Lorna came back with an armful of flowers and a vase to hold them. She smiled at Lem.

"That is lovely!" Henrietta said. "Put them where Lem can see them. Come now, we must go down. We will bring you some dinner, Lem." Miss Susan, when she learned the boy was himself again, assumed once more her attitude of dislike.

"Well, how is he?" she asked, as if even asking that was more than she wanted to do.

"Quite himself again, I think," said Henrietta. "Lorna took up some flowers."

"What for?"

"I've heard it said that everything should be as bright and cheerful and pleasant as possible when any one comes out of one of these fits," said Henrietta. "A child, especially. It is as if one was dead, you know, and coming back into the world again. It ought to be, just at first at least, a nice world. It ought to seem to be a world worth coming back into. If not--"

"What?" asked Susan.

Henrietta shrugged her shoulders "You could n't blame them much for going right back into dead-land again, could you? And staying there? I suppose they do, sometimes."

"Humph!" exclaimed Susan, but she mentally resolved that, whatever she felt about Lem, no one should ever say she had been the cause of his death. "I don't say I would n't be glad to have him around," she said grudgingly. "Time and again I've told his father I would admire to have Lem here. But a liar and a thief and a young rowdy I can't abide and I won't have."

"Lem is not a liar," said Henrietta quietly. "He tells the truth. Wasn't that the trouble, Susan? You questioned him and he told the truth and it made you angry. Now I never make that mistake," she continued gayly. "I'm quite a reprobate. I only tell the truth when it pleases everybody, and if something else pleases better I tell something else."

Lorna gasped mentally at this surprising frankness. Later in the day she tried to explain to Gay the strange feeling that took possession of her at that moment. Of all places in the world the town of Riverbank was the least romantic, and of all houses in Riverbank Miss Susan's house was--or had been--the least likely to harbor mystery. It was a large, broad, simple house, with large windows and large, sunny rooms. There was nothing dank or dark or dismal about it. It was as open and unromantic as a new tent in the middle of a sunny field, with the flaps tied back, and suddenly this

matter-of-fact, wide-open, every-day boarding-house began to affect Lorna with a sense of mystery and hidden secrets and things shielded from view. She told Gay it gave her a creepy feeling, like finding one's self suddenly and unexpectedly on the edge of a deep, dark pit.

Mystery is usually linked with strange creatures who come out of dark rooms, garbed in strange gowns, to steal out at night, and who say mysterious things. Lorna had not thought of mystery in connection with a person so visible as Henrietta, who wore shirt-waists that cost two dollars at Graydon's and who darned her stockings on the front porch in full daylight. There was so much Henrietta, and all of it so healthy and seemingly wholesome, that mystery seemed the very thing that would avoid her, as moss avoids a sun-drenched wall.

There was nothing apparently mysterious about Henrietta when, after school that afternoon, she walked to Main Street in company with two other teachers, talking of the nearing end of the school year. She left them at the corner and went to Johnnie Alberson's.

A bevy of high-school girls, their books under their arms or deposited at the feet of their high stools, were glorying in ice-cream sodas at the fountain just inside the door.

"Hello, Freeman," Henrietta greeted the white-jacketed youth. "Is Mr. Alberson in?"

"Ho! Johnnie!" Freeman called, and Alberson came from behind the prescription case. "Miss Bates wants to see you," Freeman said.

Alberson came forward, turning down his cuffs. He was behind the counter, thinking only that she wished to be waited on. Freeman turned his back, loading a glass with the ingredients of the celebrated "Papsy Shake" that was the fountain's leading concoction that season.

"T can I do for you, Miss Bates?" Alberson asked.

Johnnie Alberson was a bachelor, plump, cheerful, and as worldly-wise as any man in Riverbank. Henrietta knew about him. It was in the back of Johnnie's store that the poker games were played. It was said, too, that it was by no means necessary for young fellows to be seen in a common saloon while Johnnie ran a drug store, and more than one "girl scandal" was said to have had its growth through meetings at Johnnie's.

"I want to see you about Freeman," Henrietta said in a low tone. "He's taken some of your money, has n't he?"

Alberson's professional smile departed.

"I would n't say any one had taken any of my money," he answered. "What do you think you know about it?"

"He told me."

Alberson glanced at Freeman Todder as if he meant to call him, but changed his mind.

"Come in the back room," he said, and led the way.

There were two ways into Alberson's back room, one at either end of the prescription case. One was the doorway by which Johnnie bustled back and forth when he came out to wait on a customer or hurried back to compound a prescription. The other was less frank. It was at the other end of the prescription case. Here was placed the long showcase containing toilet articles--the face powders, combs, brushes, perfumes--but standing on the floor, close to the case, was a large easel bearing a six-foot advertisement in gay colors. To see the articles beyond this it was necessary to go behind it. The most innocent of customers might do that, wishing to see the articles in the case, or a silly or foolhardy girl might seem to be looking in the case and disappear behind the easel, and thence slip through the opening into the region behind Johnnie's prescription case and into the famous back room. That was one reason you might think you saw some young woman enter Alberson's drug store and yet not find her there if you entered. It was said that Johnnie's back room was about the only place in Riverbank where a girl could smoke a cigarette in safety, or--rumor said--find a glass of sherry wine. Alberson led Henrietta to the back room by the open path.

"You said Freeman told you something," he said when they were there. "What do you think he told you?"

They were standing. Henrietta placed her purse on the stained table.

"May I sit down?" she asked. "I wish you would sit down too. I want to tell you something I have never breathed before."

Alberson took a seat opposite her and she looked him steadily in the face.

"Freeman told me he had stolen two hundred dollars from you and that he could not pay it, and that if he did not you would make trouble for him. Is that so?"

"It might be."

"No, I must know! He told me, but I cannot always trust him. Did he take it?"

"Just what would happen if I said he did?" Alberson asked.

"I know him rather well," Henrietta said. "We both board at Miss Redding's. I have helped him before."

"You mean you would pay what he stole, if he stole it?" Johnnie asked.

"Yes. That is what I mean."

"He stole it," said Alberson. "He took it out of the till. Two hundred and eight dollars. He confessed when I put it up to him hard. And I'll get it back or he'll go to Anamosa, that's absolute."

"Then I 'll repay you," Henrietta said quietly. "I thought perhaps he was lying to me. I'll pay you a little this month and the rest regularly when school begins again in the fall."

The pleasant look that had come back to Johnnie's face at the mention of repayment fled again. In money matters he was notoriously close; his carefulness in the matter of pennies was a joke that he accepted good-naturedly, since it permitted him the more easily to protect himself. No one could borrow money from Johnnie Albersori, and no one asked him to lend, although "Lend me a couple of cart-wheels" was the phrase most often spoken by the young fellows who made the Alberson store a loafing place.

"That won't do," he said. "How do I know? Maybe you'll pay and maybe you'll get tired of paying. And before fall he may be in China. No, I'm going to have the money or put him through."

"I thought perhaps you would say that," said Henrietta. "You would naturally. You think I am merely one of Freeman's friends. I am his mother, Mr. Alberson. I'm Freeman's mother." And thus another lie was uttered by Henrietta Bates.



CHAPTER IX

Johnnie Alberson looked at Henrietta without the least questioning of her statement that she was Freeman Todder's mother.

"That's different, Mrs--" he hesitated; "Mrs. Todder," he said finally. "Or is it Mrs. Bates?"

"No, not Todder," said Henrietta. "Nor Bates either. I am Mrs. William Vane. My husband is in the West. He is a worthless, drunken wreck. You can understand why I took the name of Bates, with a son like Freeman, always an expense, and a husband like Mr. Vane, and the position of teacher here open only to spinsters. It was necessity, not choice."

There was no weak appeal in Henrietta's voice, nor in her manner, nor were there tears or tremulousness. She looked directly into Alberson's eyes and spoke with what seemed to be absolute frankness.

"That's different," Alberson repeated. "I can see why you want to save Freeman, that being so. And I'm sorry for you; I'll say that, Mrs. Vane. A son like yours--well, he's not much good. Now, about this payment you want to make?" Henrietta told him what she would like to do. She would, of course, bring him the money as often as she could.

"I may be able to get a little out of Freeman's father," she prevaricated. "When he has work and is not spending all for drink, he sends me a little now and then. I'll write to him. He may try to do something now--when my need is so great."

When she arose she gave Alberson her hand, and held his a moment, warmly pressing it, in thanks.

"I am so grateful," she said. "It is such a load off my mind. You cannot know how I have worried. I know you'll say nothing about what I have told you."

"I'm a wise old owl," said Johnnie, and only then dropped her hand. "I know secrets and still more secrets."

When Henrietta went out to the front of the store Alberson took a small, round mirror from his pocket and viewed his face in it. He was always a little vain.

"One damn fine woman," he said, aloud, "and she must have married mighty young. Fine, that's what she is!"

Henrietta stopped to speak to Freeman.

"I fixed it," she said hastily. "He will wait and let me pay him as I can. I told him you were my son, Freeman. Please don't say much if he quizzes you."

"I won't," Freeman said, "but you might just let me know who my father was and where the dear old chap died. A son ought to know that."

"Don't be funny; I can't bear it," Henrietta begged. "I told him your father was Billy Vane. He is a drunken brute and he is not dead. He is in Colorado."

Freeman gave her the first admiring glance he had bestowed on her for many days.

"Et, you'll do," he said. "I'm almost proud to be a son of such a mother. You sure are a fixer."

"Please, don't be funny," she begged again. "It is not ended yet. I still have the money to pay. I don't suppose I can expect you to help? Even a little, Freeman?"

"Not a bit, mother dear," he said and turned to wait on two girls who had just entered.

At the boarding-house Henrietta learned that Lem was still sleeping and that Judge Bruce had postponed the trial of Saint Harvey of Riverbank and had sent him to the lock-up to await Lem's recovery. Henrietta ran up to see how Lem was faring, stopped in her own room to freshen herself, and then hurried down. Lorna had not reached the house yet, but Gay had come over. Henrietta embraced her gayly.

"You dear!" she said. "I just want you. I'm going over to see Judge Bruce about Lem and I want you to go with me. It will be like taking him a rose moist with dew. I can't imagine how you ever manage to come from a day of teaching so bright and beaming."

Gay did not tell her that she had stopped at Alberson's for a soda and that Freeman had been, for him, unusually nice and politely lover-like.

"And how is Miss Susan?" Gay asked. "About Lem, I mean. How does she feel toward him?"

"Still sour," Henrietta said. "That's one trouble with such *good* good women. They are hard on mortals. Come."

They went across the street and down past Gay's home to the Bruce house. The old justice of the peace had not reached home yet, but he was expected, his wife said, and Carter Bruce came out on the porch.

"Lo, Gay; 'lo, Miss Henrietta," he greeted them. "How's things?"

"Fine," Henrietta answered for them both. "And, oh, Bruce! You're a lawyer, you can tell us what to do. About Lem, Miss Redding's nephew--you know about him?"

"Mostly. I was in dad's court when he held old Harve."

"Well, then--" said Henrietta and hesitated momentarily. "Listen, Bruce, I know something about it. May I tell you? I can tell a lawyer, in confidence, can't I?"

"You can tell this lawyer in confidence," said Bruce. "I'll take Lem's case if you want me to--free of charge--if that is it."

"Then--you don't mind if I whisper to him, Gay?"

"Don't mind me," said Gay, laughing. Henrietta drew Carter Bruce to the far end of the porch.

"I don't know anything about Lem," she said hurriedly. "Nothing special. I just wanted to speak to you about Gay. Freeman Todder is making love to her; you know that. And I know it is not right. He is not to be trusted, Carter. You like Gay, don't you? You'll do something to save her, won't you?"

"What can I do?" he asked. "She likes him best. She don't care a hang for me."

"She does! Make love to her, Carter," urged Henrietta. "Make her love you; be--be strenuous about it; make strong love to her. She's the age when she craves it, and I know she will listen to you. You must; I know Freeman so well! I know he is bad for her, utterly bad." Carter was red with embarrassment.

"I'm asking you because I think she's getting to like him," Henrietta added.

"Then I'm out of it--absolutely," Carter said. "I won't butt in. No, thanks. I know when I'm not wanted."

Henrietta put her hand on the young man's shoulder and for a moment he thought she meant to shake him, as a naughty child is shaken, but she relaxed her grip somewhat.

"No," she said, "you do not know when you are not wanted. You only know that you feel resentful. And why? Because the fruit on the bough did not fall into the mouth you had opened to receive it. Because, when another's hand stretches out to pluck it, the fruit did not leap eagerly between your teeth. You are angry. That's pure conceitedness. And all I ask you to do is to put out your hand. Is n't your hand as brave as Freeman's hand?"

She waited a moment to hear what he might say. What he might say made a vast difference to Henrietta. On all sides of her, catastrophes were towering, ready to crush her. You must remember she was a woman of forty now and her life had been hard--cruelly hard--because of her own acts and doings, and that here in Riverbank she had found friends and hoped to find long, peaceful, happy years. Instead she was in the midst of a tumult of troubles and dangers, with lies that threatened to return and destroy her and with Freeman's reckless wickedness an even more imminent menace. But still she meant to fight, and Freeman's attempt to win Gay, which if successful meant ruin for all, was a thing she must battle against first of all. Carter Bruce was her only weapon.

"Don't look at me like that," was what he said finally.

Henrietta drew a deep breath.

"Once more; just let me speak once more, Carter," she pleaded. "You don't know Gay as well as I do. I know her so well that I know why she is yielding--in danger of yielding to Freeman--when you are in every way to be preferred. He makes love to her. He hurries her and drives her from defense to defense. She loves Love's attacks, as all women do, but she more than most. You must not expect to win by a siege when she is being won by another's bold charge. You can win if you charge, too, Carter."

"She likes him best. I'm out of it," he said.

Henrietta let her hand drop from his shoulder. She looked around. Gay was still at the far end of the porch, keeping studiously aloof. When Henrietta looked at Carter Bruce again, the light of frank truthfulness that always shone in her eyes when she was lying was in her eyes.

"I hoped I would not have to tell you," she said, "but now I must. Even if you do not love Gay you must help her. You must protect her from Freeman. Carter, will you keep what I say sacredly confidential?"

"Of course."

"Freeman has a wife. He is married and his wife is living."

"The devil you say!" Bruce exclaimed. "How do you know that?"

Gay, from her end of the porch, spoke.

"I can hear!" she warned. "I heard what Carter said."

Henrietta lowered her voice.

"I know his wife. She is an old friend of mine," she said. "Her name is Mary Vane. That is her name now, since she married Freeman." Bruce was sufficiently interested now.

"Then his name is not Todder?" he asked.

"No," said Henrietta. "It is Vane--William Vane. There are reasons why he cannot use it."

"That's rotten," Carter Bruce declared. "I knew there was something wrong about him, hanging around Riverbank

when he don't earn enough at Alberson's to pay his laundry. Where is this wife of his? Why does he stay here? He must know you know about him."

"He does, Carter," Henrietta said. "He is getting money out of me. That's how he lives. His wife is in Colorado."

"Money? From you?" said Carter with momentary suspicion. "What hold has he on you?" Henrietta was looking straight into his eyes. "His wife is my daughter," she prevaricated glibly. "Tubercular. And--don't you see?--with my husband there in Colorado, too, and my poor wage from the school all we have to live upon, that if I say anything we must all starve. They would send me away, Carter. 'No married women need apply.'"

"Ah!" said Carter sympathetically.

"So you will do what you can for Gay--for my sake, even if not for your own?"

"Yes."

They walked to Gay's end of the porch.

"He's going to help us, Gay," Henrietta cried. "He will do all he can for Lem."

"Carter! You're so good!" Gay cried and clasped his hand for a moment in thanks.'

"That's all right," he said. "I'll do all I can. It is not much of a case--not a very serious case--but if I were you and Henrietta I would try my smiles on father first. He likes you both. You have a pull with dad."

They did not have long to wait, for old Judge Bruce came slowly up the shaded street, his coat over his arm. Henrietta was upon him before he had fairly entered his yard, her arm through his, coaxing him to be a dear, sweet man and be easy with Lem.

"Well, I had a mind that way myself," said the justice teasingly, "until this here female lobby come a huggin' and kissin' me and tryin' to corrupt the bench. Now I guess I'll have to give the young reprobates a hundred years in jail, all three of 'em, and old Harvey about two hundred on bread and water at hard labor. I guess so."

"Now, Father Bruce!" exclaimed Gay. "You could n't be so mean?"

The old man looked up at her slyly and pulled at his white beard.

"I bet you been doin' some more crooked business, engagin' the judiciary's son to corrupt the judge in hopes it will sway justice from the straight path, ain't you?" he cackled. "Dead wrong, I call it. Improper to beat the band. Reg'lar confession of guilt."

He dropped into a porch chair and wiped his face.

"Never knew it so hot this time of the year. Big storm brewing, I shouldn't wonder," he said seriously. "About your Lem, now. There ain't goin' to be no trial. Nor for that big, fat fool father of his, neither. Charges has been withdrawn and case wiped from the docket. They've got strong friends."

"That's not just regular, is it, father?" Carter asked, laughing.

"What in tunket do I care if it is regular or not?" said Bruce. "I run my justice court to suit Judge Bruce. Told 'em I would when they come pesterin' me to take another term. I run on the platform, 'Old Judge Bruce will lay down the law the way he dumb pleases,' and that's how I was elected."

He filled his pipe and lighted it.

"About your Lem boy," he said, "there ain't goin' to be no trouble. To my notion we ain't got a better citizen in town than Sam Cantor, if he is a Jew. He sells good clothes and if they ain't satisfactory he hands you your money back, and no fussin'. Now, this here old pair of pants I got on--well, no matter. He comes up to my justice shop this mornin' and he handed me one of the best seegars I ever stuck in my face. 'Judge,' he says, 'how are them pants wearin'?' 'All right, Sam,' I says. 'Don't look so to me,' he says; 'looks to me like you ain't gettin' good wear out of 'em. You better come around tomorrow and let me fit you to a new pair, or I won't lay easy in my grave.' 'Let me see!' I says, 'a new pair of pants is worth about six dollars, Sam. Who's hopin' to get let off from about a twenty-dollar fine?' That's how I talk to Sam Cantor!"

He cackled again gleefully.

"But I thought it was Moses Shuder brought the charges against Harve Redding and the boys," said Carter Bruce. "Is n't Shuder a protege of Cantor's?"

"That's it," said Bruce. "That's the nub of it, right there. 'Judge,' Sam says, 'I'll lay my cards right on the table. You know my friend Shuder and the rest of the long beards ain't any too popular around here yet, and you know it was me that started the move to raise money to fetch them from Russia or Poland or wherever it was they was. If old Dod-Baste and them three boys gets jailed or anything, them long beards is going to be more unpopular than ever. I've got to look out for Our People,' he says. 'I can't have 'em hated. I've had a talk with Mose Shuder and he's ready to lay down on his back and stick his legs in the air and yell, "Excuse me," if you'll just wipe the slate clean.' So I give it a wipe, and that's ended. And to-morrow mornin' I git a new pair of pants."

"What would you have done to them if Mr. Cantor had not interceded, Judge Bruce?" asked Gay.

The old man cackled until he began to cough.

"That's the joke of it, young woman," he said gleefully. "I was goin' to turn 'em all loose anyhow. Maybe I might have fined Mose Shuder two dollars for disturbin' a justice of the peace; it makes me so dumb mad to have all these fool fusses fetched up before me. Why, land's goodness! If I had been sentenced six months every time I stole junk when I was a boy I'd be in jail yet!"

