

Butler Ellis Parker

In Pawn



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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 pro-tectingly. 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?”

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