

Heir Apparent

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"Roscoe! Roscoe, no!" he rasped, and tore the hammer from the boy's slack fingers. Then, embarrassed by his outburst, Old August laid the hammer down and his voice became tremulous.

"Roscoe . . . why do I have always to tell you this. You know better. Please," he picked up the hammer and a small scrap of wood. "When you want to knock out the side from a cabinet, all you have to do is just put a little block of wood inside . . . like this . . . and then tap yently . . . easily."

The hammer moved gracefully as a wand in Old August's thick hands. "See, boy? Easily."

Roscoe watched, still silent from the shock of hearing Old August shout at him. Then, as the board came loose under the persistent tattoo of the hammer, he ventured:

"I know, Gramp. But the other way's a lot quicker, and I was going to do it careful."

"Quicker? Ja. So is a steam shovel quicker for digging a garden."

An even heavier blow to Old August was the display of temper shown some days later by his protege in hammering a small table into splinters because it persisted in having a short leg. Old August blew out his disappointment with pipe smoke, and showed Roscoe how to hold the legs of the table against the plate glass window in the front of the shop.

"The floor is too uneven," he told the boy. "You can't tell if the table wobbles. The window is the only level place in the shop."

There were other things: Roscoe's unexplained two-hour

absence one day at lunchtime, his putting of thumbtacks on drawer slides because "that's the way they do with factory-made jobs when the drawers don't fit," and the time he overturned the glue pot on a newly finished radio cabinet. He was predictable in only one thing. He arrived for work ten minutes late every morning.

Old August became anxious. He felt a growing apprehension that Roscoe might not be cabinetmaker material. He was almost sure of it when Roscoe made a blunder which completely overshadowed all his previous ones. He had just finished applying a final sheen of varnish to a tall and ornately-carved highboy, when Old August announced that it was time to quit work for the day.

"Just be sure and close the window first," the old man warned, nodding toward a small window at the back of the shop. "Otherwise the wind will blow t'rough the shop and tomorrow morning your nice shiny highboy will be all over dust."

"Sure, Gramp. Old Lady Winthrop would have a fit if that happened."

"Mrs. Wint'rop is a particular woman. She was down here every day ven I made that highboy for her two year ago."

Old August discovered the horror when he arrived the next morning. Mrs. Winthrop's highboy was liberally powdered with a fine coating of wood dust, firmly adherent to the hardened varnish. The window at the back of the shop was open, and the morning breeze was lifting little puffs from the dust-encrusted window sill and rustling the shavings on the floor.

Roscoe arrived his usual ten minutes late, and spent the rest of the day going over the cabinet with fine sandpaper and then refinishing it. All the while he worked Old August stood over him and discussed the boy's career prospects in a soft voice, but in words that made Roscoe's ears flame.

* * *

The next day Roscoe spoke little and he avoided looking at Old August. When he returned from another two-hour lunch period and went back to his workbench without offering an explanation, Old August said nothing. He stood sucking on his unlit pipe and watched the shavings snarl viciously from Roscoe's plane, as the boy leveled a table top.

"The plane is set too deep," said Old August to himself.

But he was feeling a twinge of remorse from the way he had talked yesterday, and he decided not to mention it. "It would just make the boy feel worse."

He lit his pipe and was turning away when the bell over the front door tinkled. A tiny woman in a black coat entered the shop, carrying a table. Her hair, tucked haphazardly under a round black hat, was as white as Old August's.

"Anna! What brings you here? Come in, come in!" Old August bounced agilely to the little lady and lifted the table from her arms. "How well you look!" He took her arm, smiling, and led her to the center of the shop.

"Ack, August," she lifted a finely wrinkled face to him and returned his smile falteringly, "I have brought you some work."

"Ja?"

She nodded to the small table Old August held in one arm. It was an end table, with slender curving legs. Bordering the oval top and of the same piece of wood was a fret-work design of intertwining leaves. It looked almost too fragile to bear its own weight, but Old August handled it with the confidence of a man who knows the strength of walnut. He rubbed his hand caressingly over the top. Even in the dimness of the shop its surface gave off a satiny glow that bespoke long hours of hand polishing.

Old August's broken-nailed forefinger came to an abrupt halt in the center of the table top. He felt, rather than saw, the deep gash. He looked at Anna.

"Ja," she whispered. "It was a lamp. My cat knocked it over and it cut the table top. Can you fix it, August?"

"I think so," Old August said slowly.

"I don't mind the cost. It is to be a wedding present for my grand-daughter, Ebba. She has always liked it."

Old August looked up quickly. "Ebba is being married?"

"Ja visst! This Friday." The old woman's eyes glistened. "And only the table would make her happier."

Patting her arm suddenly, Old August grinned. "It will be finished for her, Anna. Don't worry." He led her to the door and opened it for her. "Come back Friday afternoon and we shall see, na?"

He was a little surprised to turn around and discover Roscoe kneeling by the table, inspecting it closely. Old August walked up behind him and lit his pipe. At the sound of the match, Roscoe's head jerked up. He turned a sheepish face to Old August and then quickly looked down, frowning at the table.

"What do you think, boy?" Old August queried.

Roscoe did not look up. "About what?"

"The table."

"It's a nice piece of work."

"Do you think it can be fixed, boy?" The old man sucked

at his pipe.