"But Mr. Redding received the stolen junk, did n't he?" Gay asked teasingly.

"T wa'n't my junk, was it?" asked Judge Bruce. "And he hit Moses Shuder," said Henrietta.

"Well, a man has got to hit somebody once in a while, ain't he?" asked the justice.

"You're a dear, anyway," said Henrietta, "and I'm going right over and tell Lem. You need n't hurry, Gay. Stay and keep the judge corrupted."

Henrietta hastened to the kitchen, where Miss Susan was sure to be found at this time of day.

"Lem is not guilty," she cried. "He's not even to be tried. Nor your brother either."

But Miss Susan did not show the delight Henrietta had hoped to see. She wiped her hands on the roller towel and turned to Henrietta a somber face.

"I want to talk to you, Miss Bates," she said. "I've been waitin' all day to. I don't, mind you, think no evil, but I guess you'll have to find a boardin'-place elsewhere. A boarding-house-keeper that tries to run a nice home, like I do, has to be careful, even if it does mean she has to be harsh sometimes."

"But what have I done?" asked Henrietta, aghast.

"Nothing you'd blame yourself for, I dare say," said Miss Susan, "nor do I think evil, but there's things that can't be allowed to happen in a boarding-house if talk ain't to be started. Last night when I had to come downstairs late to tend to my set bread, Mr. Todder was in your room. I heard you two talkin'. Such things can't happen in my house. You'll have to go, and he'll have to go."

Henrietta looked at Susan's mouth, which was firm with resolution. For a moment her heart sank, but she drew a deep breath.

"I knew it! I knew this was sure to happen some day," she said. "I ought to have told you long ago, Miss Susan, but I did not dare. I was afraid. But now I must tell you--Freeman Todder is my husband."

"For mercy's sake!" cried Miss Susan, surprised out of her attitude of unfriendliness. "Then what was all this howdy-do about your being engaged to that William Vane man?" Henrietta put her arm coaxingly around Miss Susan's waist.

"I'm a bad girl," she said. "You'll say I am, and I am. I've been deceitful; can't you see why, Miss Sue? Could I have come to Riverbank as a school teacher if it had been known Freeman was my husband?"

"Humph!" said Miss Redding dryly. "Seems to me you've been mighty free with your deceit while you was about it. And seems to me your William Vane sends you plenty of letters."

"I made them up," said Henrietta contritely. "You got some," said Susan. "I took them from the postman myself. What right had he to be writing to you if you was married?"

"What right?" asked Henrietta. She did not mean to lie to Miss Susan any more than was necessary, but the further lie came out unbidden. "What right? Every right because--you see--William Vane is my father!"

Miss Susan looked into Henrietta's frank eyes and was satisfied.

"Well," she said grudgingly, "I'm glad you told me the truth finally. Lyin' never gets anybody anywhere."

In her heart of hearts Henrietta hoped Miss Susan was right, but she was beginning to doubt it. Lying seemed to be getting her into a most difficult web of contradictions.



CHAPTER X

When Henrietta Bates told Miss Susan that Freeman Todder was her husband, she told the truth, with the sole exception that her name was not Henrietta Bates nor his Freeman Todder, but all her other stories regarding Freeman and the mythical Billy Vane were lies. Henrietta was not a wicked woman; she was the kindest-hearted woman that ever lived; always ready and eager to do a kindness and full of pity for those who, like Lem, seemed to be in trouble.

The trouble with Henrietta, to use that name as the most convenient, was that she was romantic. She was one of those women--and there are men like her--who live a few inches above the tops of their own heads so that their words have to jump above solid facts in order to give satisfaction to their imaginations.

In Riverbank there is a phrase, used when small boys like Lem take a huge helping of food and fail to consume it, to the effect that their eyes are bigger than their stomachs. Henrietta's desire for romance was bigger than her facts. She was a romantic liar, filling in the gap between what was true and what she wished was true with details that were not true. In other words, Henrietta was a born romancer.

There are many such, and it is remarkable how many escape discovery and humiliation. It is always a little regrettable when one of the pleasanter of the kind *is* discovered and humiliated. There are women--and men--who live their entire lives in a golden haze of untruths, who do no one any great harm and who get immense momentary pleasure (and whole ecstasies of pleasant pain of conscience) out of their romantic prevarications.

Most often it is no one's particular business to grasp one of these lies and by unpleasant cross-questioning and investigating prove the romancer a liar. The one who does such cross-questioning is usually a most disagreeable person--the sort of nosey, rudely inquisitive person none of us likes.

I have given a great deal of thought to lies, having been a well-known liar myself before I reformed, and being an admirer of the late Mark Twain, who was a connoisseur in this field, I have classified human beings in four rough groups:

1. Those, like Miss Susan Redding, who sin not and tell no lies.
2. Those, like Lem, who sin and tell the truth about it, because they cannot tell a lie.
3. Those, like Henrietta, who lie romantically and without evil intent, but who are so weakened by it that, although they would not lie to do intentional harm, do come in time, as Henrietta had come, to lie in self-protection or to protect another.
4. Those who, like Freeman Todder, will lie to do another harm or to win the liar personal advantage, or for any other reason whatever.

Lem, being a boy, was, in my opinion, more or less of a "freak" as the botanists would say. The young are, and should be up to a certain age, unethical. This has the advantage that we can take them when they are innocent of ethics and drill into them the variety of ethics we want them to have. The undrilled youngster, faced with trouble, will tell a fib or the truth quite indifferently, as seems desirable at the moment.

Of course, we begin the drilling at an extremely early age, in these days, and a boy of five has often learned that it is nobler to be spanked for stealing the pie than for lying about it. But he has to be taught, and Lem had not been taught. There had been nothing in his early lack of training to teach him that lying was wrong. He had never been spanked for lying, or shut in a closet for lying, or even scolded or wept over for lying. He had been born with the ability to lie left out of him, or so weak that it shriveled up and blew away before he learned to talk. In the matter of being unable to tell a lie Lem was not to blame; he was born that way.

Neither should we be inclined to blame Henrietta too severely if she romanced frequently, with eyes that looked frankly into other eyes while she was telling whoppers. Henrietta was a mature woman, healthy and attractive, but her ethical development had been arrested when she was about five years old, while her romantic imagination had continued to grow. Henrietta was, in this one respect, abnormal.

We all know, or have known, girls or boys of seven to sixteen years who tell awful lies. There are others who pick up things that don't belong to them; who slip upstairs in a neighbor's house when unwatched and open dresser drawers; otherwise nice girls and boys who just can't help doing such things. Nearly all have frank, honest eyes. They look you in the eyes with saintly innocence and say they did not do it. They are cases of arrested ethical development and cannot help doing what they do. They are abnormal.

Friends and neighbors often say, "Etta Bates is such a liar! Dear, dear! Mrs. Bates ought to take a strap to her. I'd wale that child within an inch of her life, but I'd cure her!" Beating such a child does no good, nor would locking it in prison cure it. The trouble is deeper.

Henrietta had been a handsome girl. At twelve her physical development was that of a young woman of eighteen. She was enthusiastic, noisy, healthy, and untruthful. She liked to romp, especially with boys. She never knew her

lessons, because she did not waste time on them, but she was at the head of all when it came to games. When her little friends were still dressing dolls Henrietta had developed the "he said" habit. Judged by Henrietta's tales all the boys were mad over her and thought of nothing else.

A year or so later Henrietta began to be caught in lies. She told her child companions she had gone to dances, gallantly escorted, when she had been safe in bed all the while. Mothers began to say, "I would n't play with Henrietta any more than necessary."

Henrietta told lies about any subject that at the moment promised to glitter more brilliantly as a lie than as a truth. She said her mother was making her a blue silk dress with red bead embroidery in a sort of Greek design, and the skirt only shoe-top length, when her mother was making her no dress at all. She said her mother was going to take her to New York in the fall, so she could go to a private school where Mr. Vanderbilt's daughters went, and that she was going to room with Mr. Vanderbilt's daughter, when her mother in her wildest dreams had never thought of any such thing. Things like these Henrietta told not only to children, but to grown-ups. She told the minister that her mother had told her to ask him what college she ought to attend if she was going to be a missionary. All this was unpremeditated. She had happened to be passing the minister's house, so she just dropped in and began lying in her frank-eyed, innocent way. The minister believed her until he spoke to her mother. Then there were tears and he agreed to do what he could to reform Henrietta. The result was that she joined the church and went on lying. She was then fourteen.

More frequently her lies had to do with love affairs. She had no love affairs, but she invented them. If, returning from school, a boy walked a block or two with her, she filled every one's ears with tales of his attentions. It was about that time she began buying herself presents--cheap beads, plated pins and bracelets--which she said the boys had given her, and began, also, writing herself "notes" and letters, which she read to the girls, saying the boys had written them.

All the while, except when her romancing made trouble and led to hot flashes of resentment, every one liked Henrietta. She was kind to every one, and polite, and helpful in many small ways. Being found out in her prevarications did not seem to worry her long; it frightened her stunningly at times, making her gasp, but the fright did not last. In a few moments it was all over. The whippings her mother gave her, until she was too big to be whipped, hardly annoyed her. She was fearless physically; she never admitted that anything hurt her.

Her mother, a worried little woman, suffered most. The father was a traveling salesman and not often home, and Mrs. Bates kept from him as much of Henrietta's misdoing as she could, killing herself eventually, crushing herself under the weight of the burden. She would have worried herself away earlier than she did had the Bates family not moved as often as it did. As Henrietta reached high-school age, and later, the Bates family was moving continually, Mr. Bates changing from one job to another and each time taking his family to his new headquarters. Each time Mrs. Bates tried to obscure herself and Henrietta, but never with much success because Henrietta did not wish to be obscured.

One particularly unfortunate lie got Henrietta expelled from a high school she was attending and she was sent to a private school. It was a strict school, and during her entire stay there she met no young men, but her letters to her friends and to her mother were filled with romantic incidents. It was then her famous Billy Vane first appeared in her lies.

Lying--whole-souled, brazen lying--has a strange, half-hypnotic effect on many hearers who are by nature truthful and kind-hearted, as quite a few human beings are. When a man looks me full in the eyes and lies to me, I have a feeling of shame. I want to lower my eyes and not look straight into his. I say to myself, "He is lying, and I know he is lying, and I am ashamed to look him in the eyes; he will see in my eyes that I know he is lying." Then I say to myself, "But if I look down he will know I am looking down because I know he is lying." So I continue to look him straight in the eyes, saying to myself, "I know you are lying, but I will not let you know I know it." Then I say to myself, "It does not matter if you *are* lying as long as I know you are lying"; and presently I am sorry for him, as a mother is sorry for a cripple child, and I pity him, and pity is akin to love. Some whole-souled, brazen, cheerful liars are among the best-loved men in the world. We know we are being lied to, but we are also being charmed, as the innocent bird is charmed by the serpent.

Although Henrietta never understood it, the ease with which she made herself believed was one reason why she continued to be such a liar. Her eyes compelled belief. No one ever doubted her lies at the moment they were being told. When her eyes looked straight into the hearer's eyes there could be no doubting; that sometimes came later when the self-hypnotism was dissipated. Had Henrietta--especially when she grew older and was a woman--met doubt or distrust when she told her fanciful tales, she might have faltered, thought, and stopped. She might have been cured.

After her mother's death Henrietta taught school. That she taught in a town that had not known her was helpful, undoubtedly. What lies she told there about her romances in other places were readily enough believed. She was a satisfactory, commanding teacher, having little trouble with her students, and a fine, clean figure always, in her black shirt, white shirt-waist, and a peculiarly clean neatness. She had a gesture of smoothing her trim waist downward toward her belt with the edges of her hands that was in itself a certificate of clean spinsterhood.

Her misfortune came suddenly and with catastrophic unexpectedness. She had worked her way upward until she was teaching mathematics (higher algebra, to be exact) in the high school of a southern Illinois town. With the teachers of a near-by river town she had kept in close correspondence and for them she had built a romance of lies, telling of a lover who was impetuous, young, handsome, and brilliant--"too young for poor me," Henrietta had written, and "his father

objects, and if there is a match it will have to be a run-away one. His name"--she had hesitated, fearing to use "Billy Vane" lest she might have used it before--"is Freeman Todder," she had written, jotting down that of the "A Class" boy who had remained in the classroom while she was writing the letter. Followed much more, romantically untruthful, but interesting and intended to be so. The next week two of her teacher friends to whom she had written, wrote her they meant to make her a visit; they were wild to meet Freeman Todder; they wrote.

Henrietta had one of her sudden panics. She was sitting at her desk in the schoolroom when she read the letter and she looked toward Freeman Todder. The unlucky youth was passing a note across the aisle.

"Freeman, come here!" Henrietta commanded, and he arose and walked to her desk. He was as tall then as he was ever to become. He was one of those boys who think they are already men, and who have begun to accumulate the vices of bad men, considering the evidences of maturity. He was already one of the town dandies.

"What's the matter now?" he asked when he stood at her desk.

"You know what is the matter," she said. "This cannot go on, Freeman. I want to talk to you. Remain after school."

He went back to his seat with swaggering bravado, and made especial efforts to break more of the few slight rules Henrietta had imposed on the scholars. He hoped she would notice and expel him. He hated school and wanted to be free to lead a man's life.

"It will be all the better for him," Henrietta told herself, excusing herself, during the short hours of courtship to which she subjected him before they "eloped."

"I can make something out of him and if I do not he will go to ruin. He is headed that way and there is no one to stop him if I do not."

She convinced herself that this was so. As for Freeman, in his egotism he imagined he was doing the courting. He imagined it was he proposed the elopement. He felt he was a clever, sophisticated man of the world to be able to annex the love of this rather magnificent woman, to make her throw her arms around him and weep wildly on his shoulder.

He strutted considerably among the other cheap dandies of the town for a few days, and then they eloped, if abducting a silly youth can be called eloping, and were married. It made a great row in the town, of course, and Freeman and Henrietta did not dare to return.

The triumph of feeling that her friends would find all she had said in her letters was the truth did not last long. She tried to coax Freeman to go to work, so that they might live the life of a respectable married couple, but Todder was of little account and was made less so by a growing feeling that somehow Henrietta had played a trick on him, and by his early discovery that she was a liar. What the trick was he did not bother to make sure, but he felt that it was her fault that they were married and that it was her business now to take care of him.

Henrietta was contrite of heart beyond all question. She felt that she had done Freeman a vast and irreparable wrong, and, as he became more and more worthless, she blamed herself and not him. Whatever he was and however he acted it was her duty to bear with him and protect him.

The years had been miserable ones. The pair had reached some low depths--penniless days--but at last Henrietta had won her way into the Riverbank schools under her assumed name of Henrietta Bates, posing as an unmarried woman.

This was the Henrietta who left Miss Susan pacified and went up to see Lem. She carried a bag of the largest, yellowest oranges she had been able to buy. She was in most respects the kindest and most thoughtful of women. She was liked and respected by all. She had seemed, a few days earlier, the safest and happiest of women. Now her whole world seemed about to topple upon her from all sides, crushing her in a chaos of disgrace and infamy.



CHAPTER XI

When Henrietta entered Lem's room the boy lay as she had left him, and he was in a deep, healthy sleep, beads of perspiration on his forehead, for his room was under a slanting roof that received the full strength of the afternoon sun. Henrietta stood looking at him a moment and then spoke to him. He opened his eyes, saw her, and sat up.

"Gee!" he said, "I guess I had a long sleep, didn't I?"

"A fine one. Look what I've brought you. You like oranges, don't you?"

"You bet I do. How long was I asleep?"

"Hours and hours."

She seated herself on the bedside and began peeling an orange. Lem stretched. His eye caught the great vaseful of syringas.

"Those are the flowers Lorna brought," Henrietta said. "She thought you would like them."

"They're nice," Lem said.

Henrietta divided the orange into sections.

"Open your mouth," she said, and popped a juicy section into Lem's mouth. He made no effort to get up. He was contented where he was, and opened his mouth from time to time, as a baby does when being fed.

"I bet Aunt Sue is sore on me," he said presently. "I don't care. She did n't have to take me if she did n't want to. She made pop leave me. I'd rather stay with pop an' help him be a saint, anyway. I guess I 'll go back, anyway, when we get out of jail. How long are pop an' me goin' to be in jail?"

"You're not going to be in jail, either of you," said Henrietta. "Judge Bruce fixed it all up."

"I bet Aunt Sue's sorry, ain't she?" asked Lem.

"Lem," Henrietta said, "you must not think badly of your Aunt Sue. She is a good woman and she means to be kind. She likes you--"

"Rats!" said Lem. "She likes me like snakes. She hates me, that's what she does. I'll get even with *her*, all right."

Lorna stood in the doorway.

"How's Lem?" she asked.

"Fine," said Henrietta, and Lorna came and sat on the other edge of the bed.

"And who is this you're going to get even with, Lem?" Lorna asked.

"That old Aunt Sue," Lem said. "I 'll do it, too. She told that old Schulig to take me to jail, an' I had n't done nothin' but hook a chunk o' lead. From old Shuder. He's only a Jew, anyway. He's a Russian Jew. He ought n't to holler when--"

"When what, Lem?"

"When it wasn't his lead, anyhow. It was pop's lead. Swatty an' Bony sold it to pop first. I know, because I bought it from them, an' then they hooked it out of pop's junk-pile an' sold it to Shuder. So it was n't Shuder's; it was pop's, anyway. I was just gettin' it back again."

"But you sold it to your father again after you got it back," expostulated Henrietta, although she smiled.

"Well, it was good lead, wasn't it? It was worth the money, was n't it? We sold it to him cheap enough, did n't we?"

"Yes, but it was his lead already--"

"No, it wasn't. Because Swatty an' Bony stole it an' sold it to old Shuder. He would n't have bought it if it wasn't theirs, would he? He's too slick to do that, you bet! He knew it was theirs. An', anyway, it ought to be theirs, because they had it first."

"Had it first?" Henrietta asked.

"Out of Harburger's back yard," said Lem. "It was just lyin' there an' nobody was doin' anything with it. So they had a right to take it, did n't they? That's what junk's for, ain't it? What use was an old chunk of lead stickin' in the mud, I'd like to know! So it was Swatty's an' Bony's, because they found it."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Lorna. "Do you mean they stole it from Harburger's back yard and sold it to your father, and then stole it from him and sold it to Shuder, and then stole it from Shuder and sold it to your father again?"

"Why, of course--"

"And I suppose," said Lorna, "they would have gone on forever, stealing it from your father and selling it to Shuder, and stealing it from Shuder to sell to your father."

"No," Lem said.

"Why not? How many times does a junkman have to buy a piece of lead before it becomes sinful to steal from him?"

"I don't know. But, anyway," said Lem, "they'd have had to stop pretty soon, because old Shuder would get to know that chunk o' lead by heart, an' he'd know he had bought it before, so he would n't buy it again."

"I'm afraid you don't understand the Riverbank youth's theory of property rights in old metal, Lorna," said Henrietta. "It seems to be based on the idea that anything that can be picked up belongs to the picker-up."

"But not railroad iron," said Lem. "You got to leave that alone because nobody'll buy it off you. They'll get pinched if they do."

