

The Love of a Lad

THE little boy was a particularly little boy. I mean, of course, that his body was very small even for his few years. And as we see little or nothing of one another except our carefully clothed bodies, it is not strange that we mutually judge of our size by them; that is, we do this unless we are very well acquainted, indeed. Doubtless, too, this is best, for how it would embarrass some of us if we were to be judged in another way. Take, for instance, your papa's friend, Mr. Brown, the portly gentleman who visits at your house sometimes, and who wears such a handsome watch chain, and who talks about stocks; or take Miss Wheezle, the tall and stately lady who converses with your mamma about the latest fashions and says the minister's sermon last Sunday was "really sweet"—how do you suppose they would feel if, by some marvelous change of size, this world were to be judged by mind or soul? But, bless your hearts! they never think of such a thing, more than the rest of us do; and so we all are quite contented and cheerful.

It may as well be admitted, too, that, as his uncles and aunts said, the little boy was "such a strange child!" His Aunt Dora, who had five children of her own, all so precisely like the other human peas in the pod that if one had rolled out it would have been difficult to designate exactly which one it was—his Aunt Dora, I say, even went so far as to remark that he was "the strangest ever;" but this assertion perhaps should be considered a trifle emphatic, for Aunt Dora underscores the words of her speech very much as she does those of her letters.

But the little boy was strange; this must be conceded. For example, if you made to him an assertion based on an assertion your father had made to you, which was based on an assertion his father had made to him, which was based on an assertion his—but it is needless to carry the train of argument further, for about this time the little boy would quite upset you by remarking, "Yes, but why—" or, "But doesn't it seem—" and then he would ask all sorts of embarrassing questions; that is, questions of which unfortunately you had forgotten the answer. Of course, it should be remembered that he was too young to understand how much deeper than reason is faith and how absolute should be the confidence we place in the wisdom of our grandfathers. However, this has little to do with the story, except as it tends to indicate what manner of child was our small hero.

The little boy was a great reader, and all books, good, bad, or indifferent, that came to his small and sometimes grimy hands were absorbed by him with complete impartiality. So, much of his time he lived in the bright Country of Imagination, where are many wonderful things. Often his mother would say to him: "Now, little boy, you really must put your book away, go out, and play in the sunshine." Then he would put the book to one side, take his bow and arrows, and go to his cave. It was not much of a cave, being, in fact, but a hollow in a great oak just within the edge of a wood; but he imagined that its dimensions were tremendous and its secrecy complete, and so, as his imagination was as large as his body was small, the "cave" did quite well for his purposes. He had drawn a dingy cloth across the hole so as to conceal it from observation, and he used to say to himself, as he approached the "cave" and gave three distinct whistles to announce his coming to his faithful servants, that nobody would suspect that the Mysterious Lord of the Forest lived there; and, indeed, nobody would. You would be surprised could you know how often this retreat was attacked by wicked bandits and how frequently it was assailed by painted savages, but it was defended with great vigor and always came off with credit, and even glory, to itself and its redoubtable master.

The little boy went to school, and for some time he did not think much of his teachers. They were a trying lot, he felt; always asking questions concerning matters that were of no consequence and insisting on answers that were equally irrelevant to the real interests of a boy's life. His teachers said that he read with expression, but that they could not get him to take an interest in his other studies. His mother received this report with anxiety, and his Aunt Dora remarked that she always had said so, although no one could remember that she had. The change in this condition of affairs took place after Miss Hattie joined the procession of the little boy's teachers, and by this time he had grown so large that he was almost ten years old. Other people might say that there were Miss Hatties and Miss Hatties, but after a few days the little boy knew very well that there was only one real Miss Hattie; the rest were

mere imitations, who had, doubtless surreptitiously, secured a name of which they were all unworthy. The discovery of this transcendent fact first began to dawn upon him under inglorious circumstances. He had, with much care and a pilfered piece of chalk, inscribed on the back of the boy who sat in front of him the highly ambiguous word "DUNSE." The only Miss Hattie discovered who was the perpetrator of the deed, and kept him after school. After they were quite alone she said to him:

"How do you think you would like to have some other boy write that word on your back?"

The little boy thought about it, and then said that he didn't believe he would care, for the other fellows would know it was only a joke anyway.

