

The Free Press Short Story

THE LITTLE GRAY BOX

By HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH

JELIA M. WALTERS  
 Edith is the elder, but Alice is named after me, grandmother sometimes said when the two children would stand before the glass cabinet, looking at its treasures. "Of course those things will be divided between them, but I haven't decided yet who shall have the little gray box."

The two girls grew up, not knowing what was in the box, but feeling sure that it held the chief of grandmother's previous triumphs.

Wynmere was an old and quiet town with the charm of a beautiful setting. When the cousins were still in high school summer tourists discovered the place, and summer cottages soon sprung out along the river. Several of the largest old houses became inns and tea rooms.

Grandmother Wynne's two grandchildren were popular with the townsfolk and also with the visitors. The girls were special favorites of a new family, the Elliots, and the winter they were sixteen they went to the city to make them a two weeks' visit. It was the first time they had ever been away from Wynmere and they came back with a broadened point of view. They told grandmother about the trip over the supper table the first evening.

"We had the most wonderful time!" exclaimed Edith. "Grace Elliott was simply lovely to us. They took us to see everything. And, grandmother, the clever people we met and the music we heard! Why even the stores are an education, just to walk through them. I'm going to live in the city as soon as I graduate from high school. Mr. Elliot says if I do I shall have a chance in his office."

"That's fine," said grandmother. "It's a great thing to know what you really want to do. And what about you, Alice? Are you going to live in the city, too?"

"No, I like Wynmere better. I want to visit in the city sometimes, but I want to know that I can come back here. I'll have to think of some way to earn my living right at home." And grandmother was pleased for the old home was dear to her.

Edith was conscious of a mean, little jealous pang as she saw how much her cousin had gained in her grandmother's good graces, but she thrust the unwelcome feeling away. "I want to please grandmother," she thought, "but it wouldn't be honest to pretend I want to stay here when I don't."

The next June the girls graduated from the Wynmere High School. A week later when the festivities and excitement of commencement were over grandmother called them in for a serious talk. "I want you to decide what you really wish to do next," she said. "I think you both have unusually good minds, though of course I'm prejudiced in your favor. But I know you've finished your school work two years ahead of the average. I've saved up a little money for you from my income. I wish it were much more, but you know I'm not rich. I can give you about six hundred dollars apiece. With economy that amount will see you through a year in college or some professional school. But I leave you free to use it in any way you wish."

Edith could hardly believe her good fortune. "Oh, grandmother!" she cried. "Then I really can go to that secretarial school! And after I get to work I'll pay you back."

"No, this was saved for just this purpose. And you may write and make your arrangements to enter next term. Alice, where do you want to go to school?"

"I don't think I want to go to school. And I want time to think a little about what I'll do. You see, I didn't know there was any money for me. I have just the beginning of a plan, but I must find out more."

"A week later Alice announced her plan. "I'm going to open a tea room," she said. "I've liked housekeeping more than anything else. I've been making some inquiries, and I think I can manage it. Mrs. Horton is going to put some money into it. I can get the old Jordan place on Main Street at a reasonable rent, and—well, I'm just about ready to begin."

Grandmother and Edith were amazed. They had looked upon Alice as a dreamy impractical person, which indeed she was. It was hard to believe that she had been quite businesslike. But Alice said she knew where she would get her furnishings and how she would decorate; she had a woman for dishwashing and cleaning, and she had arranged with farmers for fresh butter, eggs and cream. Grandmother talked the matter over with Mrs. Horton, who was an old friend of hers, and with the Elliots, who had arrived at their cottage. Then she withdrew all objections.

Edith, whose school did not begin for a month, plunged in whole-heartedly to help Alice. She hemmed and starched curtains, painted tables and chairs, helped search for old-fashioned dishes and put the cupboard in order. The old house, shaded as it was by great elms, made a most attractive tea room. When all was ready for the opening day she declared she didn't believe there could be a nicer tea room in the country.

But it had cost much more than Alice had anticipated. Grandmother had drawn several hundred dollars more to put into it, and another old friend of

hers—a Mrs. Craven—had lent a hundred dollars.

Edith worked wherever she could the week the tea-room opened. She was not a good cook, as Alice was, but she acted as waitress, arranged the flowers, pulled berries and wrote menus. The tea room had a flying start. The tables were filled each afternoon. It looked as if the venture were succeeding.

Edith began a system of simple book-keeping, showing the cost of the things used, and what the meal must sell for to bring a profit. Alice was not systematic but she did promise to keep her books.

"You know, dear," said Edith, "it would take only a little while to get to running behind if you don't know just what your income and outgo are."

The next week Edith went to the city and plunged into her course at the school. She was able to get into advanced work quickly, for she had already studied bookkeeping and shorthand. She was also well trained in spelling and in the use of correct English. Her teachers praised her work. She boarded at a quiet house that Mrs. Elliot had recommended. The summer was hot and trying, but to Edith it was a never-falling delight. Each day held some new and pleasant experience.