"But after a junkman has bought it, Lem, it belongs to him," said Lorna. "I might see how useless old metal, even if not just lying on the street, might seem to be nobody's property, but when it is in a junkman's yard--"

"Well, they could take care of it if they wanted to," said Lem. "They could put barb-wire on the fence, or somethin', if they did n't want it stole. How does anybody know they don't want it stole when they just leave it out in the yard? How would anybody know it was n't just some old junk they left out there on purpose to have it stole?"

Lorna looked at Henrietta and shook her head. This sort of logic was too much for her.

"But I bet you one thing," said Lem. "I would n't ever buy any junk they had just stole out of pop's yard. If they went around back an' stole some, an' brought it around front an' wanted to sell it, you bet I would n't buy it. That ain't honest. That's cheatin'."

"So you see, Lorna," said Henrietta; "what is needed here is an education in property rights and not summary punishment. But I have a feeling that Lem's theory of rights will be hard to make clear to Miss Susan."

"Well, I'll get even with her, all right," said Lem, nodding his head. "You wait an' you'll see! She can't make my father leave me here an' then go an' tell old Schulig to put me in jail. I'll get even, you bet!"

"Listen, Lem," Henrietta said, taking his hand. "You must not feel that way."

"Well, I do, just the same," he said.

"But you must not. Your Aunt Sue likes you--"

"In a pig's eye, she does!"

"Yes, she does. She loves you, Lem. We all love you. Your Aunt Sue does n't understand boys yet, and she was upset when she heard you say you had stolen--"

"I'll upset her, all right!"

The supper bell tinkled and Henrietta arose. "Shall I bring you your supper?" she asked. "A nice tray, with everything on it I can think of? So you won't have to go down this evening?"

"Yes, mam. If you want to," Lem said. They were no sooner out of the room than Lem was out of the bed and putting on his few ragged garments. It required only a moment. Then he pushed up the screen of his only window, climbed out upon the roof, and, hanging from the gutter, dropped to the ground. He paused to see that he was not pursued and then made a dash for the back gate.



CHAPTER XII

Lem found his father preparing his evening meal in the junkyard shack and not at all glad to see Lem.
"What you want?" he asked. "If your aunt sent you down here to get money out of me, it ain't no sort of use. I ain't got a dollar to spare."

"She did n't send me; I come," Lem told him. "Well, what did you come for? I ain't goin' to have you comin' here. To-morrow mornin' I'm goin' to start in bein' a saint for fair and I can't be bothered with no kids hangin' around. This here saint business is difficult enough to do without kids to take a feller's mind off it. What did you come for?"

"I've quit livin' with Aunt Sue," Lem said. "I hate her, and I ain't goin' to stay with her."

"You mean you've run away from her house?"

"Yes, I do!" said Lem. "You heard her tell old Schulig to jail me. I ain't goin' to live with no aunt that tells old Schulig to jail me." Harvey turned the egg he had in the small frying-pan. He liked his eggs done on both sides.

"You had your supper?" he asked Lem.

"No."

"Well, you won't get none when you go back, I'll bet on that, if Sue is havin' one of her rantankerous spells. Eat this egg. I got a couple more. I want em all et up to-night, anyway; I ain't goin't' eat 'em after to-night. To my way of thinkin' eggs is too fancy for a hermit saint to eat. When you go back you tell your aunt you heard me say so. Dod-baste her! She thinks I'm foolin' when I say I'm goin' to be a saint. You tell her how earnest I am goin' at it, Lem, eatin' every dod-basted egg I got in the shack. Yes, and all the bacon, too. You tell her you seen me gettin' ready to eat all the unsaintly food I got before midnight, so's I could start clean an' parsimonious, or whatever you call it, to-morrow mornin'."

He looked at the square of bacon on his shelf. "I guess I'd better fry you up some bacon, too, Lem," he said. "I got to keep out o' temptation from now on an' there's most more bacon in that hunk than I can swaller to-night. You tell your Aunt Sue I used up' all my bacon an' eggs, will you?"

"No. I ain't goin' back."

"Yes, you are, too!" said Harvey. "Why, dod-baste it all, Lem, I put you in pawn, did n't I? I'd be a nice-lookin' saint, would n't I, if I went an' pawned you to your aunt an' then let you come back? Why, look here! she could jail me for it, if I let you come back. You ain't got no right to come out of pawn. I'd be a nice sort o' saint if I let you. I'd be a dod-basted old liar, that's what I'd be."

"I ain't goin' back," said Lem.

"Now, Lem, you looky here," Harvey said. "You don't understand this business. I don't say I ought to expect you to, you bein' young yet, but I owe your aunt a heap of money--a heap!--an' if she went an' pushed me all over the place for it I'd have a dod-basted hades of a time tryin' to be a saint. That aunt of yours gets on my nerves so gosh all awful--"

"She gets on mine worse 'n that," said Lem.

"Now, *that* ain't got nothin' to do with it," said Harvey irritably. "Don't you interrupt. If your aunt gets to chasin' me all round town an' back, pesterin' me for that money, I might as well give up bein' a saint right now an' go back in the junk business."

"You don't have to be no saint, do you?" asked Lem resentfully.

"Yes, I do," said Harvey. "You don't understand it, but I've been called. I've heard the call; callin' me to be a saint in this land where there ain't no saints. I've heard the call, Lem."

"Where from?" Lem asked.



“ I’VE HEARD THE CALL, CALLIN’ ME TO BE A SAINT ”

"From heaven; where do you think I'd get it from?" asked Harvey irritably. "The post-office? Do you s'pose it come in a registered letter, with a special delivery stamp on it? That ain't no way a saint gets called. I heard it in my heart, dod-baste it! like any other saint would hear it."

"How long you goin' to be one?" Lem asked dismally.

"Why--why, forever. From now on. It ain't no *job*, Lem. It ain't no *business*. It's--it's a way of bein', like an angel is or a--a somethin' or other. When you're a saint you keep on bein' one. Once a saint, always a saint. Saints keep right on bein' saints forever, gettin' holier an' holier, an' workin' for mankind."

"What kind of work do they do?" Lem asked. He had eaten the egg and was eating the crisped bacon--Harvey always had the best bacon.

"They don't do no work; not the kind of work you mean," Harvey said. "They just work to be a saint. They work to be good. Some of 'em has a sort of sideline like I'm goin' to have. I'm goin' to work to be kind to stray dogs."

Lem finished his bacon. His freckled face set in firm resolution.

"I'm goin' to stay here an' help you be a saint, pop," he said. "I'm goin' to be a saint, too. I can be a young one, can't I?"

"I'll be eternally dod-basted if--" Harvey began angrily, but he remembered himself. "No, Lem," he said with forced gentleness, "that ain't in my plans. I can't let you do it. Not now. You 're too young yet. You go back to your aunt an' be a good boy, an' when I get her all paid off an' get you out of pawn, maybe I 'll see about it. After-while. In a year or two,

maybe. Just yet awhile I got to suffer alone an' in silence, as you may say. You go back to your aunt like a good boy an' I'll give you a dollar."

"I want to stay here."

"You can't stay here."

"Lemme see the dollar, then."

Harvey produced a dollar, a big, silver one, and Lem took it. He had not taken off his hat, so he did not have to put it on. "I'll go back," he said as he paused at the door, "but I won't stay. She's mean."

Harvey had turned his own egg and bacon on to the plate Lem had just emptied.

"She's mean," Lem repeated. "I don't care what you are; I'd rather be with you, anyway. I'd rather be with you, even if you are a saint."

Harvey had been about to begin on his bacon and eggs, but he paused with his knife and fork suspended.

"Lem," he said.

"What?"

"You go back to your Aunt Sue, Lem," Harvey said with sudden tenderness, "an' git along the best you can with her. For a while, anyway. But you don't have to let her be too dod-basted mean to you, Lem. You come an' tell me if she is, because maybe I might get a notion to git out of this saint business sooner than I think I will. I guess I don't have to let you be put upon too dod-basted much, saint or no saint. You come an' see me once in a while, anyway. Now git along with you."

Lem went, but his heart was far lighter. His father had not cast him off totally. He stood outside the junkyard gate a few moments in the deepening dusk. Then he had a happy thought. He looked over his shoulder and started down the street at an easy, unhurried run. He did not pause until he reached the high fence at the rear of Moses Shuder's junkyard. He raised himself by grasping the top of the fence and looked inside. The opportunity seemed perfect. He slid over the fence and moved cautiously among the shadows until he reached the shed where Shuder stored the more valuable of his properties. His toe stubbed itself on the very chunk of lead he was seeking. Keeping a lookout over his shoulder he dragged the heavy lump of metal to the fence, boosted it over, and shinnied after it. Close at hand was the wide opening into the rainwater sewer and into this Lem pushed the chunk of lead, hearing it splash far below. Then, feeling more at peace with the world, he went slowly back to his Aunt Susan's. He climbed to the kitchen roof, into his room, into his bed, and slept peacefully and without a dream.



CHAPTER XIII

That Miss Susan never knew that Lem had stolen from his room that evening was due to the fact that Henrietta had carried the tray to the room. The half-open screen told her how Lem had gone, and when she took the tray down again it was as empty as if a boy with a healthy appetite had dined off its contents. Henrietta ate a rather light supper in consequence.

"I don't feel hungry," she said in answer to Susan's question, and Susan imagined it was because Henrietta was worrying over the revelation she had been forced to make that Freeman Todder was her husband.

"Don't you worry about what you told me," Susan said when she found her alone for a moment after supper. "It's all right as long as you're a married couple. The only thing I want is to be able to keep the good name of this boarding-house clear, and speak right up to anybody that questions it, Mrs. Todder."

"Oh, please don't call me that," begged Henrietta, in fright.

"I've got to," said Miss Susan. "I've got to do it once in a while. I've got to be able to say, to anybody that finds out, 'My sakes, I knew it all along. I always called her Mrs. Todder when we was private alone together.' So don't you worry. All I ask is to see your marriage certificate, so I can say I saw it."

"Of course, I'll show you that," agreed Henrietta; but she had a drowning sensation. She could not remember what had become of her marriage certificate; if it was still in existence it might be anywhere.

"Not that I'm in a hurry," said Susan. "Tomorrow will do. I've got to go up now and see how that boy is getting along, I suppose. If ever there was a fool I was one when I took him."

"I know you don't mean that," said Henrietta, putting her hand on Susan's arm. "It has been an annoyance--having that ridiculous policeman come for him--but you really like the boy, Miss Susan. Don't you? In your heart of hearts?"

"I don't like a thief," said Susan grimly.

"But Lem is not that," Henrietta urged. "All boys do what he did--most boys--if they have the chance. They mean no wrong, I know."

"They don't do things like that and stay in *my* house," Susan said.

"But Lem is such a dear boy--"

"He'd have to be a whole sight dearer before I'd ever want a thief in my house," Susan interrupted. "I'll let him stay to-night, but tomorrow back he goes to his worthless parent, money or no money."

It was evident her dislike was still keen, and Henrietta knew it would never do for his aunt to discover he had decamped, even temporarily, by the window. Lem might not return, but if he did Miss Susan must not know he had ever fled. That, she was sure, Susan would never forgive.

"Let me go up to him, Miss Susan," she begged. "You're tired and it makes you cross, and I love Lem."

Miss Susan was willing, and Henrietta went up to the empty room. When she came down she said there was nothing the matter with Lem now, as far as she could see, which was, in a way, true enough, for she had looked out of his window and could not see him at all.

The evening was pleasant. Gay, who had come across the street, and Lorna and Freeman were already on the porch. As Henrietta went out to them, Carter Bruce came up the walk. Gay was on the step, with Freeman at her side, and they were talking in low tones. Bruce hailed every one and stopped in front of Freeman.

"I hear you are going to leave us," he said. "First I've heard it," said Todder lightly. "Where did you get that?"

"I got it straight," Carter said. "I hear you're going to leave Riverbank the first of the week."

"Nothing in it," said Todder carelessly. "Why leave Riverbank where the fairest girls are? Must have meant some other fellow, Bruce."

"No. You're the man. I'm not mistaken," Bruce said.

Henrietta leaned forward in her chair. "Stuff!" Freeman laughed carelessly. "Why should I want to leave Riverbank?"

"Come here a minute and I'll tell you what I heard," said Bruce, keeping to the tone of inoffensive friendliness.

Todder arose and walked a few yards away with Carter Bruce.

"Excuse the secretive males," Bruce called; and then his tone changed, as he spoke to Todder. "You are going to leave because you have a wife you ought to be looking after, instead of making up to some of the girls here. I've got this straight, understand? So you get out of town before the first of next week or there'll be trouble."

Todder felt in his pocket for a cigarette.

"Got a wife I ought to be looking after, have I?" he said. "That's glad tidings. Nothing like having a wife. Now, where is this wife of mine?" He did not know how much Carter Bruce knew, or how he had learned what he did know, but he felt fairly positive that Bruce did not know much or he would not have suggested that he ought to be looking after his

wife. Henrietta was his wife, and he was, all things considered, fairly close to her even at that moment. "Just where is this wife of mine, Bruce? I'm interested. That's proper, is n't it? A man ought to be interested in his wife."

"You know where she is," Bruce said.

"That means you don't," said Freeman, suddenly taking the offensive. "That means somebody has been lying to you or you have been overworking your imagination. Where is this wife of mine?"

Carter smiled. He had played for this. He watched Freeman Todder's face, to see the sneering smile die when he spoke.

"Your wife," he said slowly, "is in Colorado." The effect on Freeman Todder was not at all what Bruce had expected. Instead of cringing he shouted a laugh. He even clapped Bruce on the shoulder.

"You've got me all wrong, Bruce," he said. "I know what's the matter with you--you're jealous. You're gone on Gay yonder and you're sore because you think I'm cutting you out. Well, don't go spreading any of these 'you're married' lies about me in our beautiful little city, understand? I won't stand that."

Bruce said nothing. It was evident there was something wrong with his information. He had no reason to doubt that Henrietta believed what she had told him, but something was wrong somewhere. He had tried to "throw a scare" into Todder and the scare had not worked as he had expected. He blamed himself, a lawyer, even if a young one, for having attempted a bluff before he had his evidence in proper shape to back his bluff, but he felt reasonably sure that when he had had another talk with Henrietta he would have the facts so completely in hand that he would be more successful.

Todder lighted his cigarette. This, in Iowa at that date, was in itself equivalent to a show of bravado, for the cigarette was a sign of deep depravity, so much so that the Riverbank audiences were never quite sure the "vilyun" on the stage was actually a villain until he had lighted a "coffin nail." Even Simon Legree, in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" had to come to it, and if Uncle Tom had put match to a cigarette he would have lost the sympathy and gained the hatred of all respectable citizens. By lighting a cigarette Freeman Todder was, in a way, flaunting his devilishness in the face of his rival.

"Your jealousy has given you wheels in the head, that's what's the matter with you, Bruce," Todder said carelessly. "If you want to get the real inside information about my wife affairs, past, present, or to be, I'll give it to you straight. The only wife I ever expect to have is sitting on that porch. There you have it and you can do what you please with it. You can stand here if you want to; I'm going back and talk to Gay." Bruce walked back at his side.

"I seem to have been mistaken," he said in the tone he would have used had he believed he was mistaken, and in a few minutes the incident seemed to be forgotten.

Henrietta, however, was greatly disturbed. She could not guess what had passed between the two men nor how much Bruce had told or Todder guessed. She was, for the moment, exceedingly unhappy. She looked at Freeman closely, trying to judge what had been said, but his face offered no information.

If anything Bruce had said so acted on Freeman that the latter tried to leave town, the very worst was apt to happen. Johnnie Alberson, thinking he had been played a trick, would in all probability have Freeman arrested. That would very promptly end everything. Henrietta drew her chair far back in the shadow of the porch and sat silent, trying to plan something when there was in fact nothing that could be planned until she had spoken with Freeman. She had closed her eyes, trying to think, when she heard Lorna say, "Who's that?"

Henrietta peered into the dusk and saw a plump, jaunty figure coming up the walk toward the house.

"It's Johnnie Alberson," Freeman answered Lorna.

It was Johnnie Alberson. He came to the porch smiling and swinging his light cane, his straw hat in his hand.

"Hello! quite a party," he said. "Won't anybody offer a fat, old man a seat?"

He walked between Lorna and Gay, up the steps, and peered into the shadows of the porch.

"Is that you, Miss Redding?" he asked.

Henrietta had hoped she would not be seen. At that moment there was no one she less wished to see than Johnnie Alberson.

"No, this is Miss Bates," she said; and Johnnie, excusing himself for making the mistake, went to her end of the porch and took the chair at her side. He was pleased, because he had hoped to find her there. It had been a thought of Henrietta that had sent him tramping up the long hill. He had, after Henrietta's visit to the drug store, thought of Henrietta quite a little and he had decided that--unless his memory deceived him--she was just about the finest woman he had ever seen; that she was the sort of woman with whom he would enjoy a flirtation, let it go as far as it might.

"Like meeting an old friend," he said, putting his hat carefully on the floor. "And I hope we'll be better friends. Mother has gone to Dubuque to spend a couple of weeks and I'm going to ask Miss Redding to take me in, if she has room."

"That will be nice," said Henrietta warmly, but she felt that the coming of Johnnie was almost too much.

CHAPTER XIV

The evening proved more satisfactory than Henrietta had feared. Carter Bruce did not leave Gay to Freeman, but seemed to have taken Henrietta's warning thoroughly to heart. It is true that Freeman tried to monopolize Gay, rather driving Carter to Lorna, but Carter would not be wholly driven and managed to make it a party of four on the steps, talking across Lorna at Gay.

Neither was Johnnie Alberson as fearsome as Henrietta had feared. If he meant to press his attentions on her--and he certainly did mean to--he was too wise to begin too violently. Flirtation was a game with Johnnie and one in which he was an experienced hand. When, about eleven, he said good-night, Henrietta had spent one of the pleasantest evenings of her life. She settled herself in her chair again, listening to the four younger people on the steps, to the crickets in the grass, and to the thumping of Miss Susan's iron in the kitchen.

Carter, when Gay finally arose, went with her, and Henrietta was pleased to see that he took her arm and that she did not object to this slight attention.

"Going up, Lorna?" Henrietta asked, meaning the question more as a hint to Freeman, for she wanted to talk with him, but he did not take the hint and sat on the step smoking when they went in.

It was an hour later--fully midnight--when Miss Susan laid aside her irons and went to her room. The house was silent, for Freeman had gone to his room half an hour before and Miss Susan climbed the stairs wearily. She was so tired that when she reached her room she sat on the edge of her bed, almost too tired to bend to undo her shoe-laces, and suddenly her eyes fell on her purse, which she had left on her dresser. It was wide open.

Miss Susan crossed the room and took the purse in her hand. It was empty. For a minute she stood looking into it and then she opened her door and went into the hall.

The purse had not contained much money--eleven or twelve dollars, if she remembered rightly--but that was gone. At Lem's door she paused, listening, for she heard subdued noises within the room. She opened the door suddenly.

The boy stood in the full moonlight, fully dressed and his ragged straw hat on his head, just as he had come in from his visit to his father. He turned as the door opened and the next moment Miss Susan had him by the collar. He tried to pull away toward the window, but she held him fast and he fell and was on his feet again in an instant, kicking and striking. Miss Susan held tight to the collar.

The small stand holding the ewer and basin toppled and fell with a crashing of queensware, and almost before the noise ceased Lorna and Henrietta were at the door. A minute later Freeman came, and Lorna fled, being too lightly clad.

"Grab him! Grab the little rat!" Susan cried, and Freeman clasped the boy from behind, slipping his hands under his arms, and spreading his own feet wide apart to escape the kicks the sobbingly angry boy dealt with his bare heels.