Then Miss Hattie talked to him, and she talked so kindly, and so appealed to the best that was in his childish heart that the little boy said to himself that it was mighty curious about teachers. Then he looked at her somewhat timidly, or at least dubiously, and saw how kind was the glance from the great blue eyes that met his own. And from that starting point it was only natural that he should notice how lustrous were the curly brown hair and how pink were her cheeks, for even little boys must notice things, you know.

Now you who have forgotten the emotions that sway the heart of childhood may deem the idea absurd, but I am ready to avow my convictions, nay, my complete assurance that then and there, and while that conversation still was in progress, the tender passion

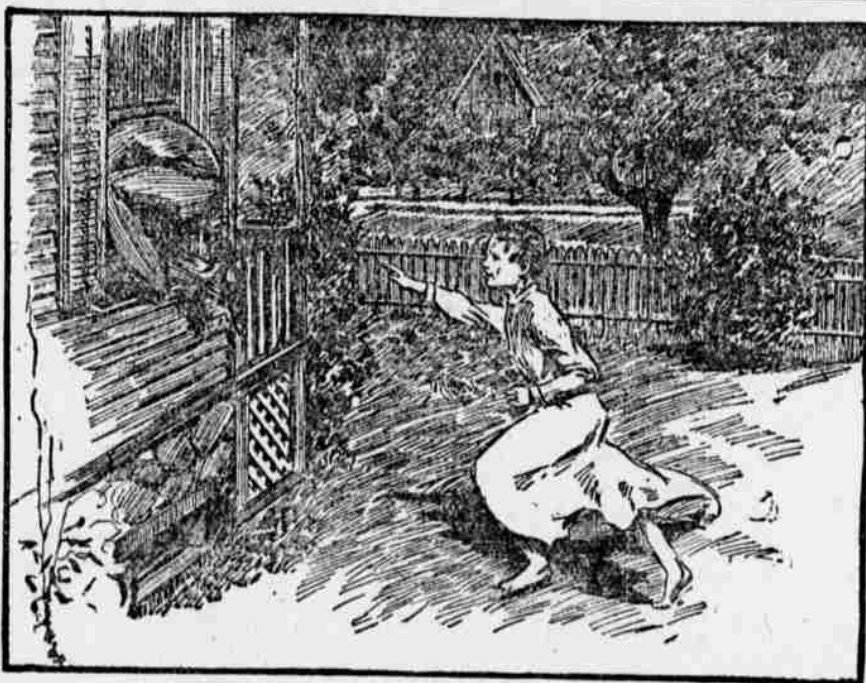
unwavering devotion. But that John! How tired of him she must get!

One night, after the little boy had been in bed and asleep a long time, an owl came and sat on the limb of the oak tree near his window and said, "Hoo-oo-o." Ordinarily this would not have waked him, but for some reason it did that night; and when the owl again said, "Hoo-oo-o," he thought he would get up and see where the bird was and what it was doing. So he crept out of bed and pattered to the window, reaching it just in time to see the owl fly away.

Now you must understand that by this time the little boy had grown so big that he was more than ten and one-half years old, and, of course, when a boy has attained that ripe age he knows a thing or two when he sees it. So it will not be considered surprising that when, as he stood at the window, he saw two men lurking in the shadow of Neighbor Griscom's house he knew that something was wrong. When he saw the first man he thought for a moment it might be John, who, he had noticed, had a most reprehensible habit of lingering about that house until late hours; but when he saw the second man he realized that the situation was even worse than he had suspected.

"They're burglars!" he whispered to himself; "I'll bet they're burglars, and I've got to do something 'bout it. They'll scare Miss Hattie terrible."

Just what he would, or could, do the little boy did not know, but he felt very certain that he must do something, and that immediately. So, merely stopping to shout, "Burglars! At Griscom's!" to his father, he ran across the road as fast as his little bare feet would carry him. The window at which he had seen the two men was open now, and one of the men had disappeared, while the other was two-thirds through the opening. The little boy did not hesitate an instant, with the yell, "Burglars! Burglars!"



THE LAD PURSUED THE BURGLAR.

first began to stir and make itself felt in the brown corduroy breast of the little boy. Never had he been talked to so kindly save by his mother, and, of course, all things good are to be expected of mothers. A simple, boyish gratitude which stood ready to lose itself in admiring adoration awoke in his heart, and did not go to sleep again.

