

# JEAN: A VICTIM OF THE LIFE OF A BAD BOY

BY ERNESTINE GERSTEL SCHWARTZ



JEAN was the bad boy of the village, and what seemed the essence of incongruity, he had the face of an angel. His large, innocent blue eyes, his fine nose and perfect mouth, supplemented by a clear complexion, a dimpled chin and a mass of curling yellow hair, caused the new minister, who was young and fresh from the seminary, to exclaim, "What an inspiration for an artist to do cherubs!" Luckily for the new minister one of his auditors was deaf and the other knew nothing about inspirations or cherubs. Trentville would have considered the observation frivolous.

Jean was 14, tall, strong and well grown, in marked contrast to his twin brother Frank, who, though quite as tall as Jean, was slight and stooped a little. He had the same regular features as his brother, but lacked the vivid coloring, the animated expression and the dimpled chin. Strangers would pass Frank by unnoticed, but were quick to remark on Jean's beauty, and it may be added, as quick to be told of his Satanic disposition by the person to whom the remark was addressed. There was hardly a person in Trentville who had not been made personally acquainted with Jean's exuberance of animal spirits.

When Jean struck his mother to the earth, she pushed back the blue gingham monstrous. Frank's smiling eyes looked up into her own. The look of startled incredulity on their aunt's face struck Jean like a bolt of lightning from the sky. He had been laughing at the two boys, Frank scrambled to his feet and still laughing, ran away from the close vicinity of his aunt. Jean, however, stood his ground to see the full effect of his latest achievement.

That Jean was bad, every one was forced to admit, even his poor mother; but that he was hopelessly bad, only Mrs. Whitcombe, his aunt, was ready to assert. Mrs. Whitcombe was a tall, spare woman, with faded yellow hair and pale blue eyes. Her sharp chin and sharper nose and the straight thin lips held no reminiscence of past beauty, but were a faithful index of her harsh and nagging disposition.

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A bitter arraignment of Jean by his aunt in the presence of the young minister, however, called from the latter an expression of opinion that was new to that locality. "The boy has a keen sense of humor," he asserted. "There is always a point to his pranks. You will notice they invariably bring out the weakness or vanity or folly of the person on whom they are perpetrated. And, after all," he added warmly, somewhat to his own surprise, "while it is true they sometimes show disrespect to his elders, you yourself must admit, Mrs. Whitcombe, they are really harmless."

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"I saw him a-gota' there half an hour ago. You didn't see what he had in his hand, did you?" asked Jean. "He had Jim Field's old pipe and he went up in the hayloft to learn to smoke. Doin' chores!" and Jean laughed derisively. Just then a cry from Frank attracted them, and following the direction of his gaze, they saw flames bursting from the upper part of the barn back of Mrs. Whitcombe's house, and smoke pouring out of the window in the loft. "My God! Jacob's in there," shrieked the horror-stricken mother, rushing wildly to the barn. "Jacob! Jacob!" she screamed. "He'll be burned to death before my very eyes."

## A VICTIM OF THE MERIT SYSTEM

TRAGEDY OF A MODEST SCHOOLTEACHER NOT WITHOUT APPLICATION TO THE PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"He succeeds who deserves to succeed." Do you believe that, Marjorie? Marjorie, Tsay, Marjorie, do you believe it? "What?" drawled Marjorie, with an abstracted half yawn. "Believe what? What did you say, child?" "Do you believe it?" persisted the first speaker. "Action and reaction are equal and in opposite directions. What we give out in teaching comes back in salary, and those intangibles that are the reward of good or evil doing. Now, if the action is fairly correct, the physical law demands the return stroke—the reward, that is—the—"

commission have never even heard of me; and as to the others, the two heads, as I call them, of the great double-headed snake, one barely knows me by sight, and the other has never seen me in the schoolroom ninety minutes altogether. Marjorie, I just can't—I can't—it would kill me to be refused—and yet—here her face whitened, and her voice dropped to a whisper. "I've got to. I'm getting so nervous lately. I need a Summer trip away—a real rest—and a merit rise is my only hope. It's so little for them to give—only twenty-five cents a day for the twenty working days—and it means so much to us. Besides, I've worked so hard it isn't begging to ask for it. Haven't I earned it?"

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"I have thought of them," said Marjorie. "Thought and thought till my brain whirled, and I concluded non-resistance was better for my complexion. The possibilities are appalling. I presume they must have simply overwhelmed the two distinguished heads of the merit commission and the favored special teachers."

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WHEN JEAN STRUCK HIS MOTHER TO THE EARTH

JEAN'S AUNT

ONE OF JEAN'S REDEEMING POINTS

Later in the day she regained consciousness. "Never mind, dear, I'll pay your fines," whispered Marjorie, tenderly, and the sick girl closed her eyes and babbled again of the orgies of the schoolroom and of herself, an outcast.