"You leave me alone," Lem sobbed, doubling his kicks and jerking to set himself free. Miss Susan, as Freeman tightened his grip, felt in the boy's pockets, bringing forth a silver dollar, but no more.

"Lem! Lem, dear!"

The boy looked up. Henrietta was standing in the doorway, her voice commanding but soothing. In the instant before Freeman or Susan could turn their heads toward her, she closed her eyes and stiffened her body. At the moment Lem was too angry to heed her, but, in another moment, he felt that his struggles were useless, and he grasped what she meant. Suddenly he grew white and rigid and lay in Freeman's arms, stiffly inert.

"I was afraid of that! I was afraid of that!" Henrietta said, and she went to take Lem from Freeman.

Miss Susan, one hand comforting the side of her face where one of Lem's blows had fallen, scowled at the boy.

"The thief!" she exclaimed angrily. "The miserable, low, thieving brat! He robbed my purse. I'll show him! I'll see that he gets what he deserves now! Fit or no fit he does not stay in my house another hour."

Henrietta paid no attention to her. Lorna was at the door now, a robe thrown around her.

"What was it?" she asked. "What did he do?"

"He stole from me," said Miss Susan. "He robbed my purse. And out he goes!"

"But not to-night," said Henrietta, braving her. "Not while he is like this."

She tried to lift him, but he was too heavy. "Take him, Freeman," she said.

Freeman lifted the boy and turned toward the bed.

"Not there," said Henrietta. "In my room. He is not wanted here, but my room is my own. To-morrow, if Miss Redding wishes, Lem and I will go. Come, Freeman."

CHAPTER XV

Before Freeman had placed Lem on Henrietta's bed, Henrietta had her door closed and locked. She stood with her back to the door, facing Freeman when he turned. She had several things she wanted to say to him. She had not the slightest doubt that he had taken Miss Susan's money and there were other things she wished to talk over with him. Her position was becoming more and more difficult each hour.

What she meant to say she did not know, and neither did she know what she meant to do when all was said. One thing seemed to her particularly monstrous--that Lem should be held guilty for a theft he had not committed--and in her present state of mind she was ready to sacrifice both Freeman and herself to save Lem. Her own life, and Freeman's, seemed already ruined, and as she stood there she was resolved that before Freeman left the room everything must be decided.

Freeman, as he turned, looked at her. He knew by the look on her face and the light in her eyes that she had been driven beyond all patience by this last act of his.

"What do you want?" he asked, moving away from the bed.

"To talk with you," Henrietta said. "I am through. This is the end, of course."

"A nice little family chat, I suppose," he sneered. "Door locked, hubby captured, wifey angry. Act 3, Scene 2. Villain husband lights cigarette."

He took his pack of cigarettes from his pocket and shook one out, knocking it on the back of his hand before he lighted it.

"Wife glares at husband," he continued, in the same tone. "Husband nonchalantly crosses stage to chair."

He walked toward the chair that stood by Henrietta's window.

"And exit husband," he said, raising the wire screen of the window and stepping out upon the tin roof of the porch. Henrietta leaped forward, but only in time to hear the crackling of the tin as Freeman crossed to his own window. She heard his screen clatter down, and the creak of his window as he lowered it, and even the grating of the safety lock as he quite satisfactorily locked himself in.

For a moment Henrietta looked at her window; then she turned to Lem.

"Lem!" she commanded. "Lem, wake up!" The boy did not stir.

"Lem!" she said. "Wake up. I know you are only pretending. Stop this fooling; I want to talk to you."

But Lem would not waken. She tried other ways, talking to him all the while, tickling the tough soles of his bare feet and opening his eyelids, but he was not to be coaxed or driven out of the pretended fit.

"Very well, then," Henrietta said, seating herself on the bedside. "I'll talk to you, anyway, for I know you hear me. I know you did not steal Miss Susan's money, but she will never believe that. I know Freeman stole it."

Lem lay as inert as a corpse. If he heard he gave no sign.

"Listen, Lem," Henrietta continued. "What I want to tell you is that you must not run away, if you were thinking of running away. That was why I had you brought here, so I could tell you that. You understand, don't you? You must not run away; not to-night, anyway."

There was still no sign from the boy on the bed. "I'll tell you why," Henrietta went on. "If you do, every one will always think you are a thief, and all your life you will have trouble and misery and unhappiness. All your whole life, even if you live to be a hundred. So I want you to promise not to run away to-night. Will you promise that?"

Lem did not answer.

"I wish you would," pleaded Henrietta. "I'm tired, Lem, and my heart is tired to-night. I want to sleep and see if sleep will bring me any answer to the troubles I can't see my way out of to-night. There may be some way, but I do not see it now, and if you will not promise not to run away I'll have to go to Miss Susan now and tell her that Freeman stole her money. I want to save you, Lem, but I want to save myself and Freeman, too, if I can, and if I tell Miss Susan the truth it means ruin for me. I will have to go away forever. Will you promise now not to run away?"

She looked at him, but not a muscle of his face quivered. She arose, and drew her robe more closely around her neck, and went to the door. There she gave a last look toward the bed. Lem was sitting straight.

"Aw, gee!" he said. "Don't go an' tell her nothin' like that. Don't you go an' tell her Freeman took her money. Because he didn't take it. I took it."

"Lem!" Henrietta cried, with a deep breath, while her eyes showed her distress. "Not truly? You don't mean that, Lem?"

"Yes, I did!" he insisted. "I took it. I took it, but I did n't steal it. I took it to get even with her, callin' me a thief an' everything." Henrietta returned to sit on the edge of the bed.

"Oh, Lem!" she said. "How could you!"

"Well, she was mean to me, so I was mean to her," he said. "I got a right to get even with her, have n't I? I don't have to let her be mean to me an' not be mean to her, do I?"

"But to steal!" cried Henrietta.

"I didn't either steal!" declared Lem stubbornly. "I just took. I just took her old money an' put it where she would n't get it again, so she'd wish she had n't ever wanted to be mean to me."

"Where did you put it?" asked Henrietta.

"I won't tell you!"

"You will tell me! You 'll tell me this instant!"

Henrietta had not been a school teacher for years for nothing. Now, by an instantaneous change, she was all a school teacher--a school teacher able to command rebellious boys for their own good.

"I won't either tell you!" declared Lem.

"Very well!" said Henrietta, and she arose and began to draw on her stockings.

"What you goin' to do?" Lem asked.

"No matter," she said. "You are going to tell me what you did with that money."

Lem watched her uneasily. She drew on her shoes with the brisk movements of one who knows exactly what she has planned to do and how she has planned to do it. She drew the shoe-laces taut with little jerks that made the metal tips snap against the shoes.

"Are you going to wale me?" asked Lem.

"No matter. You'll know soon enough."

"I ain't afraid of being waled," said Lem. Henrietta was snapping the hooks of her corset now, not looking at Lem. There was a businesslike briskness in the way she snapped hook after hook and reached for her skirt that frightened Lem.

"Well, anyway, you might tell a feller what you're goin' to do to him," he said uneasily.

"Never mind," Henrietta said, and jerked the band of the skirt two inches to the left around her waist. She reached for her jacket and thrust her arms into the sleeves, reaching for her hat almost the same instant.

"Well, what do I care who knows where I put the money?" said Lem. "I made her mad, all right. I wa'n't afraid to say where I put it. You don't need to think I'm afraid to." Henrietta jabbed a pin into her hat and put her hand on the doorknob.

"Where did you put it?" she demanded.

"I put it in her shoe."

"What shoe?"

"Her shoe in her closet."

"Her Sunday shoes? The shoes with the cloth tops?"

"Yes, mam."

"All of it?"

Lem nodded an affirmative.

"Very well," said Henrietta. "You'll stay here; understand?"

"Yes, mam," said Lem meekly. "I'll stay."

"See that you do, if you know what is good for you," said Henrietta, and she went into the hall, closing the door behind her, but leaving it unlocked. She knew Lem would not try to run away that night.



CHAPTER XVI

It may be doubted if Henrietta would ever have worked as hard to save herself as she worked that night with Miss Susan to save Lem. At the end of the long plea for the boy, the best Miss Susan would say was that if he was not a thief he was an imp of Satan and she wished she had never set eyes on him. She supposed, however, she would have to keep him for, goodness knew! it was the only way she would ever get her money out of that no-account brother of hers.

Henrietta went back to her room utterly weary and disheartened with the world in general. Lem she sent back to his own room with a warning that he was to try no escape business. The boy was, indeed, too sleepy now to want anything but sleep. He went staggering to his room, and it would be hard to tell whether he or Henrietta was asleep the sooner, for she threw herself on her bed as she was, only removing her hat and jacket, and she did not awaken until the sun on her face and the discomfort of her shoes brought her to herself again. She opened her eyes with a sense that everything was going wrong in her world.

In this feeling she was not far wrong. The amount of her debt--in money--to Lorna, Gay, and Johnnie Alberson, to say nothing of the board money she owed Miss Susan, was enough to worry any school teacher. In Freeman she had a constant source of worryment, not knowing what folly or crime he might undertake next; the lies she had told so freely threatened to make trouble any moment, and she had Gay on her conscience, too.

The next few days held nothing to make Henrietta happier. Johnnie Alberson took up his residence at the boarding-house, and the way in which he flirted with Henrietta did not please Miss Susan.

From the day of his installation at Miss Redding's, Johnnie Alberson made open and almost outspoken love to Henrietta, and Miss Redding looked upon it sourly. She would have sent Henrietta away instantly but for the equally open and almost outspoken attitude of disapproval shown Johnnie by Henrietta. Henrietta could not, Susan knew, say outright that she was a married woman, but Susan was none the less displeased. She made up her mind that as soon as possible after Johnnie Alberson left, she would send Henrietta away. To interfere while Johnnie remained seemed to her to invite scandalous gossip, and she did not think of sending Johnnie packing. He was an Alberson, and every one knows what that means in Riverbank. Temporarily, therefore, Miss Redding vented her irritation on Lem. He was, a good part of the time, a sulky boy in tears, for he had a new grievance. Miss Susan had taken his dollar and had not returned it.

It has been remarked before, by other observers, how some good women, otherwise admirable, can take a bitter dislike to certain children, and Miss Susan--overworked, harassed by the thought of the scandal-pregnant presence of Henrietta, and "pulled down" by a spell of unusually hot weather--made Lem's days miserable. She even heaped upon him a crowning indignity and made him wash the dinner dishes. He might almost have washed them in the tears he shed over them.

"I've got you, and I suppose I've got to keep you," she told him, "but, if so, you've got to be of use. I can't afford to feed useless boys, and it's no use to bawl about it. You're better off washing dishes than skirmishing around stealing from folks, anyway."

If idle hands are the only hands for which the devil finds work, Lem was in little danger of doing the devil's work during those days. He was too busy doing Miss Susan's. The great stove in the kitchen seemed to swallow wood by the cord during those hot days, and Miss Susan, for economy's sake, was burning pine slabs from the sawmill, and they had to be chopped. The big, drab-painted wood box always needed filling. It was always empty to the last handful of pine bark, Lem thought.

The boarding-house dishes, too, seemed to breed in great masses, like sturgeon eggs. He had never imagined there were so many dishes in the world. He had to carry the dishwater to the alley, to empty it, because the grease would kill the grass. He had to pump water for the washlady, who came twice a week. He had to carry water to fill the ewers in all the rooms, and he even suffered the indignity of having to carry down slops. He felt he was a slave and he was more bitterly and miserably resentful than any slave had ever been.

In addition to all the other work there was the yard to cut. This Lem knew to be sheer thought-up, intentional cruelty to youth, for the yard had never been cut before. In places the matted, dried grass was the accumulation of years, tough and stringy. It was a huge yard; to Lem it seemed like square miles.

To cut the grass he had a sickle that had seen better days, but not recently. It was like cutting grass with a spoon. When he came to the places where the old grass was matted under the new, he had to comb it out with his fingers and hold it up, like a Bluebeard holding the hair of an inquisitive wife's head, and hack at it. His knuckles wore raw, stained with earth and grass, from rubbing as he slashed at the grass.

The result of his sickle work gave Miss Susan little satisfaction. The yard looked worse where Lem had cut it than it had looked originally. It had a jagged, uncouth appearance, like some yellow furred animal that had shed in rough, irregular patches. Miss Susan told him he would have to go over it again as soon as he had finished.

To his misery was added the knowledge that it *was* a shocking-looking job. His acquaintance with sickles was so slight that he did not know the instrument of his torture was outrageously dull. He foresaw a life of unending grass chopping, with a complaining Aunt Susan always at hand to give him another job as soon as she had scolded him for doing the last in a sloppy manner.

Lem, handed into pawn like a chattel by his father, was miserable and he did not think of letting his countenance hide his misery. He was so thoroughly boy that when he felt miserable he showed it, and Miss Susan believed that Lem disliked her, and Lem had no reason to doubt that she disliked him or that she was intentionally "being as mean as an old cat" to him.

In addition to the worry caused Henrietta by the dangerous and annoying attentions of Johnnie Alberson, who believed in making hay while the sun shone, both Carter Bruce and Freeman were giving Lem's only able friend so much trouble that she had little time to help Lem with sympathy or otherwise.

Johnnie seemed inclined to take advantage of his knowledge of Henrietta's supposed maternal relation to Freeman, as well as of his power over her because of Freeman's peculations. Henrietta was thoroughly frightened. That Miss Susan objected was enough in itself to worry her, but she was actually afraid of Johnnie's love-making because she was to some extent really in his power. She did not know how far he might choose to press his attentions and she did not have a free cent with which to lessen the amount for which he was holding her responsible.

Johnnie himself was probably having one of the gladdest times of his life. Being a Riverbank Alberson he had his full share of conceit, and thought well of himself at all times except when his withered, dictatorial, and aged mother was treating him as if he were a five-year-old boy. She treated him thus whenever she saw him, no matter where, and she was such a thorough tyrant and so hearty in her tyranny that Johnnie was meek and lowly before her. It was said she swore at him like a pirate when he asserted himself in any way whatever.

When he was away from his mother, the plump, immaculately dressed pharmacist rebounded to the extremes of self-adoration. He thought he was the finest flower of Riverbank's gallantry and that the only reason all females did not fall in worshipful attitudes at his feet was because an Alberson was so awesome that their very worship would not permit them to take even that liberty.

During the days when he was thus annoying Henrietta, he believed himself to be the admiration of every one at Miss Susan's, instead of which he came near being, in nearly all eyes, a most ridiculous figure. To Miss Susan, who knew the truth about Henrietta and her husband, he was a matter of sorrow; it was painful for her to see an Alberson preening his feathers and strutting peacock-like around Henrietta while Freeman Todder, her husband, observed it all, and laughed up his sleeve at an Alberson.

Gay and Loma alone were pleased. As they had no reason to know that Henrietta was married, and as they believed--and rightly--that her Billy Vane was a myth, they hoped Johnnie was in love with their friend and might marry her.

To Henrietta he was nothing but a danger and a menace, doubly annoying because of her other annoyance. Carter Bruce was pressing her for more information regarding the wife of Freeman Todder.

"I've got to have it," he told her.

"You shouldn't have said anything to him about it," she told him. "It was a secret. I told you in confidence."

Carter did not see it in that light. He was inclined to argue.

"I kept your secret," he said. "How could he know how I learned? I don't mean to let him know, either, but you *must* give me some hint how I can get the information in some other way. Give me the name of the town where his wife is."

"I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"I can't."

"You mean you won't?"

"Very well, Carter, I won't. It is absolutely impossible. I told you to look out for Gay--to make strong love to her--not to go blundering like a bull in a china shop."

Henrietta had this every day. Freeman was even worse. He accused her of having told Bruce some lie, of course, but the worst was his insistent demand for money. He must have money. There must be some way in which she could get it, he said.

"There's not," she told him. "How can I get it?"

Freeman did not know, but he knew he had to have money. He was as ugly about it as possible, worse than he had ever been.

"You get me some money," he said brutally. "That's all I want from you--some money."

"Freeman, I can't get any. If I could get it I would not give it to you. Presently we will have to leave this house, and wherever we go next we have to pay in advance. And I must give something to Johnnie Alberson. I'm afraid of him. I

must pay him something. I don't like the way he acts."

"Let him act," said Freeman scornfully.

All in all Henrietta was in no state of mind to think of any troubles except her own, and poor Lem was left to his own resources. Or to his one resource. That one resource was his father, and his father, unfortunately, was having his own troubles. He was having difficulty in preserving that calmness of mind and subjugation of appetite necessary to carry on the business of a successful saint.



CHAPTER XVII

Again and again Lem stole from his room at night by the window route and made his way to his father's hermitage, to beg to be taken out of pawn. These visits caused Saint Harvey of Riverbank the utmost irritation. The good Saint Harvey, Little Brother to Stray Dogs, was doing his best to live up to the task he had set himself. He was trying faithfully to mortify the flesh and to live abstemiously (on bread and water), to do without his pipe, to think high thoughts, and to be gentle and kind to all living creatures, particularly to stray dogs.

He had a double reason for trying. The news that he was in business as a saint had gone around town--for he could not keep from bragging about it--and old friends and perfect strangers dropped into the junkyard to inquire how he was progressing and to learn from his own lips how a man went about being a saint and how he liked the job.

The worst, of course, was living on bread and water alone. Every atom of his huge body seemed to cry for ham and eggs every minute, and his stomach simply yelled for ham and eggs. And that made him irritable, of course, and made it more difficult to keep from dod-basting everybody, and everything. And it made him long for his pipe, which would have been the solace that every man knows tobacco is. And then the questioners would come:

"An' say, Harvey, they say you don't eat nothin' but bread an' water. Is that so?"

"That's all. Nothin' but. It's got to be that way. Mortify the flesh, that's the idee. High thinkin' an' plain livin'. Why, there would n't be no merit in *bein'* a saint if I was to go on eatin' an' drinkin' an' smokin' an' cussin' around same as everybody does an' like I used to. Bread an' water; that's the idee of it."

"Gosh! it must be hard on a man!"

"Well, yes! Yes, right at first it is. I don't say it ain't, right at first. It irked me some right at first, but I'm gettin' used to it."

"An' don't it no more?"

"Not a mite. Mind conquers the flesh, as you may say. Want to come back an' see the stray dogs I'm takin' care of? That's my speciality--stray dogs. It's just that I love 'em an' they love me, like I was a brother to 'em. That does the business."

He would lead the way to where three canines were chained in the junkyard.

But at night, when he was supposed to be sound asleep, and his blinds were closed, he would begin to think of food--rich, solid ham and eggs cooked in bacon fat--and he would fight with himself, and groan and roll to and fro in his bed.

"Dod-bas--no, not dod-baste; I'll take that back, it ain't saintly," he would mutter; "but I'm hungry. I did n't know a man could *git* so hungry."

Then he would get up and walk the floor.

It was wonderful that he stood it. A new spirit of resolution seemed to have entered into him. The interest that was shown in his new life by his friends and by strangers certainly was one cause of his tenacity, but even so he might have given up--as he had given up all his previous labors--had the *Riverbank Eagle* not written him up. The article was intended to be satirical, but satire is a serious matter for unpracticed hands to meddle with, and the article that appeared in the *Eagle*--headed "Riverbank Has a Hermit"--was so very delicately satirical that it did not appear to be satirical at all. Riverbank accepted it as sincere, and so did Saint Harvey, and so did papers all over the land. In a day Saint Harvey found himself not only a recognized hermit, but a famous one. The "Brother of Stray Dogs" was a national character, but he wished he was n't. He was a national celebrity, but a hungry one. Nobody knew how hungry he was. He was the hungriest man in the United States. He was just plumb, downright, miserably hungry for ham and eggs.

