

The Free Press Short Story

THE BRIDGE ACROSS

BY HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH

HER telephone bell had rung at least two minutes before the slatternly girl who was clearing the table in the long, narrow boarding house dining room, took the trouble to answer it. When she had done so, she merely screamed up the stairs, "Somebody on the phone for Miss Cresswell."

A second floor girl took up the cry. "Say, tell Theodora Cresswell that she's wanted on the phone." Then the third floor girl, whose room was at the head of the stairs, ran across the hall, and thumped on Theodora's door. "Phone, Theo. Better hurry!"

"Now wouldn't that jar you?" Theodora asked her reflection in the mirror. It was characteristic of the change which had been taking place in her the last two years, that she frequently resorted to cheap slang, even when conversing with herself. "Why couldn't whoever wants me have rung ten minutes ago?" She slipped on her bath robe and ran downstairs. "Hello?" was rather breathless.

The caller came a little after eight, a trim, well-dressed woman still under forty, who introduced herself as Miss Herbert. At once she noticed the picture of Theodora's mother on the wall of her room, and she stood before it, studying it earnestly. "It looks very much like the Mrs. Cresswell I know, older, of course, but after all, very little changed. You're like your mother, I think."

"Oh, do you think so?" exclaimed the girl, very thankful that she had scrubbed her face in anticipation of this visit. When Miss Herbert again seated herself, she said quietly, "Tell me something about yourself. When you were younger, your mother thought you would like to be a teacher. You gave up that idea, it seems."

Theodora felt her lips trembling. That casual question had touched one of the big disappointments of her life. "I was just getting ready to take a kindergarten course when father died. It was the thing I always wanted to do. There wasn't money enough for my schooling, and so mother gave up housekeeping, and took a position. We came here to live because it wasn't a very expensive place."

"The last time I had from your mother had this address." "Of course, all my plans were changed. I got a position in a department store. I suppose I'm lucky to have it, only it's so different from the work I wanted to do."

"Theodora, I wonder if your mother ever told you of the great service she did me when I was a young woman, a few years older than you?" "I know I've heard her speak of you, because I remember your name perfectly, but I can't remember what she said about you."

"I'll tell you. I was an orphan, half through college when the Trust Company which had charge of my little fortune, went bankrupt. I was just beginning my Junior year, and I knew your mother slightly. I went to her in great distress to tell her of the collapse of my hopes. Of course I expected to leave college at once, and I wondered when she asked me not to take any steps till I had seen her again. The next day she came to me, and offered me a home with her. If I could manage the other expenses. She and your father had not been married long, and he did not have a large salary, but they were ready to sacrifice in order to help out a young woman without the slightest claim on them. After I began to earn something, I paid your mother for my board during those two years. The greater share of my debt has never been paid, however."

Theodora's eyes had moistened. "That was just like mother. I suppose you wonder that when I was so indebted to her, two years should pass before I knew of her death. You must remember that I haven't seen her since before you were born. At first we used to write to each other several times a year, but of late we've only sent each other a Christmas card, with a line or two written across it. Don't think, though, that this made any difference in our friendship."

There was silence for a moment. Theodora took up the artificial flowers intended for her hat, fumbled with them and laid them down. "What a pretty color," said Miss Herbert. "I can get a hat lots cheaper if I trim it myself. I'm trying to get ready for Easter."

"That means a great deal, doesn't it?" Theodora stared. "Why, I'm not going to have much new. I didn't mean that. The new clothes are only a symbol of a new beginning. It's the new life that Easter stands for." She waited, but as the girl did not answer, she went on. "Would you like, even now, to take that kindergarten course?"

"What's the use of talking about it?" The girl's face became white. "I can't." "I'm not so sure. I'm doing very well now. There's a normal school in the city where I live with an excellent kindergarten course, and I have a little apartment where you could stay. This is my chance to do something for your

mother, in return for what she did for me. Theodora was on her feet suddenly. "Wait! Wait!" Her voice was choked and tremulous as she hurried on. "You don't know what you're saying. You don't know me."

"I know you are your mother's daughter." "Yes, but I wasn't always a good daughter, was selfish, always thinking about what I wanted, and sometimes I spoke so impatiently when we didn't agree. I'd give anything if I could live over the last year or two that mother was here, so I could do things for her and show her that I cared. I thought I'd have years and years, you know."

THE EVENING MEAL By Barbara B. Brooks "The supper hour—a magnet drawing home The ones who have the need of food and rest All women know this hour of day is best."

"I wonder," mused Miss Herbert reflectively. The girl did not stop to ask her meaning. "I say you don't know me. Why, before you came here to-night, I washed out the rouge and powder I'd put on to go out with the girls. You may think this room looks quite neat, but that isn't real. I tucked things out of sight when I knew you were coming. I swept the dust under the couch."

"Because—because—well, I thought if you saw me all made up, or if you saw this room all dusty and in disorder, you'd think my mother hadn't brought me up right. That's the way people do, blame the mothers for everything."

"And you wanted to defend yours against my possible misjudgment. Then don't you see that it isn't too late for you to do something for your mother?" The fire died out of Theodora's eyes. "I thought of that." "And that's only a beginning. Nothing you could have given your mother would have meant so much to her as that which you can give her now. More than anything else, she wanted you to be a fine, brave woman as she herself was, serving God, and helping others."

"The girl sat very still. When she was small, her ambition had been to grow up like her mother. Now as she realized how rapidly she had deteriorated in the last two years, the idea seemed almost grotesquely impossible. "There's a bridge between the two worlds, Theodora, a bridge that love and helpfulness alone can span. You can still do something for your mother, and she can still do something for you. It is your mother, not I who is giving you this chance."