She made several week-end visits home. The tea room, dainty and cool, seemed to be flourishing; the summer people came in flocks. Alice talked happily of the money that she was taking in. She seemed to have found her place.

"With the coming autumn and winter Edith went home more rarely. Her year's work was to be finished in May, and Mrs. Elliot had secured her of a position; she had had glowing reports from her teachers. But he told her to go home for a month's visit before beginning her work.

In May therefore Edith turned homeward with a happy heart. To spend Maytime in the quiet village would be a joy. She thought of grandmother's old garden, and shrub stood—lilies, peonies, pinks, lilacs, bridal wreath; and the first roses would bloom while she was home. And then to have a whole leisurely month with dear grandmother and Alice and all the old friends! Alice would help her get her wardrobe in order, and she would look over the tea-room books. She hoped the tea room was doing well. The profitable season was just opening.

Although as the train pulled into Wynmere Edith felt that life was satisfactory. Wouldn't grandmother stare when she told her what salary she was to get! Well, it certainly showed that she was succeeding.

It was supper time when Edith reached home. There was just time for a warm kiss from both her dear ones. The dining room was the same orderly, restful place. There were fresh spring flowers on the table and on the sideboard.

Abigail, who had been cook so long that she was like one of the family, had prepared the things that Edith liked. Edith looked with new pleasure at the spotted linen and the old silver and china. But there was something wrong. Alice was anxious and distraught, and grandmother seemed sad. Edith talked brightly, but she had the conversation almost to herself.

"Something's wrong at the tea room," she thought, looking at Alice. "Perhaps she's got the books all tangled up. Well, I'll have plenty of time to straighten them out for her now. She ought to have a little vacation. I could manage the tea room perfectly well if only I could cook."

She slept late the next morning, and Alice was gone when she awoke. About the middle of the morning Edith walked across the shady square to the tea room. Alice was in the kitchen preparing sandwiches and mixing her delicious cup cakes; but her face was even more tragic than it had been the night before.

"I can spread the sandwiches," said Edith. "You must let me help all I can this month; you look tired."

To Edith's astonishment Alice dropped her head on the table before her and burst into tears. "O Edith! It's no use offering to help now; it's too late. I've got to close up the shop. I can't put it off more than a few days longer."

"Why, my dear, my dear!" Edith's arms were round her cousin. "Tell me what has happened! Perhaps it isn't so bad as you think."

"Yes, it is! I owe money everywhere. The man from the city will be here to collect ninety-six dollars in a few days. My rent is overdue. I haven't paid grandmother or Mrs. Horton a cent of what they let me have. And Mrs. Craven needs the hundred dollars she lent me last year. There's nothing to do but give up. You can't know how I've suffered. This was what I loved to do, and I can't see what happened."

"But Alice, what became of the money you took in?"

"I don't know. Honestly I didn't waste it. I paid things as the bills came due, and I thought I was going to have enough. But now it's all gone."

"Alice had the grace to look ashamed. "But don't your books show?"

"I didn't keep them up. You see, I was so busy last summer that I neglected them for a few days; then I couldn't catch up. But I kept on charging the same prices, and I didn't pay more for

anything. They ought to have come out all right."

Edith did not utter a reproach. She sat silent, thinking hard.

"Alice," she said at last, "you can't give up. Don't you see what will happen if you do? Your creditors will sell your equipment here. It will bring only a few dollars as second-hand stuff, and you will lose the six hundred dollars grandmother gave you; worse yet, you will lose what grandmother lent you and what Mrs. Horton and Mrs. Craven put into the business. None of them can afford to lose so much. Alice, don't you see that to give up would be pretty close to disgrace?"

"I'll go to the city with you and work and pay them back."

"What could you do? You have no business training. You could hardly make enough to keep you."

"Well, what am I to do? I can't get any more money, and I can't go any farther. I've done my best. Oh, don't imagine that I'm not sorry and ashamed."

"Now don't cry any more, dear. We're going to pay them back. Your best season is beginning, and we're going to hold on. I shall stay and take care of the business part. I have a little money left, and we'll pay your creditors some of the little more time. Now cheer up, for we're going to work with all our might. Finish your cakes; then we'll sit down at the desk and find out just what our assets and liabilities are."

When Edith had put the bills in order she found the situation quite grave as Alice had said. She had a day of struggle, she realized that to put the business on a sound basis would be the work of months. But if it failed and grandmother's friends lost their money, grandmother would be bowed with shame in the neighborhood in which she had spent her life. Indeed grandmother would probably sacrifice her own property to pay them back. Alice alone would not be able to get a start again. But if she, Edith, remained to help she must lose her opportunity of going into Mr. Elliot's office.

Nevertheless that evening when the tea room was empty Edith wrote and told Mr. Elliot that she would not take the position; she said she was going into business with her cousin. In times of storm a family must stand together.

Edith attacked the problems of the tea room with decision. Of course she found waste in the kitchen. Alice was buying more than she needed, and the inefficient kitchen helper was calmly throwing away everything that was left over. Edith discharged her and wrote to the city to a girl who had been in her class at school.