From that time he was Miss Hattie's faithful knight errant, to run her errands and heed her every suggestion; and it seemed to him, as he constantly improved in his studies, that her cheeks grew more pink, her wavy hair more lustrous, and her beautiful eyes more tenderly blue; that is, it would have seemed so had he not known that in the nature of the case such a thing must be impossible. He was very glad that she boarded just across the road from his father's house, for this gave him a perfectly natural opportunity to carry her books home nearly every night, thus imperfectly demonstrating his loving adoration.

About this time the little boy began to hate John with an intense, burning hatred. Who was John, anyway, the great, clumsy fellow? What right had he to be hanging about Neighbor Griscom's house, at which his teacher boarded, particularly in the evening? Miss Hattie was so kind that she tolerated his presence, of course, but his loutish attendance must be very annoying to her. After the little boy grew up he would whip John; he would teach him a much-needed respect for the sanctities of place and association. Oh, that he were grown up now! The little boy used to feel of the muscles of his arm and wish that they would develop faster. Strange that this odious John never noticed his look of undying hatred and scorn, but always greeted him with a cheery, "Hello, Twofers! How are we to-day?" Some time he should know how we were to-day! Should he—oh, thought to give pause to the beating of his heart!—should he tell Miss Hattie of the emotions with which he viewed her matchless charms, and ask her to wait for him to grow up? No; she might—it was hardly conceivable, but she might heedlessly laugh at him; and what were life then? Better to wait, and let her of her own accord observe his

he threw himself upon the leg that still was without the window, caught it, and clung to it for dear life.

What followed never has been at all clear to the boy. He remembers that there were muttered curses from the man he held, a dark form that jumped from the window and ran past him, a rush of feet while he still valiantly held to the leg; then there seemed to come a crash of all things, and he was lost in a great blackness and knew no more.

When the world came back to him Miss Hattie was holding him in her arms. Mrs. Griscom was standing by his side with a basin of water in her hand, and his father and Neighbor Griscom were holding the ruffian who, as he afterward learned, had beaten him down with a most cruel blow. Even then he noticed that Miss Hattie's nightgown was very white and very pretty, and it seemed to him that, so robed, her cheeks were even pinker, her hair more wavy, and her eyes more tenderly blue than they were when she appeared in more conventional costume. But he dismissed this thought as soon as possible, feeling that to dwell upon the scene which must be embarrassing to her in the recollection was a species of treason and a departure from that high honor in which a chivalrous knight should hold his lady fair.

There was a time during which the little boy was very sick. The blow had been most brutal, and for days his life hung by an uncertain thread. Then the vitality of youth asserted itself, and he gradually found more and more secure footing on the goodly highway that leads to health. How his little romance, a very real romance if it was extremely infantile, grew in those days! For Miss Hattie called to see him every day! And such jellies as she brought to him! And such flowers! And she was so kind and loving! And sometimes she even kissed him—ah, how his small heart beat then! And she called him a hero! He almost made up his absurd little mind that the eventful hour had come. He would propose to her; he would let her know exactly how a fellow felt; he would assure her that her evident and faithful love would not be in vain

if she would wait a decade or two for him. But—again the hateful thought—she might laugh at him. Ah, that "but!" His heart turned faint, and he did not propose.

Quite fanciful and impossible, is it? I tell you that there is many a bald-headed and supremely dignified father of a family who need turn but a few leaves in memory's book until he reaches a page wherein is written the story—oh, of course, my dear sir, a very absurd story—of a time when he, too, an awkward, shambling school boy, was tremendously in love with some sweet-faced, gentle-souled woman, anywhere from ten to twenty years his senior, whom, having smallest conception of the real meaning of marriage, he hoped to marry some day, if she would be good enough to wait for him; to whom he would have proposed such a blissful waiting but for an inexplicable fear of her laughter. Jones, Brown, Robinson, how is it? Honestly, now. Why should we hesitate before the confession? What unfledged love in life is more beautiful?—no touch of grosser passion about it; wholly ideal, unselfish, and sincere.