It was late at night, when this hunger was greatest, that Lem would come, pushing open the door, standing on the sill, and saying: "Pop, I want you to lemme come home."

"Say! Are you here again? Did n't I tell you to keep away? You git out o' here an' go right back to your aunt."

"Aw, pop! Lemme stay here, won't you, please?"

"No, I won't. I can't have you around here, Lem. The place where a man is tryin' to be a saint ain't no place for a hearty, growin' boy. I got to practically do without food. I got to fast, an' live on bread an' water--"

"Aw, lemme come. I don't want much to eat. Just maybe some ham an' eggs--"

"Now, hush up! You shut your noise! Don't you come talkin' about--about nothin' to eat. You come around here talkin' about ham an'--about things to eat, an' botherin' me, an' I won't have it. How can I get my mind quieted down to bread an' water when you're comin' here all the time? It's just food, food, food, an' tempt, tempt, tempt, all the time. I'm havin' a hard enough time as it is, dod--I mean--"

"Why don't you quit it, then? I don't see what you want to be a plaguey old saint for, anyway. I don't see where you're goin' to make any money at it."

"There now! Money! That just shows you oughtn't to be around here, Lem. You don't understand the first principles of a saint. A saint ain't in the saint business for the money it gets him."

"What is he one for, then, I'd like to know? What's it good for, anyway?"

"Why, dod-baste--no, I take that back, Lem. I mean anybody ought to know what a saint is for. He's--well, he's just a saint. There don't have to be no reason for a saint. He just stays around where he is, an' is. Folks come an' look at him an' wonder how he does it. He's a credit to the town, dod--I mean, he's a credit to the town. He gets wrote up in the papers. They make monuments of him when he's dead, an' put his picture in a book."

"Well, I don't think it's sense, I'd rather not be dead an' have monuments, if I had to go an' have nothin' but bread an' water. I'd rather be alive an' have ham an' eggs--"

"Now, you stop that! You're talkin' about ham an' eggs just to pester me, an' I won't have it! You get away from here!"

Always it ended in Lem coaxing again to be taken out of pawn. He would sit in the shanty snivelling, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand after he had run out of words, but always his father sent him away again, back to Miss Susan. He ordered him out of the shanty sternly enough, but after Lem had closed the door, going out into the night reluctantly, Saint Harvey could not forget him. He worked off his irritation by whanging his pillow around the room, kicking it when it fell to the floor, until he was nearly exhausted, and then he would settle himself in his bed and, grumbling at first, read--his dime novels!

The truth was that, much as he scolded about them, he welcomed the nocturnal visits of the boy, even if they did irritate him (or because they did), and during the long, saintly days when he sat in his hickory rocker reading his "Lives of the Saints," he became hungrily homesick for Lem. He missed him.

Now and then, too, Saint Harvey had a qualm. Now and then the thought came to him that he was being a saint because there was no heavy work connected with the job, and he had occasionally a guilty feeling that he had put Lem in pawn to be rid of him. He was not very happy. When he thought such thoughts he had second thoughts--that he was thinking such anti-saint thoughts because he was finding the saint business harder than the junk business.

He did not relish a form of martyrdom that came with his sainthood, either. It took the form of small boys, who love to annoy saints, hermits, and other odd characters. They began throwing clods at him from a safe distance, chanting in chorus:

*"Holy saint! Holy saint!
Wishes he was, but knows he ain't!"*

Saint Harvey was learning that saints are not canonized for nothing. They thoroughly earn their places in the estimation of their admiration.

Lem, after an unusually hard day with Miss Susan, came one night to the hermitage of Saint Harvey with his usual plea to be taken back.

"No, Lem," his father said patiently, "I ain't going to take you. I can't, Lem. I got to stick at this saint job now. And I can't, anyhow. I ain't got the money to pay your aunt, and you've got to stay until--"

From his pocket Lem drew something thick and square, wrapped in paper. He was sitting where he always sat, and he cast a glance out of the corners of his eyes at his father as he slowly unwrapped the paper.

"Aw! please let me come back!" he begged, and dropped the paper on the floor.

Saint Harvey of Riverbank licked his lips and drew a deep, covetous breath. In his hand Lem held a thick, moist ham sandwich. He lifted one lid and straightened the ham with his finger--thick, moist ham with a strip of luscious white fat that hung tremulously over the edge of the bread.

"Aw! please, pa! Let me come back," Lem begged, and set his teeth into the sandwich.

Saint Harvey licked his puffy lips again and heaved a second deep sigh.

The great ham sandwich barrage against the encroaching sainthood of Saint Harvey of River-bank had begun.



CHAPTER XVIII

Saint Harvey of Riverbank was not having a care-free sainthood those days. Lem came every night, sitting in the same place, pleading with his father to stop being a saint, and eating a luscious ham sandwich before his eyes. The young rascal knew what he was doing. He found a way of turning the ham slowly on the bread--so his father saw it in all its beauty--that made Saint Harvey turn red in the face and swallow hard and lick his lips greedily. There was a way in which Lem licked a forefinger after getting it moist with ham grease that was agony to Saint Harvey. And all the while Lem talked.

"Don't your aunt treat you nice?" his father would ask.

"No, she don't," Lem would say. "She's mean to me. She makes me wash the dishes, she does. An' she's got millions of dishes. She don't care how many dishes she has. She goes an' cooks an' cooks, an' has pie an' puddin' an' roast beef an' asparagus an'--"

"How does she have the asparagus, Lem?"

"Well, she has it in stalks--big, white stalks--with a kind of sauce on it. It's good. It's mighty good. An' she has ham an' eggs an' beefsteak an' sausage an' pancakes for breakfast. With maple syrup."

"Ham an' eggs an' beefsteak an' sausage?"

"Yes."

Saint Harvey would emit a long, tremulous sigh and close his eyes. Sometimes when Lem told of a Sunday dinner Saint Harvey would turn quite pale, and groan. Then he would get up and walk back and forth, gasping and swallowing and working his jaws and licking his lips.

"I don't want all this sandwich. You can have it," Lem would say sometimes. "You ought to be hungry; nothin' but bread an'--"

"You get out o' here! You scoot out o' here!" his father would cry, reaching for something to use as a club, and then Lem would go.

Nor was Lem the only trial the good saint had. The Russian Jew, Moses Shuder, would not leave him alone, and no one could anger good Saint Harvey as Shuder could. His very meekness angered Saint Harvey.

Moses Shuder would come to the junkyard, meek and apologetic, dry-washing his hands against his chest, with his crushed hat on his head--the hat itself a reminder of Saint Harvey's anger--and plead with Harvey to sell him or lease him the junkyard.

"Please, Misder Redink, I vant only to talk to you. Please, you should not get a mad at me--"

"Why, dod--why, blame take--" Saint Harvey would begin furiously, only to remember himself in time, and force himself to calmness. "You go 'way from here! I don't want to talk to you! I don't want to sell! I don't want to lease--"

"But, please, Misder Redink--"

The meekly appealing eyes of his late rival made Harvey furious, inwardly. He longed to be able to cast aside all restraint and to dod-baste Moses Shuder with all his heart and all his soul. Moses Shuder was worse than a hair shirt or peas in his shoes.

It was the meekness of Shuder, coming back so cringingly, day after day, that drove Saint Harvey to the edge of terrible outbursts of unsaintly temper. And Moses Shuder's eyes, which were like the meekly appealing eyes of Saint Harvey's stray dogs, reminded him of them.

For the stray dogs were another thorn in the good saint's flesh. He was having a sad time being a Little Brother to Stray Dogs. Stray dogs did not like him. They hated him. Whenever they saw him, they looked up at him with meekly appealing eyes like Moses Shuder's and then bit him on the leg.

Perhaps this was because before Saint Harvey became a saint he had hated stray dogs and thrown things at them, and the dogs recognized him as an ancient dog-hater. However that may be, they now greeted him, when he approached them, with a look that pleaded not to be given a beating, and then, as he approached, showed their fangs, growled and raised the hair along their spines, and jumped at his legs. He wished he had been advertised as a Little Brother to Stray Rabbits instead of to dogs.

Saint Harvey missed his smoking tobacco, too. He missed it tremendously, and temptation was always being forced upon him. You know how Americans are. We are not well used to saints and hermits, and when we have one we are proud of him and grateful to him, and we try to show that we are. We go to him and offer him a good cigar. People who would never have thought of offering Harvey Redding even a two-for-five cigar went out of their way to buy ten-cent cigars to offer to Saint Harvey of Riverbank. Sometimes they offered him two two-for-twenty-five cigars at one offering! And when he refused they seated themselves beside him and lighted one of the cigars and let the delicious aroma of the burning leaf float across his nostrils. Great Scott! Have you ever stopped smoking and had one of these fellows

come around and let the delicious aroma of a really good cigar float across your nostrils?

I have seen pictures of Saint Anthony being tempted, and I will admit he was subjected to some considerable temptations, and withstood them, but he had never been a tobacco smoker. If he had been, and had given it up, and had then been tempted as Saint Harvey was tempted, he would have stood firm, I have no doubt, but he would have been quite considerably irritated. Giving up tobacco after long using it has that effect on the nerves. It had that effect on Saint Harvey's nerves.

Along about that time Saint Harvey of Riverbank was the most easily irritated saint that ever lived, bar none.



CHAPTER XIX

The term of school drew to an end and July began, hot and with no sign of a refreshing rain for weeks to come. In his junkyard Saint Harvey sat and panted and fanned himself with a palm-leaf fan and felt miserable. He felt especially miserable in the region of his belt and just above and below it, for he had a huge pitcher of water always at his elbow and drank copiously, and he had a sensation of being merely a large globe full of water that swished to and fro as he moved.

He was seriously alarmed by this imagined condition. His continued existence seemed exceedingly precarious. It was not as if he had been eating good, solid food--ham and eggs, for example. When he drank another glass of water, it did not seem to go anywhere in particular; it seemed to flow down into an already vast ocean of water. When he thumped himself he was sure he heard waves splashing around inside of him, and he thought he knew what would happen if he was wounded deeply in any way: there would be a sort of Niagara for a minute or two, and then there would be left only a deflated, extinct Saint Harvey.

It was to this worried Saint Harvey that Moses Shuder came on the third of July, appealingly offering him fifty dollars for his remaining junk and one hundred dollars for a year's lease of the junkyard and shanty.

For several nights Lem's sandwich barrage had been especially trying to Saint Harvey.

"Cash money?" he asked Moses Shuder.

"Sure, cash money! I got it in my pocket the cash money. I could show it to you."

He did. Saint Harvey looked at the crisp, new bills and at the pitcher of water at his elbow and at the lump of bread beside the pitcher. It was the hour for his frugal midday meal. From somewhere came the odor of ham frying.

"Please, Misder Redink!" urged Moses Shuder meekly, and from his pocket he took--with exquisite care--a large, costly-looking cigar.

Saint Harvey reached for the cigar.

"I'll go you, dod-baste the dod-basted luck!" he exclaimed, and with the other hand he reached for the money.

From the shed at the rear of the yard came the sharp, angry yelps of two of Saint Harvey's stray dogs beginning hostilities. Saint Harvey eased himself carefully out of his chair.

"You wait," he said to Shuder.

Three minutes later three stray dogs, their tails trailing their legs, their eyes looking backward, dashed through the gate of the junkyard and down the street. Three pieces of old iron hurtled through the air after them.

"There!" puffed the Little Brother to Stray Dogs; "that's what I think of you, you worthless curs!"--and then he added, "Dod-baste you!"

The next morning, which was the morning of the anniversary of the day of our glorious independence, Lem, finishing the task of the breakfast dishes, had the final and crowning indignity thrust upon him. He was sore, anyway, because Miss Sue had forbidden firecrackers and other noise-makers, and now she told him to go upstairs and make his own bed.

"You're old enough, and you know enough, to make it," she said, "and if you ain't it's time you was."

"I won't! I won't do that! Boys don't make beds. That's girls' work."

"Lem!"

"Well--well, I don't see why--well, I'm goin' to, ain't I? You don't have to be in such a hurry about it, do you?"

"Lem!"

"All right, I'm goin'. But all right for you!" On his way up the stairs he passed Henrietta coming down, and she touched him lightly on the shoulder in sign of her good-will. She was going down to meet Carter Bruce, who had insisted that she see him that morning. She found him awaiting her on the porch, in a mood not exactly pleasant.

"I've got to have something definite," he said, when he had told her why he had come. "This can't go on a day longer."

"I'm glad," said Henrietta.

"Glad about what? Glad Gay is so thoroughly infatuated with that sneak--with Freeman?"

"No, glad you know now that you do love Gay," said Henrietta. "That was what I hoped for, Carter: that you would discover it. For you do love her. And, if you do, I need not worry. Gay will not prefer Freeman to you; not if you are bold, as a lover should be."

"She does, though," said Carter. "I don't care what he is, he has a way with women."

"Why don't you have a way with them, then, if that is what is needed?"

"Because I have n't it, that's all! I'm slow. Henrietta, she likes him best. She likes me, but I have no chance with him around. He has to go. You've got to give me facts. Where is this wife of his? How can I prove he has a wife? You owe it to me, and to Gay, and to the wife, to tell me."

"It is enough that I say so. You can tell him I told you."

Carter Bruce hesitated.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but that is n't enough. I--"

Henrietta looked at him steadily for a moment and then let her eyes fall.

"I know what you mean," she said. "You mean you can't trust my words. You mean I am a liar."

"I have to be frank," Carter said. "Gay has told me about William Vane. She does not believe there is a William Vane. When I told her--"

"You told her I had said Freeman has a wife?" asked Henrietta. "And you promised not to tell, Carter!"

"I told her."

"Well?"

"She said, 'Perhaps Henrietta is romancing again.'"

Across the street Gay came out upon her porch. She waved a hand, and Henrietta returned the salutation, but the next moment she guessed it had not been meant for her, for Freeman came around the house, waving to Gay as he came. Henrietta put her hand on Carter's arm.

"No, I can't tell you more," she said breathlessly. "I'm sorry--only it is true he has a wife. It is true, Carter."

Carter's eyes hardened. He walked down the steps of the porch and toward Freeman, until he faced him.

"You are a sneak and a cur and a cad," he said, "and I am going to give you this every time I see you."

He shot out his fist and it struck Freeman on his cheek, throwing him to the ground. An instant he lay there and then he was on his feet and, mad with rage, had leaped for Carter. Henrietta screamed. From across the street Gay came, her palms pressed to her cheeks. The fight was all over before she reached the two men. Bruce stood arranging his tie, but Freeman lay where the last blow had sent him, prone on the grass.

Carter laughed, pantingly.

"Every time I meet you, remember," he said, and turned to Gay.

"I thrashed him," he said, but Gay dropped to her knees beside the prostrate man.

"Freeman! Freeman!" she cried; and then to Carter, "You brute! You cruel brute!"

"Oh, just as you wish!" said Carter Bruce, and laughed again, and went across the yard to the steps and out of the gate.

"Get up!" Henrietta said, coldly, to Freeman.

"Oh! how can you be so cruel!" Gay cried, but Henrietta did not change her tone.

"Get up!" she repeated. "Get up and go into the house."

"How can you speak to him like that!" cried Gay, and she helped Freeman to arise.

He was rather badly battered, and tried to hide the side of his face where the worst blows had fallen. He laughed thinly.

"He's bigger than I am," he said. "He hit me before I expected it."

"He's a brute!" said Gay again.

"Go in the house!" Henrietta ordered; and without more ado Freeman picked up his hat and went into the house. Henrietta followed him.

For a minute more Gay stood where she was, and then she went homeward.

"The brute! The big bully! I'll never speak to Carter Bruce again as long as I live. Never!"



CHAPTER XX

Now, don't you go an' let on to your Aunt Sue, Lem," Harvey told the boy that night when Lem came begging to be taken back. "You just keep your mouth shut, an' in a week or so you come to Burlin'ton an' hunt me up. You won't have no trouble findin' where the post-office in Burlin'ton is, an' when you git there you go to the window, an' ask if there's a letter for Lemuel Redding. It'll tell you where to find me, an' then you come to where it says."

"I'd ruther go with you," Lem said wistfully. "I ain't ever been on a train. I don't know how to do on a train."

"You don't need to do nohow. You buy a ticket an' you git on the train an' sit down in a seat. That's all you do. When the conductor comes around, you hand him your ticket an' let him punch a hole in it, an' when you git to Burlin'ton you ask where the post-office is. That's all there is to it."

"Why can't I go with you, pop? I'm sort o' scared of it."

"I can't take no chances, Lem. If we was to go together, man an' boy, your aunt would sure think I took you an' she would n't rest until she fetched us back. She's got to think you've runned away. On your own hook. I got to keep clear of you awhile. If she got a notion I'd stole you out o' pawn she'd raise the dod-basted dickens against me. She'd make me hand over every red cent I've got, an' I need it to start the new business I aim to go into once I get away from here."

He took a fat roll of bills from his pocket. "I'm goin' to give you twenty-five dollars, Lem," he said solemnly. "That's more'n enough to see you through easy. Don't you lose it. An' don't you ever let on I give it to you."

"I won't," Lem promised.

Harvey had planned carefully. He meant to depart the next night, and the next day he trudged up the hill and paid Miss Sue twenty-five dollars on account of his debt. That might quiet her for a while in case she learned of his departure too soon.

Miss Sue took the money, and the severe expression she had worn when Harvey appeared softened.

"Well, I will say, Harvey, you've done better at keeping your word than I ever thought you would. Bein' a saint has n't hurt you any--I'll say that. I'll mark this down on the back of your note, and keep good track of it, and I only hope you keep on the same way."

"So do I," said Harvey. "How's Lem carryin' on?"

"He's a trial," Miss Susan said, "but I'll bear him."

"You don't want I should take him away?"

"Harvey Redding, that boy stays until you get me paid the last cent you owe me. A bargain is a bargain."

Harvey sighed.

"Well--" he said, and went away.

That night he departed from Riverbank and Miss Sue put the saint's five crisp bills in her purse.

A week later, Miss Susan, going to her room to retire after a hard day, picked up her purse. It was lying on her bureau. Lorna had just paid a week's board and Miss Sue took the money from her pocket and opened the purse. Her eyes saw at once that the purse was empty, the five crisp five-dollar bills Lem's father had given her were gone.

For a moment or two she stood, her hand laid along her cheek, thinking. No, she had not taken the money from the purse. She could remember putting it there, but not taking it out again. She opened her door and walked toward Lem's room.

At Lem's door she paused, for she heard the boy moving about. She opened the door suddenly.

Lem stood, as he had stood on that other night, fully dressed and his ragged straw hat on his head. In his hand was a handkerchief, tied together by the four corners and bulging with the food he had purloined to sustain him on his journey. As the door opened he leaped for the window, but Miss Susan overtook him and dragged him back into the room. He kicked and struck at her, but she held fast. Lorna and Henrietta came to the door, and a minute later Johnnie Alberson also came, all fully clad, for these pleasant nights all sat late. Freeman did not appear; he was with Gay, across the street, on her porch.

"You hold the little rat!" Susan cried, and Johnnie grasped the boy from behind. Miss Susan's hands felt the boy's pockets. Unlike that other time Lem did not struggle now.