"Sure!" Roscoe answered quickly, and then, as if regretting his certainty: "I guess so, if you say it can." He stood up.

Old August grunted and walked toward the back of the shop. His feet, plowing through the shavings which littered the floor, catapulted myriads of capering dust particles into the twin pillars of sunlight that leaned against the front windows. Lifting his sweater from a nail in the corner, he shrugged into it and dropped his pipe, already gone out, into the pocket. Returning to the center of the shop he found Roscoe still standing beside the small table, watching him silently.

"I go to get a piece of walnut for the table top," Old August said. "You will heat up the glue while I am gone, please."

The bell over the door chattered tinnily and the old man was gone. Roscoe turned and looked at the small table, his eyes traveling over the intricate carving, then to the gash that marred the smooth top; then down the graceful S-curved legs and back to the gash. He stood a full minute without moving. Then he walked over to the workbench and switched on the electric plate under the glue pot.

* * *

If Old August was surprised upon his return, when he found the top already removed from the end table, he did not show it by any change of expression. He laid a new piece of walnut carefully on the workbench, hung up his sweater, and lit his pipe. Taking the damaged table top to a jigsaw standing in the light from one of the front windows, Old August painstakingly began to cut out the oval center section.

This done, he laid the ring of fretwork aside and returned to the bench. Picking up the new piece of walnut he held it at eye level and squinted at the grain, turning the wood slowly in his hands. Then he put it down, laid the cut-out oval section on the new wood and began to make pencil lines around its edge. Roscoe watched.

Then Old August handed the new piece of wood to the boy. "You finish it," he said. "It is a good job for you."

Roscoe took the piece of walnut with a stunned look. "Me?"

"Ja. You know how. When you cut this out, just fit it into the carved part and peg it in. Then sand it up and finish it."

"Well . . ." Roscoe looked at the piece of wood in his hands.

Old August smiled, and Roscoe suddenly beamed.

"Okay, Gramp," he said, and started briskly for the jigsaw.

"And use walnut pegs, boy."

"Okay. You bet!"

Old August relit his pipe.

It was nearly five o'clock when Roscoe finished smoothing the completed table top. Sanding the old varnish off the carved portion without erasing the fine tracery in the

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Editorial

Culture is the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and thus with the history of the human spirit. Matthew Arnold said. And he defined the aim of culture as the aim of setting ourselves to ascertain what perfection is and to make it prevail.

America, and particularly the West, for too long a has been considering itself a nation without a distinct culture. For too long a time Americans have been content with imported art, music, and literature translated, adapted, and distorted to conform to their own taste.

Americans have devoted their energies to building skyscrapers, bridges, roads, dams, automobiles, airplanes, and handy household gadgets. These things, it was thought, were the ultimate products of our civilization.

Today men realize that, although the functional beauty of electric drill presses and monel is a necessary and important component of our culture, our national psyche is not satisfied without other forms of self-expression. Today we are beginning to appreciate more fully the inherent value of our own art, music, and literature—expressing and amplifying as it does our way of life, our ideals, mores, thought, and temperament.

As in other civilizations, our centers of learning, our universities, must become the instigators of and conservatories of the cultural expressions of our country. For many decades the University of Oregon and other schools have been releasing a flood of Babbitts into the folk-stream of America: accountants, insurance salesmen, lawyers, and hack writers. There have also been a few artists, musicians, and poets. But recognition for these men and women has often been haphazard, and perhaps a lack of appreciation has stifled many a search for perfection.

This first edition of the Emerald Literator is an experiment. The editor and the staff hope that the Literator will become an institution—not limited to a four-page section of the Emerald but developing into a full-fledged monthly magazine. The Literator is the Emerald's attempt to provide an outlet for creative talent on the campus, to encourage the seekers for perfection, and to give some recognition to the first gauche creations of men and women who may someday become great.

About the Author...

Like Byron, Harold J. Ostergren awoke one morning and found himself famous. When a friend rushed into his room two weeks ago and asked, "What are you going to do with the fifty bucks?", the author of "Heir Apparent" learned for the first time that his short story had won the Marshall-Case-Haycox award.

Twenty-six-year-old Ostergren has been writing since his high schools days. A journalism major, he has worked on school publications, a newspaper, and is taking a course in short story, to round out his literary training. He is enthusiastic about writing and plans to do newspaper work after he graduates from college.

There is no exclusive thematic material to which his stories are devoted, a condition of which many modern writers cannot boast.

Harold Ostergren sums up his use of themes when he remarks, "Whenever an idea hits me, I put it down on paper." In the main, the ideas for his stories are drawn from real life. In the case of the "Heir Apparent" he developed characters from his two grandfathers; and he, himself, had been a cabinet-maker at one time. In relation to this point he believes that newspaper work affords a storehouse of subject matter for short stories. From this point of view journalistic experience is of great value to the prospective writer.

Harold Ostergren is a severe critic of his work and labours patiently until he is completely satisfied with the results. To him the mechanics of the short story are important but not so much as characterization. In his characters he sees the success or failure of his work. Reflecting on his technique he has this to say, "I first obtain my character and then I throw them into a plot. The character must be consistent."

Utopia

And only the master shall praise us,
 and only the master shall blame;
 And no one shall work for money, and
 on one shall work for fame,
 But each for the joy of working, and
 each, in his separate star,
 Shall draw the thing as he sees it for
 the God of things as they are.

—Rudyard Kipling