With the little boy entirely recovered, it seems almost a pity not to terminate the story, but there is one other incident so directly connected with it that it probably should not be omitted. It was in the long summer vacation, and the little boy now had grown to extremely big that he was nearly eleven years old. For several days he had seen little of Miss Hattie, who appeared to be very busy and preoccupied and kissed him only in an absent-minded way. He had noticed, however, that John was not hanging about Neighbor Griscom's house as much as usual, and was glad to feel that at last he was learning his place; it certainly was time!

On a certain day he had visited the Griggs boy, who lived quite at the other end of town, and when he returned his father and mother, were crossing the road from Neighbor Griscom's. The little boy wondered why they were arrayed in their best, and so he asked them:

"What you been doing?" His mother smiled as she answered: "We have been attending a wedding."

"Whose wedding?" "Can't you guess?" "No."

But a great fear had seized upon the heart of the little boy even before his mother replied:

"Well, we attended the wedding of Miss Hattie and Mr. John."

The mother smiled again. How was she to know, how was she even to suspect, that the iron had entered his soul? Without saying a word, he left the room, sought his little chamber, and here threw himself upon his bed. So this was woman's love! This was the woman's constancy! This was all that her kisses meant! For his heart, he never would love again. And that John, too! Well, the woman who could be content with such a love could never have been worthy of his own. It had been a fortunate escape for him, he said. Ah, we are human, and grapes are sour, even when we are but three feet high.

In an hour or two he was playing one-old-cat with two other boys. He would hide his crushed and broken heart; and, besides, he said to himself, what he had read in a particularly fascinating book, that it would be dishonorable to continue to love the wife of another. Fortunately, the tragedies of youth do not strike deep, but they leave a mark on the lives we lead none the less on that account. His mother watched him for a time as he played, then turned to his father and said:

"What do you suppose made him act so queerly when I told him about the wedding?"

His father, who had forgotten a thing or two, responded:

"I can't guess."

And as the little boy never told a soul the story of his first love, even Miss Hattie herself never having the slightest idea of the real state of the case, the reader must decide for himself, if he can, how I came to know so much about it.—Public Ledger and Philadelphia Times.

Motion for a New Trial.

It is told of the late Senator Matt Carpenter that one day while chatting with friends in a committee-room the conversation turned on the relative merits of religious sects. Nearly every member of the party belonged to some church and there had been an animated discussion, Senator Carpenter pacing up and down, listening intently enough, but saying not a word.

"What church do you belong to, Carpenter?" asked one.

"I don't belong to any."

"Why don't you join one?"

"I don't want to. None exactly suits my views."

"What one would you join if you were to feel forced to a choice?"

"The Catholic, by all means."

"And why the Catholic?"

"Because they have a purgatory, and that's a motion for a new trial."

—Omaha Bee.

How often you scold without cause!

A SURPRISED PHYSICIAN.

A Dying Patient Recovers Through Interposition of a Humble German.

Chicago, Nov. 10.—A reputable and widely known physician living on C— street, was called to attend a very complicated case of Rheumatism. Upon arriving at the house he found a man about forty years of age, lying in a prostrated and moribund condition, with his whole frame dangerously affected with the painful disease. He prescribed for the patient but the man continued to grow weaker and on Sunday evening he was found to be in a very alarming condition. His knees and elbows and larger joints were greatly inflamed, and could not be moved. It was only with extreme difficulty that the patient could be turned in bed, with the aid of three or four persons. The weight of the clothing was so painful that means had to be adopted to keep it from the patient's body.

The doctor saw that his assistance would be of no avail, and left the members of the family following him to the door, weeping. Almost immediately the grief-stricken ones were addressed by a humble German. He had heard of the despair of the family and now asked them to try his remedy, and accordingly brought forth a bottle of St. Jacobs Oil. The poor wife applied this remedy. The first application eased the patient very much; after a few hours they used it again, and wonder of wonders, the pain vanished entirely! Every subsequent application improved the patient, and in a few days he was well and out. When the doctor called a few days after he was indeed surprised.

Standing Up for His Rights.

"Get out of here!" growled the larvae in the cheese rind, as the wasp sought to make an entrance.

"But why," protested the wasp, "there is plenty of room for us both."

"Where's your skipper's license?" asked the larvae, haughtily.—Judge.

French Like a Native.

Merritt—Why, I speak French like a native. In conversation with one of them the other day, he asked me if I wasn't born in France.

Cora—Doesn't that go to prove, dear, that the French are the polite people in the world?—New York Times.

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