"You leave me alone!" he kept repeating. "You better leave me alone!"

Not until Miss Susan took the five crisp bills from his pocket did he begin to cry.

"Don't you take that; that's my money, you old thief, you!" he sobbed helplessly. "You stole my dollar, and you want to steal everything, you old thief!"

"Quiet, Lem!" Henrietta said, but this time the boy paid no heed. If she meant to suggest that he "go stiff" again, the

hint was lost. All the fight, all hope, all belief that anything would ever be right again in his unhappy life seemed to have deserted the boy. It was Johnnie Alberson who tried to comfort him.

"Oh, here! Come now!" he said, still holding fast to Lem, however. "Don't cry. That's not how big boys do. What's the trouble all about, anyway?"

"He stole from me," said Miss Susan, holding up the money.

"I didn't! She's an old liar!" sobbed Lem, "and I don't care if I do say it! She wants to steal all my money all the time--"

"Look at him," said Miss Susan. "All packed up and ready to run away! And my money in his pocket! This time there'll be no nonsense, I tell you. He'll go packing off to reform school, where he belongs."

"That's all right," said Johnnie soothingly. "We'll see about that in the morning. The reform schools won't all close to-night. I'll go bail for Lem to-night; I'll take him into my room. If he gets away, Miss Susan, you can send me to reform school in his place."

There seemed nothing better to do and Johnnie led the boy away.

"Good-night, Miss Bates," Johnnie called to Henrietta, for the affair had interrupted their tete-a-tete on the porch. "I've got to keep this young man company."

Henrietta went down. She sat in her dark corner of the porch, staring across the street at the porch where Gay and Freeman, she knew, were sitting, and waited for Freeman.

Henrietta and Freeman had had one heated interview that night. About ten o'clock, when Henrietta was still in her room, Freeman had thrown his cigarette end from the porch and had entered the house. Miss Susan was at work in the kitchen, where he heard her, and he went up the stairs softly. While smoking his cigarette on the porch, he had come to a decision.

It was clear to him that he could not long remain in Riverbank with Carter Bruce on his trail and ready to beat him up whenever they met. Just what Carter Bruce knew he could not guess with any certainty, but he had enough respect for the young lawyer's fists and enough dread of his own past to believe that if Bruce kept on, his whole situation at Riverbank would be as unpleasant as possible, and, being so hard put to it to raise any money whatever, he saw no satisfactory reason why he should remain in the town. He went up the stairs with a coldly formed and complete intention to see whether Miss Susan had left any money in her room. If she had left any there, he meant to take it and get away from Riverbank as quickly and as thoroughly as possible, and he meant to take Gay with him if she would go.

Freeman Todder was in Miss Susan's room and had already taken the money from her purse when Henrietta opened the door. Freeman turned to look at her.

"What are you doing here, Freeman?" Henrietta asked.

Her husband waved his hand carelessly.

"Tapping the till, dearest," he said. "Breaking the bank. Getting the cash."





“ TAPPING THE TILL, DEAREST,” HE SAID

Henrietta advanced into the room. She spoke calmly enough.

"Now, this I will not have!" she said. "You may be a thief and a rascal, but you must not play your tricks in this house. If you have taken anything, put it back. Freeman, did you take any money?"

"This," he said defiantly, and he held up the fold of crisp bills, slipping it into his pocket again, but as he moved he looked past Henrietta and saw Lem, surprised and wide-eyed, standing in the doorway. Lem had come to the room to get his "other" shirt, preparatory to his departure.

"I found it," said Freeman slowly. "Finders is keepers, you know, dear." He let his eyes glare into Lem's. "And you

know what I am when I am angry, Henrietta. Any one who tells on me I'll kill. I'm desperate, you see. I'll murder any one who tells on me."

Lem slid back into the darkness of the hall and fled to his room. Nothing in this house brought him anything but trouble, and he only wanted to get away as soon as he could.

"That is nonsense," Henrietta told Freeman. "You will never kill any one. You are too great a coward. Now, put that money back and get out of here before some one comes."

For answer Freeman pushed past her.

"I'll put nothing back," he said. "I need this. You don't get any for me; I've got to get for myself."

"Freeman!"

He had gone into the hall. She followed him, and he could not throw her hand from his arm without causing a struggle and a noise that he did not at all desire. His wife drew him into her room.

"All right, go on with the lecture," he said, with a laugh, "but make it short. It won't do any good. I'm going to keep this money, and I'm going to get away from here to-night. I'm going so far you'll never see me again."

Henrietta sat on the bedside and, with her eyes on his face, let her mind touch upon the possibilities. If Freeman went, and went forever, her lot in life would be far simpler, far easier! But, if he fled, and the money was gone, Miss Susan would know he had taken it, and she already knew he was Henrietta's husband. That would besmirch Henrietta even worse than she was now. It would be the last straw. And even if Freeman went, it would not mean perfect freedom for her, for he would always remain a menace, always liable to appear again to work his husbandly blackmail and make trouble for her. She felt unutterably depressed.

"You must put the money back now--at once," she said wearily, "before any one knows it is gone."

"Too late now, Et," he said. "Somebody knows. The only thing for your little Freeman-boy to do is to skip out while the skipping is good. That Lem saw me."

"Lem?"

"Yes. He was at the door while your back was turned. He saw, and heard, too. So there you are! Nothing left but to clear out."

Henrietta pleaded with him.

"But not this way, Freeman! Wait. Take the money back and to-morrow I'll borrow some. I'll coax it out of Lorna, or Gay. Or even Johnnie Alberson; I believe I could get some out of him. Please, Freeman!"

"Et, you make me tired," Freeman said. "I've got the cash and I'm going to skip out before this night is over. That's flat, and if you don't like it, you can lump it, and if you don't like it lumped, you can roll it out and fry it. I'm sick of this and I'm going to vamoose. I'm going over to say good-bye to Gay and then I'm going."

"Freeman!" she cried, "I knew you were a despicable creature, but I never, never, never thought you were quite as low as this!"

"Oh, cut the melodrama, Et!" he said, and while she sat looking at him helplessly he went out of the room.

It was after this scene that she had to sit listening to Johnnie Alberson, making conversation with him while her thoughts were on Freeman.

From where she sat she could see Gay's white dress as a spot against the dark brick of the house across the way, and that spot she watched, all her plans in chaos, knowing only that if the spot disappeared she must rush across and keep Gay safe, no matter what else happened. When she returned from Lem's room, she looked across with fear, and breathed her thanks, for Gay was still there.

Almost immediately Freeman came across the street. He was not in a pleasant mood.

"Freeman," Henrietta said.

"My God! Again? What is it now?" he asked.

"What is it now? Throwing the blame for your thievery on that poor boy! Hasn't he enough to bear without that? You are low--that is the only name for it--low!"

"Fine! Fine and oratorical and everything, Et!" Freeman said carelessly. "Only--I did not throw any blame on him. Not that I care, you know," he added.

"Freeman, don't lie to me. You put that money in his pocket."

"Oh, no, I did n't!" Freeman laughed, and he held up Miss Susan's bank-notes. "I need this money. And I have this money, and I am going to keep this money."

"I don't understand," said Henrietta. "How did you get it again? Did you take it from her a second time?"

"Oh, quit it!" Freeman said disgustedly. "Don't be stupid. This is not the money Lem had. I've had this all the while. I don't know where the little devil got his. What does it matter? Maybe she had two wads. What do I care?"

"I care," Henrietta said.

"I'm going to clear out," Freeman said. "Last you'll ever see of me."

He turned toward the door leading into the house.

"Freeman, what about Gay?"

"None of your dear business, Et," he said. Henrietta heard him tiptoe softly up the stairs. She sat a minute longer, thinking, and then went into the house herself, and up the stairs.

There are times when heroic actions seem the only solution of great difficulties, but, however much a heroic act might add to the glory of this narrative, it was not Henrietta's fortune to rise to great heights now. She paused at Freeman's door and listened, then opened his door.

Freeman sat on a chair at the end of his bed, in shirt and underwear, changing his socks. On a chair close to Henrietta's hand lay his two pairs of trousers--the one pair crumpled on the seat of the chair; the other, newly pressed, laid carefully across the chair back. With a sweep of her arm Henrietta gathered up both pairs of trousers, backed from the room, and closed the door.

For a few moments, perhaps, Freeman did not realize the full extent of the catastrophe, but in another moment he did. What locked doors, tears, and pleadings cannot do, the loss of a man's trousers can do. In the dark hall, before Freeman could reach his door, Henrietta disposed of her gleanings.

"Et!" Freeman whispered: "Et! Bring those back!"

"Bring what?" she answered.

"My pants. Bring them back, and mighty quick."

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said. "You must be drunk. I know nothing about your pants. Go to bed."

From down the hall she heard the loud breathing of Johnnie Alberson--call it a light snore if you choose. Henrietta hesitated. Ill-fitting as Johnnie's short, wide trousers might be on slender-waisted Freeman, she knew a man will wear any garments in a crisis, and that Freeman would not be beneath stealing what he needed from the sleeper. Too, through her mind flashed the thought, "If John is awake, Freeman will not dare to make a loud fuss," and she walked to Johnnie's door and rapped sharply upon it.

"We--well? Well?" came Johnnie's voice, slumber heavy. "What? What is it?"

"It's Henrietta," she answered. "I want Lem. I want Lem to come to me."

She heard Lem whine, "You leave me alone, you!" and then the reassuring voice of Johnnie, and the door opened a wide crack, and Lem, rubbing his eyes, stepped out. Freeman's door closed.

"Come with me, Lem," she said, and led the half-awakened boy to her room. He staggered to her bed and threw himself upon it, asleep the moment he touched it.

"Lem!" she called sharply, standing over him.

The boy opened his eyes slowly, looking up into her face.

"Hello!" he said. "I--I been asleep, I guess--"

"Yes. That does n't matter. You will be all right presently. I want you to tell me the truth--the honest-to-God, cross-your-heart truth, Lem--about that money. Where did you get it, Lem?"

"I ain't goin' to tell you," the boy said.

Henrietta took his hand. She spoke kindly. "Yes; you must tell me, Lem," she urged. "Did you steal it?"

"No, I did n't steal it."

"That's honest-to-God, cross-your-heart, Lem?"

"Yes. I did n't steal it an' anybody that says I did is an old liar, that's what she is, an' I don't care who knows it. She's a mean, old liar--"

"Wait, Lem. Maybe nobody is a liar. Can I believe that you did n't steal it? Can I bet my bottom dollar on that, Lem?"

"Yes; you bet you can bet your bottom dollar on it. You can bet your boots on it. I don't steal--only old junk. I don't steal money--"

"No, I know you don't, Lem. But Miss Susan found the money in your pocket, did n't she?"

"I don't care where she found it. I don't care what that old devil finds. I'll get even with her!"

"Did she find it in your pocket, Lem?"

"Yes. Only that old Alberson had to hold me. I bet if *he* had n't held me--"

"Of course. And who put the money in your pocket, Lem?"

"None of your--I mean, I won't say."

"Did *you*?" Henrietta urged. "Did you put it in?"

"I won't say."

"But, listen to me, Lem. Somebody stole some of Miss Susan's money--"

"I know. *He* did it," Lem said. "Freeman Todder did it."

"But never mind that now. Miss Susan does n't know that. Did Freeman, here, put the money in your pocket?"

"I won't say. I tell you I won't say. Nobody can get me to say."

"Lem," said Henrietta seriously, "you don't understand what all this means. I'm trying to help you. If Miss Susan keeps on thinking you stole her money she will send you away. She'll send you to jail and to reform school and you'll be sad and unhappy all your life. I want you to be happy--"

"I'll bust out of jail if she sends me, drat her old hide!" Lem declared.

"No; you can't. You'll be watched every minute. Boys never do break out of jail, Lem. They just stay there and are *so* miserable. So what I want to do is to help you now. So you need n't be sent away at all."

"If she won't send me I'm goin'away, anyway," Lem declared. "I won't stay in any old house with such an old hyena pickin' on me all the time."

"Miss Susan doesn't understand you, Lem, and you don't understand her. But that does n't matter now. If you go away you must not go with the name of a thief fastened on you--" The door opened and Freeman Todder came into the room.

"Look here," he said angrily, "I want my pants. I won't stand any nonsense. You give them to me."

"You're insane!" said Henrietta. "I know nothing about them."

"Oh! that's it, is it?" he said. "All right!"

He began searching the room.

"Well, I ain't a thief, an' I don't care who says I am," Lem was saying. "I did n't take her old money. She took mine, an' she's an old thief, an' I'll tell her so to her face. An' I'll make her give it back to me. I'll set the police on her."

"Listen, Lem, won't you please try to help me? Won't you tell me where you got that money?"

"No, I won't!" the boy declared stubbornly. "But I'll tell her who stole her money. I'll tell her *he* stole it, an' when she searches him she'll find it."

"I'll be hanged if she will, unless she finds my pants," Freeman growled.

"If you won't help me, I can't help you, Lem," said Henrietta. "Just to tell on Mr. Todder will not help at all. Won't you just whisper to me where you got the money?"

"No, I won't! I'd rather be killed first!"

Freeman was throwing articles of clothing from Henrietta's closet upon the bedroom floor. She hardly glanced at him.

"Of course! I know where you got the money, Lem," she said. "Your father gave it to you. Is n't that so?"

She saw the startled look in the boy's eyes.

"I won't say, I tell you!" he declared.

"Then your father did give it to you?"

"I won't tell you!"

"And I can tell Miss Susan your father gave it to you?"

"No. He said--no; I won't tell you who gave it to me! I won't tell you what he said!"

"What did your father say?"

"I won't tell you what he said! None of your old business what he said!"

"I see!" said Henrietta. "Your father is going away and he gave you the money to follow him. Is that it?"

"I won't tell you!"

"You need n't tell me, Lem," Henrietta said. "No more, at any rate. You have told me all about it." She turned to Freeman. "What you are hunting is not here," she said, "and you are only making yourself ridiculous. Go back to your room. When I am ready I will give you what you are hunting, but first, Freeman, you will have to tell Miss Susan who took her money."

Freeman looked at his wife with hatred in his eyes. He opened his mouth to speak, but thought better of it and went out and into his own room. The moment her door was dosed, Henrietta took Miss Susan's money from her waist and hid it carefully, where she felt sure it would be safe.

Poor Lem was already sound asleep and Henrietta removed her shoes and a few of her outer garments, wrapped herself in her bathrobe, and in a minute she too was asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

Henrietta's first act on awakening was to look for Lem and, as she might have expected, the boy was gone. Her next was to look at her watch. She felt she must have slept until midday, so different was her physical and mental condition than when she had thrown herself on the bed. For some quite unaccountable reason she felt tremendously strong and buoyant. For a few moments she could not grasp why she felt so, and then she suddenly realized that her cheer of mind was due to the fact that Freeman, for the only time in years, was not a threatening menace, but absolutely under her control. Until she chose to permit him to be clad, he was her prisoner, and as her prisoner, subject to her orders.

When she had drawn on her kimona and tiptoed out of her room on her way to the bath, she glanced at Freeman's closed door and smiled. No need to worry about Freeman for an hour or two.

Half an hour later, fully garbed, she stepped from her room again, and this time she tapped on Freeman's door, gently at first and then more vigorously. There was no response. Henrietta opened the door and looked into the room. It was empty; Freeman was gone.

In the hall, in the corner nearest Henrietta's door, stood a wood box, receptacle for the wood used in the winter stoves, and above this the plaster and lath had been broken. It was in the hole in the wall thus made that Henrietta had thrust Freeman's trousers, crowding them down out of sight. They were still there, and as if in answer to another query that came into Henrietta's mind at the moment, she heard Gay's voice, brisk and happy, speaking to Lorna below. If Freeman had fled, he had not persuaded Gay to fly with him. Probably he had fled with such covering as he could improvise, hoping to arouse one of his boon companions and beg what was necessary, Henrietta thought.

When she reached the hall below she found Gay, Lorna, and Johnnie Alberson there, laughing over some item in the morning *Eagle*.

"Lem has gone," she said.

"Good for Lem," said Johnnie, and he handed her the paper, pointing to a headline.

"Riverbank Loses Only Saint," the headline said. "Little Brother of Stray Dogs Departs for Parts Unknown. Holy Life Too Strenuous For Saint Harvey of Riverbank."

Lorna and Johnnie, it seemed, had already breakfasted. Henrietta, leaving the three to laugh over the article in the paper, went to the dining-room and through it into the kitchen, where Miss Susan was thumping at a piece of wet wood in her stove, using the lid-lifter.

"Lem has run away," Henrietta said without preliminaries.

"And good riddance. Hope I never set eyes on him again, the mean thief! Him and his pa, indeed! Robbin' and cheatin'!"

"No, Lem's not a thief. Here is the money you missed."

Miss Susan looked at the bills.

"What's that money? I got mine off of him. He did n't go and steal it over again? You don't mean to tell me that young--"

"No. It wasn't your money you found on him. That was money his father gave him--to run away with, I suppose. He did not take your money at all. Miss Susan, Freeman has gone."

Miss Susan put down the lid-lifter and turned to Henrietta.

"Gone? Run off, you mean? Well, a nice kettle of fish him and you are, I must say, you and your fine husband, lyin' and fightin' with Carter Bruce all over my front yard, and makin' love to Gay and Johnnie! I never heard of such go-ings-on in all my born days. What'd that worthless husband of yours run of! for?"

She looked at Henrietta keenly.

"It was him stole my money, was n't it?" she said.

"Yes."

"Then he's good riddance, and that's all I've got to say about that," said Susan. "And the farther that worthless Lem goes and the longer he stays, the better I'll like it. When you going?"

"Now. Any time. Whenever you wish," said Henrietta.

"You can't go too soon to suit me," said Miss Susan. "I've had enough and a plenty of the whole lot of you. If you want to get yourself some breakfast you can, and if you don't want to, you need n't, but I hope I won't see you around too long. I've got to get your room ready for the next boarder that comes, and I'd like to have it empty by noon."

Henrietta hesitated, but only for a moment. "Of course I'll go if you want me to go, Miss Susan," she said cheerfully. "You've been very kind and patient with me. I just want to thank you for that. I'll never forget that. I *will* have breakfast

before I go. I'm ravenous this morning."

She found the coffee-pot on the back of the stove, and Miss Susan grudgingly opened the oven door and let Henrietta see where her breakfast had been kept warm. Henrietta carried it to the dining-room. She was eating when Johnnie Alberson came in and took a seat opposite her.

"I'm going away," she said.

"You! Going away! Where? What for?" he asked.

"Miss Susan needs my room; she expects another boarder."

"But, hold on! You don't mean it, do you? Where are you going?"

"I don't know--yet. Away from Riverbank, I suppose. I have n't had time to think yet. She just told me."

"But, look here!" he said. "You mean she is sending you away?"

"It seems to be that."

"It does, does it?" said Alberson, and he was out of his chair and on his way to the kitchen, and did not wait, although she called, "Johnnie, wait!" after him.

Henrietta ate her breakfast slowly. She could hear Johnnie's briskly cheerful tone and Miss Susan's voice--at first hard and obstinate, and then yielding. Johnnie came back into the dining-room and sat opposite Henrietta again.

"That's all right now," he said. "You don't have to go unless you want to. She's willing to have you stay."

"She is? Miss Susan is? Whatever did you say to her?"

Johnnie leaned forward and smiled at Henrietta.