"The other stared incredulously. "You mean—you mean you're ready to do it after what I've told you?" "All the more ready, if anything. I like your frankness." STORY 2 GAILLLEY 3 Theodora crossed the room with one long step, dropped on her knees by Miss Herbert's chair, and with her head in the lap of this new-found friend, she wept. It seemed to her that with those tears, all the bitterness and recklessness were drained from her heart. Miss Herbert made no attempt to check her, but sat quietly stroking her hair.

That Easter Theodora went to church in a strange city, and the music thrilled her as no music had ever done before. The words from the minister's text meant more to her than all the sermons she had ever heard. "Newness of life!" The words seemed to express exactly the change in herself. She was Theodora Cresswell, and yet such a different girl from the one of a few weeks before. She had new purposes, new aims, and new happiness, too. She wondered—if over the bridge of which Miss Herbert had spoken where love and helpfulness crossed and re-crossed, had come that joy that flooded her heart. It seemed to her that this was her first real Easter.

EASTER RABBITS We know that eggs are used at Easter time to symbolize the way in which Jesus came alive from the sealed tomb, as the chicken comes out alive from the lifeless looking egg. The reason that rabbits are associated with Easter however is not so plain. Our pagan ancestors believed that the hare belonged to the moon. Now Easter has always been a movable feast. It does not come on the same day of the month, but on the first Sunday after the first full moon after March twenty-first. Since the hare was the sign of the moon, it came to be associated with the Easter feast. In many parts of Europe children used to be told that if they were good and obedient during the year, a white hare would come the night before Easter and hide colored eggs for them. This was a curious twisting of the idea of the hare being the sign of the moon which governed the date of Easter.

Rabbits and hares are so much alike that it is not surprising that in places where there are no hares, the people talked about an Easter rabbit. Now we are so used to seeing them on picture cards and in candy, cotton, and paper-mache, that we seldom stop to think that we have these bunnies because the hare was the pagan sign of the moon. Eleanor Hammond.

THE LAUGHING JACKASS Many people in Australia are tired of hearing the laughing jackass, or kookaburra. But a laugh from the bird saved a man from a snake not long ago. He was cutting the long grass in Rockwood Cemetery, near Haberfield, when he heard a laugh and looked up. As he did so the kookaburra flew straight toward him, so swiftly that he jumped to one side. Not till then did he notice the black snake within a foot of him. The bird seized the snake, flew with it to a height, and dropped it. Again and again it carried it up high and let it fall to the ground, till at last the snake was dead. Then the kookaburra started its meal, for snake is just the sort of thing a kookaburra fancies.

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Free Press Ads Will Sell Your Goods Let Us Convince You

Are You Among Those Who Say---"I never read Advertisements" TO SAY "I never read advertisements" would be much like saying "I never use soap, or "I never read newspapers," or "No one can teach me anything," or "I know everything." Many good—but not very wise—persons seem to think that all advertisements are just the vainglorious braggings of those who publish them—designed to part fools and their money. The truth is that most advertisements are incitements to their readers to do or be or buy or use something for their immediate or prospective advantage. Advertisers, to be successful and to live long, have to offer something of value or of desire—something really wanted or needed by the public. Advertisers, to live long, must not cheat the expectations or confidence of those who buy what they offer or propose. Here are some questions to be answered by those who say "I never read advertisements"— 1. What alarm clock would you buy if you needed one? 2. What camera would you buy, for your own use, or to give to a son or daughter? 3. What motor car possesses your favor? 4. What face cream or shaving soap or cream, or tooth paste did you use to-day? 5. What laundry soap (or flakes) is in your kitchen right now? 6. Does the breakfast bacon which you like best have a brand name? 7. The watch on your wrist—what name does it bear? 8. Your shoes—who made them? 9. Your life insurance policy—what company issued it? 10. The ginger ale which you serve to guests—what brand is it? 11. The tea which you buy regularly—what brand is it? 12. The soap and baked beans and the tomato catsup now on your pantry shelves—what brands are they? You see, whether or not you consciously or habitually read advertisements, you buy, by preference, what advertisements have recommended to your confidence, and what experience has proven to be satisfactory. The things which we don't buy, and which have a sickish life, are those which are not advertised, and which try to ride into public favor on the backs of well-advertised products. IT IS TO ONE'S DISCREDIT TO SAY, "I NEVER READ ADVERTISEMENTS" This advt. is sponsored by the Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association.

ATTACHED BUT NOT BELONGING By Arthur W. Rinkow

A woman had suffered a slight stroke of paralysis. I suppose you wonder that when I was so indebted to her, two years should pass before I knew of her death. You must remember that I haven't seen her since before you were born. At first we used to write to each other several times a year, but of late we've only sent each other a Christmas card, with a line or two written across it. Don't think, though, that this made any difference in our friendship."

SENSE KNOCKED INTO HIM

The man was in the hospital after his first serious attempt to knock a train off the tracks. "I fear I can be of very little assistance to you," he was comfortably assured by the doctor. "I'm a veterinary surgeon."

Bladder Weakness Relieved Overnight

Writer Tells of Great Remedy That Gives Quick, Certain Relief— Invites All to Try It While serious, if neglected, it is now ordinarily easy matter to quickly relieve Bladder Weakness and Irritation, Pains in the Back and down through groins. Frequent daily annoyance and troublesome nights— by the pleasant home use of Dr. Southworth's "URATABS," which any good druggist can furnish in sealed packages containing a supply or guarantee of money back on first box purchased, if not well pleased with results. No matter how stubborn, troublesome or long standing, you may be you can easily prove the value of Dr. Southworth's "Uratabs" in a few days' time—and you are invited to do so, without slightest risk of cost, unless pleased with results. Start the test of "Uratabs" to-day and look for improvement inside of 24 hours—ask your druggist.