

The Free Press Short Story

THE INSPIRED RIGHT

BY HENRY CARLETON

It was a waste, with which Byron Norton had been...

James wiped the dirt and kicked the wad of waste out of the way...

The tall young fireman on the other side of the pumper glanced up sharply...

As the other man walked away, James burned hotly as he felt the cold glances of the other fireman...

"Come up to my office," said the captain, and James followed the man up the stairway...

"No, Sir, but there was nothing to fight about," said James.

"No," Captain Dunnigan's half smile was sardonic, "There seems to be a difference of opinion, and a difference of opinion, in Number Three Engine House, is sufficient grounds for a fight."

"I heard something about a fight," Captain Dunnigan's hard eyes demanded an answer.

"He wants me to fight him. I refused," said James.

"Then I'm sorry, but I think I shall have to ask to have you transferred or discharged. Here at Number Three we can respect a man who takes a beating, but we can't respect a coward."

"I'm not a coward," declared James, his eyes flashed angrily. "And I wouldn't take a beating. I was on the boxing team in high-school. I could beat Norton."

Captain Dunnigan opened his mouth to reply, but the answer was cut short by the clang of a gong in the outer room.

James, however, was only half-conscious of all this. His mind, while he drew on his rubber coat and boots and his heavy leather helmet, was busy. He was thinking of Byron Norton, who now, on the high driver's seat, was racing through traffic.

The pumper, by now, was arriving at the scene of the fire, a five-story apartment building from the window of which smoke was pouring...

The work became mechanical, however, as he became accustomed to it, and he had more time to watch the progress of the efforts of the department.

The window was dark now, and they waited for a moment until the white beam of light swung back.

The dark figure in the window far above did not move. It was a long jump, a dangerous jump, in the semi-darkness, but not impossible.

The firemen forming the circle around the net, holding it, stood with faces upturned, watching and waiting, for it might be necessary for them to move slightly to one side or the other to catch the body hurtling down through space.

"Better get him out. Detail somebody to go in for him," said Captain Dunnigan.

"And lose two men instead of one? Can't risk it," said James.

"You mean you'll let that man die up there, alone?" asked Captain Dunnigan.

"Alone!" exclaimed Captain Dunnigan. "Isn't that better than to let him die with somebody else? You send a man up there if you want to, but I wouldn't be responsible."

James, standing close by, saw the indecision of the assistant chief, whom he did not know. His mind was made up, hurriedly, as though half afraid that he might change his mind.

A minute later the boy was ready to start, his clothing, underneath his rubber coat, was soaked and dripping with water.

At the third floor the smoke was so thick that he had to feel his way through the hall and ceiling to the banister to avoid becoming lost.

At the fourth floor the smoke was tinged with red, and as he started up the next flight of stairs, scarlet and yellow tongues of flame licked out from the steps.

Norton had left the room. That he was in the right place he knew by the fact that the searchlight beam did not waver from its mark.

"Don't touch me. I tell you, don't touch me," the other boy screamed. "Let me alone." His voice, hoarse with the smoke, broke in a shrill shriek.

James drew back. There was only one chance. He took it. At a run he gathered speed and leaped through the fire, hurling his body hard against the door.

Down the hall he ran toward the door he guessed must lead into the room in which Byron Norton had last been seen.

The door was ajar. He pushed it open, and the room was light and the smoke was not so dense but that he could make out his surroundings.

For a moment he thought that Byron Norton had left the room. That he was in the right place he knew by the fact that the searchlight beam did not waver from its mark.

Two men faced each other in the smoke-filled, dimly-lighted room. Norton rushed in as though to overpower him with sheer force of weight.

But, Byron, it's me, Jimmy Magee. Don't you understand? No matter what's happened it's all right now.

Again, he moved into the attack. His left fist shot out. Norton caught it on his shoulder, but even as flesh thudded against flesh, James' right followed, his left in the simple one-two he had learned in his high school boxing class.

James was beside him, fastening the end of the rope under Norton's shoulders. Time was short now, woefully short, but it was only a moment's work to get Norton to the window and to loop the rope around the steam pipe.

Slowly he lowered the unconscious man, paying out the rope, hand over hand. At last there was a slackening, and then a jerk. The men below were carrying Byron Norton to an ambulance.

A moment later James slid toward the ground. He fell the last ten feet, but eager hands dragged him to safety as he had never dreamed of, much less participated in: Without gloves, clad in heavy coats and boots and helmets, the

and some one pointed to a police ambulance near the fire lines. "Over there. He's not hurt much."

Excellent for Croupy Children. When a child is suffering with croup it is a good plan to use Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil. It reduces the inflammation and loosens the phlegm giving speedy relief to the little sufferer.

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