"I'm an Alberson, you know; one of the River-bank Albersons," he said. "We are used to having our way."

"But that's no reason--that's--she would not let that change her mind. You said something else."

"Why, yes; I did," said Johnnie. "I told her you were going to marry an Alberson. I told her you were going to marry me."

Henrietta put down her fork and looked at him squarely.

"But I told you I had a husband. You know I have a husband in Colorado. I told you so."

"Of course. I remember that. I honor you for that, Henrietta. But of course it was all a lie. You have no husband in Colorado. Have you?" Henrietta tried to look into his eyes and say she had, but his eyes would not look into hers seriously. They twinkled mischievously and looked through her eyes into her heart. She drew a deep breath, like one drowning, and looked down.

"No," she said. "I have no husband--in Colorado."



CHAPTER XXII

Moses Shuder, having paid Saint Harvey of Riverbank his good money, went back to his own junkyard feeling high elation. The great ambition that had urged him ever since he had begun, a raw immigrant, was consummated. He was the mightiest Junk King of Riverbank. He need fear no paltry competition. He could put prices down and he could buy or refuse to buy, and he could put prices up, and no one would interfere. He saw himself the future great man of his people, bringing his downtrodden compatriots from Russia, sending them out upon the roads of free America to glean the waste metals and rags, setting them up in small trades, financing them, being a father to them. He had eliminated Harvey Redding.

But as he considered the transaction he began to worry. It is the duty of every man, in making a bargain, to make a good bargain--in fact, the best possible bargain--and Shuder began to fear he had not done that. Saint Harvey had accepted his offer almost too promptly.

His knowledge of values quieted this fear somewhat. The junk he had bought was worth more than he had paid for it, he knew, and the yard was worth more than one hundred dollars per year. Suddenly the awful thought came to him that, although he had paid Saint Harvey cash money, he had nothing to show for it. He had no "paper," no receipt, no lease, nothing! Not even a witness! The cold perspiration oozed from his every pore. He had been cheated!

Moses Shuder, lying beside his soundly sleeping--and snoring--wife, squirmed with shame at the thought that he had been such a fool. He pulled at his beard angrily. So be it! He would find this Harvey Redding and make him give a paper. In the morning--

He suddenly sat bolt upright.

"Rosa, hush!" he whispered, putting his palm under her chin and closing her mouth.

"What is it, Moses? Fire? Thieves?"

"Hush! Thieves," he whispered. He slid out of bed and drew on his trousers. From the lean-to where he kept his most precious junk--his copper and his lead--came the subdued clink of metal. Stealthily Shuder glided to his back door. He glided to the door of the lean-to.

"Thief! I got you!" he cried, and pounced upon Lem.

"You leave me alone! You let go of me!" the boy cried. But Shuder had him fast, and scolding in Yiddish he dragged the boy from the lean-to and into the shack.

Rosa lit the oil lamp.

"Sure!" panted Shuder. "Young Redink! Stealing chunk! Sure!"

Lem was in a panic. Fear, such as he had never experienced, cowed him. To the mind of youth the strange foreigner seems a thing to be jeered and hooted in the open day, but in the homes and churches and synagogues of the foreigners are believed to lurk strange mysteries; deep, unfathomable, blood-curdling, weird ways and doings, especially dire when wrought upon boys. Lem, in Shuder's grasp, did not see the poor shack with its grotesque furnishings rescued from purchases of offcast second-hand things. He did not see the tawdry intimate surroundings of a poor Jew struggling to wrest comfort and life from a none too friendly environment. Lem saw a perilous twilight in which might be worked strange tortures, awful incantations, black wizardry. Lem was scared stiff.

"Stealink!" said Shuder bitterly. The poor man was, indeed, almost in tears. His natural anger was all but lost in a feeling of hopelessness that he would ever be able to protect his property in this land of scorn.

"You should gif him by a policemans right away," said Rosa. "He should go to chail. Stealink at night!"

"Vait!" said Shuder, upraising his free hand. "Boy, vere is your fadder?"

"I don't know," Lem whimpered. "How do I know where he is? He don't have to tell me, does he? You let me go, I tell you!"

"Should you tell me vere is your fadder, I let you go," said Shuder. "Stop viggling. I don't hurt you. Why you steal my chunk?"

"I did n't steal it. I just took some."

"Why?" Shuder insisted.

Lem looked up at the Jew.

"I won't tell," he said.

"Then to chail!" said Shuder.

"Well--I wanted it," said Lem reluctantly, and suddenly he broke down and began to cry. "I wanted to go to pop. I wanted to go to him. He said I could go where he is."

"Rosa, hush!" said Shuder when his wife tried to speak again, and he began patiently, and with the little English he

could command, to comfort Lem and let him know nothing dire was to happen to him.

Slowly, Lem's fear of some mysterious fate was lessened, and again and again he heard that Shuder, too, wished to find Saint Harvey. Not to harm him, Shuder assured Lem; only to get a "paper" that Saint Harvey had forgotten to leave. The importance of this paper to Shuder loomed vast as the Jew spoke of it again and again. In spite of his fear and hatred, Lem felt that the "paper" was something Shuder should not be robbed of--that it was some sort of Magna Charta of his life which Harvey had carried away by mistake.

"You won't get a policeman after me?" Lem begged.

"Sure, no! I gif you right by it. Sure, no!"

"Well, I ain't goin' to tell you. Pop he told me not to tell. But I can't help it if you go where I go, can I?"

"Nobody could," said Shuder. "How could you?"

"Well, then, you let me go an' I'll go. I'll go right where he told me to, because that's what he said for me to do. And I can't help it if you follow me. Only you better get ready to walk a long ways, because it's sixty miles, I guess. Anyway, I guess it is."

Shuder stroked his beard.

"Could a man go by the railroad?"

"Sure he could, if he had the money. Was n't that what I wanted some junk for--to sell it, so I could go on the train? But I have n't got any money. So I got to walk."

"Mebby I should pay," said Shuder.

Lem considered this.

"I guess that's all right," he said, "if you want to. We'd get there sooner, anyway."

Lem would not, however, tell where they were to go even then, and the next morning Shuder had to press close behind the boy at the ticket window to overhear him ask for a ticket to Burlington. He sat beside the boy all the way, too, never moving far from him even when they changed cars at the junction. At noon he fed Lem from the lunch Rosa had provided, and he bought Lem two apples from the train-boy. Shuder was close behind the boy when Lem asked at the post-office window for a letter for Lemuel Redding. Although he could not read, he peered over Lem's shoulder as Lem read the letter the clerk handed out.

"Pa ain't here no more," said Lem, looking up at Shuder. "He's gone somewheres."

Shuder grasped the letter from Lem's hand and stared at it, turning it over and over.

"Please, misder," he begged of a man who passed, "you should read this to me."

The man took the letter.

"Dear Lem," he read. "I'm going on from here because the Jews have the junk business all tied up here from what I can see, and it's no place for me. No telling where I'll land up at. You better go back to your Aunt Susan and wait until I send for you. Maybe it won't be as long as it looks like now."

"And the name? The name?" cried Shuder. "Redding; it looks like Henry Redding, or something like that."

"Well, I won't go back," said Lem. "I don't care what he says. I won't go back to that old aunt. I don't care if I starve to death, I won't go back to her."

Shuder had heard about Miss Susan on the way down from Riverbank, for Lem had been full of a sense of injustice and had had to talk to some one about it or burst. Lem and his troubles were none of Shuder's affair, but, on the other hand, Saint Harvey and the "paper" were, and Lem was Shuder's only link with Saint Harvey now.

"Do I ask you to go back by her, Lem'vel?" Shuder demanded. "No! But why should you worry? Ain't I got two houses? Ain't I got two chunkyards? Ain't I got plenty room? I esk you, come by me awhile, Lem'vel."

"Say, what you mean?" Lem asked. "You want me to go an' live at your house?"

"Sure!" said Shuder.

Lem looked at the Jew.

"All right," he said. "Until I get a word from pop. I bet you don't have so many dishes to wash, anyway."

Shuder raised a hand.

"Listen! Listen, Lem'vel!" he said solemnly. "I gif you my word you should n't wash even your face if you don't want to."

"All right, I'll come," said Lem.

CHAPTER XXIII

To his very considerable surprise, Lem did not find residing with the Shuders a painful experience. Rosa, for all her strange ways of doing things and her incomprehensible objection to chickens killed in any but a certain way, was a better cook than Saint Harvey, and knew how to prepare things that a boy's appetite found delicious. Lem had to sleep in the lean-to, on an old iron cot set among the piles of junk, but it was summer and hot and he enjoyed that.

Shuder made him work, but it was work that Lem liked; the kind he had always done for his father, and he had only about half as much of it to do as his father had made him do. He enjoyed helping with the horse, harnessing and unharnessing it. There was only one thing Lem refused to do--he would not go out of the junkyard. For a week he kept under close cover. Then, one night, he stole away, and, keeping in the alley shadows, made his way to Miss Susan's back gate. He did not risk the rusty hinges creaking, but climbed the fence, and dodged to the shadow of the house.

Miss Susan was in the kitchen. Lem went around the house. On the porch Lorna sat, on one of the steps as usual, and Henrietta and Johnnie Alberson had chairs. It was Henrietta Lem wanted. He seated himself under the drooping spirea bushes that edged the porch, and waited. Presently Lorna went up.

Lem heard a chair move on the porch and hoped Johnnie Alberson was going, but he was to have no such luck. He heard Johnnie speak.

"Henrietta," he said, "when are we going to be married?"

"Never," Henrietta answered, but not as if the question had offended her.

"But I'm not going to take that for an answer," he said. "I can't. It would make a liar of me. I told Miss Susan I was going to marry you, and she rather depends on it, poor soul."

"I told you, Johnnie, I have a husband. It is ridiculous, sinful, for you to talk to me of marrying."

"I see! Which husband do you mean, Etta? The Colorado one who was and then was n't?"

"Oh! please don't!" Henrietta begged. "I can't tell you. Not now. Not yet. Perhaps never. I--"

"If you don't mean the Colorado myth," said Johnnie, quite unabashed, "you must mean Freeman. Do you?"

There was a momentary silence.

"Yes, I do mean Freeman," Henrietta said then. "How did you know he was my husband?"

"Well, you see," said Johnnie slowly but wickedly, "he sold you to me. The night of the row about Lem stealing Miss Susan's money, Freeman came to my room after you had taken Lem, and we had a frank talk--quite a frank talk. So I bought you."

"John!"

"Yes; I did. You cost me three hundred dollars, too--a lot of money to pay for a wife these days. You cost me two hundred--the money he stole from me--and another hundred in cold cash that I gave him to get away on. And my very best pants. That's three hundred dollars plus. So that settles that."

"He is still my husband."

"But not for long. He threw in a promise to that effect. I made him. He's getting a divorce now."

"But he can't. I've always been more than faithful."

"Yes, he can. You stole his trousers. That's grounds for the strongest kind of divorce. That's cruelty *de luxe*. So that's settled. When are you going to marry me?"

Henrietta, in spite of herself, laughed, but was serious again instantly.

"Never, John," she said. "I'm not going to do any more marrying. I'm going to do penance for the marrying I have done in the past. If what you say is true and Freeman frees me, I--"

"What?"

"I want to take that poor Lem boy and make a good man of him. I want to do in Lem what I undid in Freeman. I want that to be my penance." Johnnie laughed, and arose.

"All right! We'll leave it that way to-night. Good-night, Henrietta. You've some penance ahead of you, if I know that boy! Good-night." Henrietta sat thinking after Johnnie was gone. She had many things she wished to let drift through her mind, trying each as it came up.

Johnnie Alberson first of all. If Freeman did get a divorce--

"Say!"

Henrietta, although seldom nervous, was startled by this voice coming from the bushes.

"Who is that?" she asked, her heart standing still for a moment. Her first thought was that it was Freeman returned.

"It's Lem," the boy whispered. "Is he gone? Can I come out?"

"Oh, Lem! You did frighten me! Yes, come here. Where have you been? You poor child--"

"I ain't been anywhere," Lem said. "I'm to Shuder's--to his junkyard. I'm junkin' for him an' he's keepin' me."

"Shuder is? Who is Shuder?"

Lem came and stood by her side.

"He's the Jew. He's the one that pop could n't abide. He's all right, though, Shuder is. Say--"

"Yes?"

"You know my pop--well, he went away. So I went. But he was n't there. He said he'd send word to me when he was somewhere else--he said he'd send it here to Aunt Susan's house. But he did n't, did he?"

"No; I'm quite sure he has not."

"Well, I guess he don't want me, anyhow," said Lem. "I guess that's what's the matter. Only--"

"Yes, Lem?"

"If he does send word you'll let me know, won't you? Because I'll be down to Shuder's. You will, won't you? Only don't let that old thief aunt know where I am, will you? Because she'd jail me, darn her! She'd do that in a minute."

"Lem," said Henrietta, "would you like to be my boy?"

"Sure! I'd like it if I was. Only I ain't."

"But if I could have you? You would like to be my boy, would n't you? And live with me? Not in this house; some other house."

"What you going to do; buy me off of Aunt Susan?"

Henrietta laughed ruefully. If it came to that she was herself in pawn to Miss Sue.

"'Cause she's got first rights to me," Lem said. "Unless pop gets me back from her. Say--"

"What, Lem?"

"I guess maybe pop ain't goin' to try very hard to get me back. I guess maybe he don't want to bother about it. I guess, if the Jews have got the upper hand of the junk business everywhere, pop'll go into the saint business somewhere again. So he won't want me then. So I guess, if he don't send me word pretty soon, I'll go somewhere else. You know--where there ain't no old aunt that wants to jail me."

"You mean run away, Lem?"

"Yes. I can get a job, I guess, junking. I don't mind Jews. They cook pretty good. They don't make you wash the dishes, anyway." Henrietta put her arm around the boy, but he did not like it and squirmed, and she released him.

"How much does your father owe Miss Susan?" she asked.

"I don't know. A lot, I guess. Only he paid her some. He owes her what's left of what he owed her. Lots of money, I guess."

"A hundred? Two hundred?"

"I guess so. I don't know."

"Well, no matter. I'll let you know if any word comes from your father. But, promise me this, Lem--you won't run away until you let me know. I won't tell. Will you promise that?"

"Yes."

"And come to me any time you want to. If you get into trouble, come to me. Any night or any day. I'll always sit here awhile after the others go. You'll do that--come to me if you are in trouble?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better go. It's very late."

"All right."

The boy dropped over the edge of the porch. For a minute or two longer Henrietta sat; then she went in.



CHAPTER XXIV

When Henrietta reached her room she lighted the gas and stood for many minutes before her mirror looking at her face as it was reflected there. It was thus she took stock of herself, trying to find and appraise the real Henrietta. The face she saw surprised her, for she had come to her room feeling that she was a wrecked and ruined Henrietta. She had half expected to see the face of a hag, lined with wrinkles of moral ugliness, with eyes of a slinking liar. She saw the face of a comely woman, younger by far than her actual years warranted. On the face were no lines whatever, either of age or sin. It was the frank face with the frank eyes of unsoiled innocence.

She bent nearer and studied her eyes. They looked back at her with no signs of deceitfulness. They were clear, steady, honest. Her troubles, her mistakes, her prevarications, had left no marks. She stood back, so that her full bust was reflected, and she tilted the mirror and stood away from it so that she saw all of her figure.

She had meant, if the mirror told her that, to accept the verdict that she was old, decaying, morally and physically vile. Instead she found herself to be all she had imagined she was not. From outward view she was lovely, and her eyes refused to tell her she was depraved.

Henrietta undressed slowly, pausing again and again to drop into periods of thoughtfulness, out of which she came slowly. She was trying to rearrange her life, as if she meant, before she slept, to draw an indelible line between the Henrietta she had been and the Henrietta she meant to be.

One thing she saw clearly. There must be restitution for the ill she had wrought Freeman; for she still held herself to blame for what he had become. This restitution--since there was no longer hope of Freeman--must be made vicariously to Lem.

There were other things she must do. The lies she had told must be untold. Then, too, Carter Bruce and Gay must be set right on love's path, for Gay still held eternal resentment against Carter. Johnnie Alberson must be turned away forever. If she could hold her school position another year, or perhaps two years, she must pay Miss Susan and Gay and Lorna, and reimburse Johnnie for Freeman's pilferings. It could all be done. She fell asleep finally resolved on all these things, and slept peacefully.

Lem, for his part, went back to his lean-to and his cot among the junk in the same mind as before. He did not worry much about what women said. When the time came, if he did not hear from his father, he would cut loose from Riverbank.

Henrietta made it a point to see Johnnie Alberson the next morning before he went to his drug store, and told him, as one saying the final, unalterable word, that she would never marry him. He received this sad information cheerfully.

"Did n't think you would," he said. "Had n't the least hope of it."

"I'm glad," Henrietta said. "It makes it better when you feel so."

"Oh, I've always felt that way," he said jauntily. "I never expected you to marry me. I expected to marry you. And I still expect to. And I'm going to."

He smiled at her.

"But, wait," she said, "I tell you--"

"Did you ever know me to fail in anything I ever attempted?" he asked.

She said nothing.

"Well, I do, plenty of times," he laughed, "but this is not one of them."

"You'll find that it is one of them," she said, meaning it, too, but he did not seem to worry about it.

Miss Susan, since her interview with Johnnie Alberson, had been exceedingly cold to Henrietta, merely tolerating her. Now, when Henrietta turned into the house, Miss Susan was waiting for her in the hall.

"Well, Henrietta," she said, "I must say I'm thankful, it coming just at this time when, goodness knows! I'm hard enough put to it to make ends meet. And I will say I never expected to get it. So I'm thankful."

She handed Henrietta two slips of paper. Henrietta stared at them with amazement, for one was a receipt "in full to date," and the other a receipt, "for board, in advance, to October 8th."

"I don't say I've figured it exactly right," said Miss Susan, "but I'll make right what ain't right. And as for Mr. Todder's receipt--"

"But why? What do you mean?" asked Henrietta. "Why are you giving me these?"

"I give because I'm asked to," said Miss Susan a trifle tartly.

"But the money! I did not pay you any money."

"Nor did you," said Miss Susan, "although I might well suppose you knew it had been given. Mr. Alberson--" Henrietta colored.

"Did he dare pay this?" she asked angrily.

"He dared hand it over, as he had been told to do and as it was his duty to do," said Miss Susan. "It's infamous! He had no right--"

"Right or no right was not for him to say," Miss Susan said. "When your own husband sent the money--"

"Freeman? Freeman sent money? That's nonsense! Freeman sent the money to Mr. Alberson? That's absurd!"

"Absurd or not absurd it was so sent," said Miss Susan, "and I only hope he came by it honestly; but that is no concern of mine. Paid I am, to date and more than to date, and properly grateful, I must say."

Henrietta folded the two receipts slowly.

"Very well!" she said.

She was furious, but she had no desire to quarrel over the matter with Miss Susan. She would let Johnnie Alberson know, however, that such things could not be done. It was, as she had said, infamous. It was effrontery such as she had never imagined possible. She longed to rush to Johnnie's shop immediately and tell him so. Of course, however, that would not do. She must wait until he came.

She was interrupted by Gay and Lorna, who came down the stairs.

"Going for a walk," Gay said. "Put on a hat and come, Henrietta."

Henrietta slipped the receipts into her waist and took her hat from the hall rack. A walk with Gay and Lorna just then suited her well. They went up the hill, and turned, going toward the country.

"I want to tell you something," she said, when they were striding along the country road. "There is no William Vane. I lied about him. I made him up."

Gay laughed.

"Of course. We knew that, Henrietta."

"I suppose so. I was clumsy--toward the last. I was worried. About Freeman."

Gay closed her lips firmly.

"Freeman is my husband," said Henrietta.

For a full minute Gay said nothing.

"Is that another lie?" she asked then, but her voice was choked.

"I deserve that," said Henrietta. "No, it is not a lie. It is the full truth. Freeman is my husband. He is also a thief. He stole from Johnnie Alberson. That is why he fled. So, you see, we are a nice couple--a thief and a liar."

Strangely enough, Lorna put her arm around Henrietta's waist. Gay stopped short. The next moment she was at the side of the road, sunk down upon the grass, her face buried in her arms, sobbing. Lorna went to her, and Henrietta stood before her.

"He is not worth it," she said, meaning Gay's tears.

"Oh, I know! I know!" Gay wept. "It's not that. I don't know what it is. I did n't like him. I hated him. I knew he was bad. I don't know what's the matter. I'm just so miserable! I'm so wicked; so mean!"

"Don't cry; don't cry, Gay," Lorna was begging.

"Well, I can't help it. I've been so mean to him; to Car--to Carter. And he loves--he loves me so. He's so good and--and good and--and I've been so--"

"Hush! It will be all right, Gay," Lorna comforted. "Stop now. Pretend you've not been crying, anyway; here comes a farmer."

Gay wiped her eyes and looked down the road. Up the hill a rig was coming slowly, one flat wheel thumping the road with a rattle of loose tire at each revolution, while it, or another wheel, screeched nerve-rackingly. In the shafts was an aged gray horse that stopped now and then to swish its tail and turn its head in an attempt to bite a horsefly on its withers. In the cart sat a fat man, a very fat man, and he objurgated the old horse vociferously.

"Dod-baste you!" he cried. "Get along there. Giddap! Go on! Dod-baste you, you're enough to make a saint swear, you old lummox, you!"

Saint Harvey of Riverbank was returning from his travels.

CHAPTER XXV

That noon Henrietta hurried across the road to the Bruce mansion and found Judge Bruce on the porch, wiping his face and resting, after his walk up the hill, before going in for his midday meal.

"Carter here?" she asked rather breathlessly.

"Why, no, he ain't," said the old Judge. "Set down, won't you, Henrietta? Hot day. No, Carter ain't home. He's gone on a trip. Out to Nevada or somewhere. Some sort of business Johnnie Alberson sent him off on. Wasn't nothing I'd do as well at, was it?"

It was not.

"Johnnie Alberson sent him?" exclaimed Henrietta.

"That's right," said the Judge. "Looks sort of suspicious to me," he added with a twinkle. "Ain't ever heard of Johnnie having a wife, have you? Nevada's where folks go to get rid of them entangling alliances, I've heard tell."

Henrietta looked at him acutely.

"He didn't say why he was going? Carter did n't?" she asked.

"He might have, and then again he might n't have," said the Judge. "No use pumpin' me, Henrietta. Us law folks can't be pumped."

He waited and then asked:

"Heard from that Freeman Todder boarder of Miss Susan's lately?"

Henrietta studied the old man's face.

"You won't tell me anything?" she asked.

"Not a mite," said the Judge. "Ain't no use askin' it," and he chuckled.

Henrietta put her hand to her cheek, so hot was the cheek that it was like flame to her hand. She turned from the Judge and saw Johnnie Alberson coming up the hill, as jaunty and unconcerned as if the day was not broiling hot.

"Oh!" wailed Henrietta, and she sped down and across the street and intercepted the obnoxious druggist. He received her with a smile.

"Hot day," he said genially.

Henrietta brushed this aside.

"Did you send Carter Bruce West? To attend to my divorce? Did you dare interfere to that extent in my affairs? Did you?" she demanded.

"Bruce? Carter Bruce?" said Johnnie. "Why, yes, come to think of it, I did send him West on some sort of a divorce business. You see, I thought such things went better when personally conducted--"

"I don't care what you think! Did you dare to pay my bill to Miss Susan? Did you dare do that?"

"Oh! was that your bill I paid?" asked Johnnie. "I did pay some board bill. I do remember that now."

"I won't have it!" declared Henrietta. "It's monstrous! It's outrageous. I never heard of such unwarranted--"

"Neither did I," said Johnnie. "I'd be ashamed of myself--if I was ashamed." And then, seriously, "But why shouldn't I? Two months from now it would be all right--when we are married. What are two months? Sixty days!"

"I've told you I'm not going to marry you. That I meant; and, more than ever, I mean it now. You have insulted me beyond measure."

"Yes; awfully," said Johnnie. "And that isn't all. I've cancelled what your Freeman took from me. I'm a cave man. I'm dubbing you with a modern club. I'm getting you in my villainous toils."

"It is not a thing to be jocular about," said Henrietta. "I will not have it!"

"All right," said Johnnie cheerfully. "What are you going to do not to have it? Look, Henrietta; why be so obstinate? Don't you like me?"

"I will not have it!" she could only repeat.

"That's not what bothers me," said Johnnie. "What I want to know is whether you will have me?"

"I will not have you!" said Henrietta. "I'll never marry any man! Least of all you--after this."

"You'll just take Lem and go off and be a grandmother to him," said Johnnie. "That's nice. Well--it's almost too hot to eat, isn't it?"

What could be done with such a man? There was nothing Henrietta could do. She had no money to repay what he had paid Miss Susan, and she did not know where Freeman had gone. Nevada might mean Reno, but old Judge Bruce was no fool, and Nevada might not even mean Nevada--probably did not. She stopped short where she stood. Johnnie

tipped his hat politely and went on.

Later that day Henrietta sat in the cool parlor of the boarding-house trying to think what to do. She had gone over her slender assets and had found them all too scant to permit her to leave Riverbank, taking Lem or not taking him. To her came Miss Susan bearing a soiled envelope.

"A boy fetched this. He said there was n't any answer," Miss Susan said. "He was that Swatty boy, and I gave him a good piece of my mind about thieving, while I had the chance."

Henrietta tore open the envelope.

The note was from Harvey Redding. It asked her to come, if she could, to see him, at the junkyard of Moses Shuder. "About Lemuel," the note said. Henrietta went.

She found the late saint in the junkyard tossing old iron into Shuder's wagon.

"I would n't have asked you to come here," Harvey said, wiping his face, which was streaked with perspiration and rust, "only on account of Lem yonder. Lem's scared. Lem's afraid, now that I've come back, his aunt'll get word that I'm back an' come an' fetch him an' jail him. He's mortal afraid of that aunt, Lem is. Don't know as I blame him so dod-basted much, either. I'm sort of scared of her myself."

"No reason, Mr. Redding," Henrietta said. "She's cross--sometimes--but her heart is kind."

"Lem don't feel so," said Harvey. "Seems like she's dead set against Lem. Well, what I asked you to come for--seein' how I was scared to go up to Susan's house--was about somethin' Lem said about you wantin' to have him. I don't know but I'm willin'--"

"But don't you want him yourself?" asked Henrietta with a leap of her heart.

"I might want him, dod-baste it," said Harvey, "but I ain't got him. She's got him. I pawned him to her, an' since I've went into partnership with this here Shuder--"

"What?"

"Well, he ain't so dod-basted bad, at that, when you come to know him," said Harvey. "He is sort of set against ham, but if other food is plenty I can git along. An' the dicker I made with him, as I was sayin', is goin' to take all my spare cash for quite a while. I guess him an' me, when we git things goin' right, is goin' to con-troll the junk business of this town, an' no mistake. We got a good combination in him an' me. He's a hard worker an' me--I've got the brains."

"But about Lem?"

"Well, that's it. Accordin' to these here terms of pardnership I'm goin' to have to put in all the spare cash I can get for quite some time, an' it looks like it would be years before I could git Lem out o' pawn, an' he does hate dod-bastedly to be pawned to his Aunt Susan, he does. So if you want to unpawn him an' git him pawned to you, I ain't got no objections."

"And you, Lem?" asked Henrietta. "Would you rather be pawned to me?"

"I bet you!" the boy said eagerly. "I'd like it."

"I don't know! I'll see what I can do," Henrietta said. "I would love to have him. It is the greatest--the only desire of my heart."

She went straight to Miss Susan when she reached the house.

"Well, I don't know," Miss Susan said when

Henrietta had made her proposition, which was to take Lem out of pawn and pay Miss Susan the amount of Harvey's note a little at a time. "I won't tell a lie for nobody, not even to keep up a spite. Lem's been a sore trial to me, and I guess I ain't made to have boys around me. And there was a time when I thought you was the nicest woman I'd ever met. You've got a way with you that makes folks like you. Often and often I've wished I had time from my work so I could fix myself up and set on the porch with you and get real friendly with you. Mebby you won't know what I mean, Henrietta, but many a time I've wished I had time to get the grease off me and be so I could put my arm around you, like Lorna and Gay does. That's the sort of way you've got about you. I ain't ashamed to say there's been times I'd have given a lot if I could have kissed you."

"Yes, I know," said Henrietta. "I know the feeling."

"Mebby so," said Susan, "but if so I guess you never had it when you was thinkin' of me. Nor I ain't ever had it toward no other woman--or man--not even my ma, as far as I can remember; she was such a fretty, naggish creature, poor soul!"

Miss Susan wiped an eye, furtively.

"I had an aunt once that made doughnuts and smelled of pink soap," she went on. "The way I felt to her was the nearest like what I felt toward you. I don't know what to call it, unless it's like thoughts of a cool grave on a hot Sunday mornin' in church after a hard week's work. Henrietta, you're so *comfortable*! There just ain't no vinegar in you!"

"There is in you, Susan," Henrietta said. "Do you know how much?"

"Aplenty!"

"Just about one drop to a gallon of goodness," said Henrietta gayly. "A pint is a pound, is n't it? There must be about a hundred and sixty pints of you, Susan, and not over one pint is vinegar. Only you do let it all come to the top--you certainly do! And you are getting more and more vinegary."

"I have my trials."

"The trouble with both of us is that we're failures, and we are beginning to get old and it hurts," said Henrietta. "You were going to send me away, when I had n't a cent in the world, but that would not hurt me as much as it hurt you. Such things would turn three more pints of Susan into vinegar. And you 'll nag Lem, and there will be three more pints of vinegared Susan. Do you know what I've noticed, Susan?"

"What?"

"I'm like soda to you. When you're sour a good spoonful of me makes you fizz and boil, but when you finish fizzing and boiling you are as sweet as honey. I take the sour out of your vinegar."

"Yes, you do so," said Susan, sighing. "That's why it is so hard on me to have to not like you. I wish you was a different sort of woman."

"I am!" said Henrietta eagerly. "I am, and I mean to be. Try me! Let me have Lem!"

"Well, I'll think it over," said Miss Susan. Henrietta was happier than she had been for years. She went from Miss Susan happily. If she could have Lem she would have a life-work--an opportunity to redeem what she had done in harm to Freeman, and she would have a shield against Johnnie Albersen, too. Twice that afternoon she spoke to Miss Susan.

"I ain't had time to think it over," Miss Susan told her the first time. The second time Miss Susan said, "Well, I'm inclined. I'm more for than against, but I ain't quite sure yet. It looks like I would be."

For Gay and Carter Bruce Henrietta had no more fears. She was even able to treat Johnnie Albersen with haughty calm when he came home that evening. At supper she questioned Miss Susan with her eyes as that tired but tireless woman waited on the table.

"I'm goin' to say 'yes,' if I don't change my mind," Miss Susan whispered. "You see me before I go to bed."

Henrietta was as happy as a young girl that evening, for she felt sure Miss Susan would give up Lem. She carefully avoided Johnnie Albersen, doing so by putting her arm around Lorna's waist and going across to Gay's. What might happen to Johnnie Albersen she did not care at that moment.

"Henrietta," Lorna said, as they crossed the street, "do you know that Gay has had a letter from Carter Bruce? Carter says he is superintending a divorce. Do you know whose?"

"Freeman's," Henrietta answered. "Yes, I knew that, Lorna."

"Bruce writes that it is settled--that it is all arranged but the simple final details. Henrietta--"

"Yes?"

"You don't tell me anything about *this* love affair. Is Johnnie Albersen--has he--I mean--"

"He has asked me to marry him, if that is what you mean, Lorna," Henrietta said, "but if you mean you want to know whether I am going to marry him or not, I'm not. I'm not going to marry any one. I'm going to have Lem. I'm going to make Miss Susan give me Lem, and I'm going to live with Miss Susan, and we will all be as happy as the day is long."

"I think Johnnie likes you awfully well," Lorna ventured.

Henrietta gave Lorna's waist a little squeeze. "I know he does," she admitted cheerfully, "but I'm Lem's, and Lem is going to be mine." They found Gay in a tremble of happiness, for Carter Bruce had written other things in his letter than the mere report that Freeman would surely have his divorce in a few days. It was almost an hour later when Henrietta arose from her seat on Gay's porch and peered across the street.

"Who is that?" she asked. "Isn't that Lem and his father going up Miss Susan's steps? It is! Good-bye, Gay!"

She overtook the panting ex-saint before he reached Miss Susan's front door.

"Oh, Mr. Redding!" she exclaimed. "I know you've come to see your sister. Here--this is the easiest chair. You must be so tired. I 'll tell her you're here. You want a fan, I know."

"Well, 'tis dod-basted hot," said Harvey, taking the proffered fan. "It's hot enough to make a saint swear, if I was one, which I ain't. No, mam; never again! Saintin' ain't in my line--not as a regular job. I don't say that maybe I won't do a little at it off an' on, times when the junk business gets a mite slack, but I don't figger to go at it regular again. The way I figger it out is that bein' a saint is too easy for a big, strong man like me. Yes, mam, too easy. I may take a whack at it once in a while as a sort of amusement--"

It was evident that Harvey did not mean to use the chair Henrietta had drawn forward for him, and a great fear came to her that he would reach Miss Susan and reclaim Lem. She pushed past him into the hall, and locked the screen door, saying, "I 'll tell Miss Susan you are here," as she fled.

She threw open the kitchen door and stopped short. Miss Susan sat in her lone kitchen chair, and before her, seated on the edge of the table, was Johnnie Alberson.

"Oh!" Henrietta ejaculated, "I didn't know--"

"Wait!" said Miss Susan as Henrietta was about to go. "I'd as well say it now as any time, Henrietta. I can't let you have Lem."

Johnnie Alberson carefully smoothed the cloth over his well-rounded knee. He caught Henrietta's eye and smiled at her.

"Cave-man business, Henrietta," he said.

"What do you mean? Has Mr. Alberson been telling you I am not fit to have--" Henrietta began.

"Well, I'm sure I hate to disappoint you," Miss Susan interrupted, "but an Alberson is an Alberson, and cash money is cash money. Lem ain't pawned to me any more; he's pawned to Mr. Alberson. Mr. Alberson paid me what Brother Harvey owes me and Lem's his."

"Is this true?" Henrietta demanded. She felt she should be furiously angry, but for some reason she was not. Her heart, instead of pumping angry blood to her cheeks, leaped joyously, but she tried to put indignation in her voice. "Lem's mine," said Johnnie.

"I thought maybe you would n't mind, Henrietta," said Miss Susan, "seeing as how Johnnie tells me you and him are going to be married almost right away."

"Cave-man business, Henrietta," Johnnie repeated. "You see it's no use trying to fight me. I'm a rough one. I always have my way. An Alberson is an Alberson."

"But you can't do this thing!" Henrietta exclaimed. She would not be driven in this way. "You cannot hand a child around as if he was a chattel, passing him from one to another. There is such a thing as the law, and there are a father's rights. A child cannot be pawned. I'll see his father. I'll--"

Harvey Redding, waving his palm-leaf fan, opened the door that led from the kitchen garden and came into the kitchen. Miss Susan turned her head.

"Umph!" she said scornfully. "It's about time you showed up, I expect. A nice sort of a saint you are, ain't you? A pretty saint you are, runnin' off no one knows where to, and--"

"Now, Susan," said Harvey pleadingly, "I ain't no saint no more--"

"And leaving your son to be passed back and forth--"

"Now, you hold on!" said Harvey. "Don't you go tongue-lashin' me that way. I said I was n't no saint, an' I ain't, an' I'm liable to say what I feel like if you get me mad. You don't understand the first principles of bein' a saint, Susan Redding, an' you've got no right to criticize one. I've been one, an' I know. You're a nice one to talk about Lem, when all the time I've been wearin' my brain to a frazzle tryin' to figger out what would be best for him, goin' an' mortifyin' my flesh so I could be a saint an' he could be proud of me, an' goin' into the junk business an' out of it an' into it again. Don't you talk about saints! Why, dod-baste it, Susan! I'm more of a saint now that I ain't one than I was when I was one. Ain't I brought you the money right now to redeem Lem back?"

"You brought the money?"

Harvey tossed it into his sister's lap with a grand gesture.

"Money!" he puffed. "Count it! Ain't I brought it to you? An' ain't I gone an' give up my only son to Mr. Alberson here to keep forever, tearin' my feelin's to pieces for Lem's good so that boy could be raised up an Alberson? Ain't I signed a paper so that Mr. Alberson here can adopt Lem? An' you say I'm a nice sort of saint! Dod-baste it, I ain't either a nice sort of saint!"

Henrietta's face did redden now.

"Are you going to do that?" she asked Johnnie. "Are you going to adopt Lem?"

"Cave-man business," said Johnnie, grinning at her fondly. "If Lem is willing I'm going to adopt him."

"I'll fetch him. There ain't no time like the present to get things settled," said Miss Susan. While she was gone, the three stood silent, Johnnie still smiling at Henrietta. Harvey was the first to move. His roving eyes caught sight of a ham, partially demolished, on a platter on the table, and he moved toward it and cut a thick, unsaintly slice and laid it on a slice of bread.

"Lem likes ham," he said. "You give Lem plenty of ham and you won't have no trouble with him. He takes after me that way."

"Is that so, Lem?" asked Johnnie, as Lem appeared in the doorway, rubbing his sleepy eyes with one hand and trying to hold a coat around his waist with the other. "Do you like ham?"

"I guess so," the boy said. "I mean, yes, sir, I do."

"Then that's all right," said Johnnie. "You shall have lots of ham. Lem, how would you like me for a father?"

Lem looked towards his parent but Harvey's back was still turned.

"I'd like you all right, I guess," said Lem.

"Fine!" said Johnnie. "That's good, you see, because I 'm going to be your father from now on. And how would you like Miss Henrietta for a mother?"

"I'd like that fine!" said Lem, and he let his hand fall to Henrietta's hand and grasped it. "I'd like that bully!"

He looked up at Henrietta.

"Are you goin' to be?" he asked wistfully. "I wish you would be; are you?"

Somehow Johnnie Alberson was kneeling at the other side of the boy then, and when his arm went around Lem it went around Henrietta too. "Are you, Henrietta?" Johnnie asked.

"Oh, yes--yes!" said Henrietta. "I am, Lem, because I love you," and then, much lower, she added, "and Johnnie."

Miss Susan wiped her eyes on the edge of her apron.

Harvey, too, seemed to be affected, for he kept his back turned on the little group by the door; but what he said was:

"Well, I got quite a long walk ahead of me, so I guess I 'll just slice off another slice o' ham to sort o' eat on the way down. I don't never seem able to get my fill o' ham since I was a saint."

THE END