It was an inspiration to send for Hetty Cuming, for she was a small bundle of energy. She had dropped out of school because she had not enough money to finish the course. Edith had thought of her because she had so often said how much she wanted to live in the country. She came on the first train she could catch, and she fitted into the tea room as if she had been born for the place. No need to warn her about waste! Edith's money was enough to make the most insistent creditors give more time. Alice recovered her spirits and began to plan attractive menus again. The summer people were coming back, and the tea room was a busy place once more. When it was running well Edith began to cast about for additional means of profit. Her first venture was in lunches packed for automobile parties. The tea room was on the main automobile road between two cities, and on one of the first days that Edith was there two parties stopped and asked for lunches to eat in the car. Alice, always glad to oblige, had hurriedly got some things together and then had to guess at what she ought to charge.

Edith ordered boxes and planned several lunches at different prices; she packed a few each morning. A sign beside the road told that box lunches were for sale. The result was a modest additional profit each day.

Edith's next venture came because she was wide-awake. She overheard two of the summer residents talking of a beautiful quilt that one had bought. The other wished she knew where to get one like it.

The next morning Edith hitched the old horse to the still older carryall and made a trip to various farmhouses. She came back with enough quilts and rugs to make a brave showing in the big vacant room upstairs over the tea room. It cost little to put the things in, and from the first they returned a small but regular profit.

As spring advanced Edith began selling garden flowers and homemade jellies and pickles. Virtually every country and village housewife "put up" more fruit and goodies than her family uses in a winter and as summer came on with its fresh fruits Edith found her neighbors glad to sell the surplus.

One day when she was in the country looking for more things for her "handicraft shop" she stopped at the London farm. The London's barn boy was in his smock on the porch, making a pretty rustic flower basket of reeds and bark. Edith bought the basket and paid the delighted and astonished boy a dollar for it. She took it home and filled it with golden and purple growing pansies from grandmother's garden; then she placed it in the window of the tea room with a three-dollar tag on it. It was gone in half an hour. The painter Jimmy London had a paying occupation. Edith bought all the baskets that he could make and filled them with different blooming plants. One filled with white daisies and ferns from the woods looked like a fairy garden. A summer resident bought it to send to a sick friend in a city hospital.

The end of June showed a balance on the right side of the ledger. The girls could pay all their bills and moreover

could begin to return the money that the two old ladies had lent them.

The Elliots came in one hot July afternoon for one of Alice's cool summer luncheons. Edith waited upon them. "I'm still disappointed that you didn't come to learn my business," said Mr. Elliot.

He must have noticed the look that came into Edith's eyes, for afterwards he said to his wife, "I wonder just why she decided to go into that tea room. I don't believe it is her job. I think I'll try to find out about it."

The summer was too busy to leave Edith any time for repining. Alice was radiantly happy again; her tea room was full each day, and people were praising the cooking, the service and everything else about it. Hetty Cuming was taking more and more of the responsibility. Before August the loans were all paid, and there was a balance in the bank.

"Edith," said Alice one day, "I haven't said much, but I want you to know I appreciate what you have done. And you gave up the thing you wanted so much just to save me. I think I've learned the lesson. I believe you can go now, and I'll never get into trouble through carelessness again. I've talked it over with Hetty, and, though we shall miss you terribly, we think we can get along."

"Never mind now," said Edith. "Of course the place in Mr. Elliot's office is filled. But another chance will come, and I've found this work much more interesting than I expected."

"But your place isn't filled!" cried Alice triumphantly. "Mr. Elliot came to talk with me a month ago. And, Edith, I told him everything about the borrowed money and how I was ready to give up, and you wouldn't let me. It wasn't easy but it was my turn to do something for you. And Mr. Elliot thought it was wonderful that you could straighten things out so beautifully. This morning when he asked me and I told him that we were out of debt he said I might tell you that your place will be open the 1st of October."

Alice's eighteenth birthday came in September, and it was a happy celebration. That evening grandmother called the two girls into her room. The little gray box lay in her lap. "When my grandfather came home from his voyage to the South Seas," she began, "he brought this box. And he told my sister and me that it was for the one of us who proved to be the best Eclairham in the next three months. We knew what our grandfather meant; he wished each of us to add honor to our name. So you can imagine how we two little girls tried to be really good, brave and honorable." She paused and Edith and Alice walked silently.

"Now the box is mine to pass on," said grandmother slowly.

"Of course it should be Edith's," said Alice. "She's the better Wynne." And Alice meant it.

Grandmother smiled. "Well now I can decide," she said and opened the box.

Two strings of gleaming pearls were shining against the violet lining.

"Two!" cried both girls.

"Of course there were two," said grandmother. "My grandfather brought one for each of us. He knew how sister and I would try. And since I have two girls, I'm glad there are two of these treasures. Take them, my dears. I think you have both earned them by being an honor to the family name."

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**WANT OF COURAGE.**

A great deal of talent is lost to the world for the want of a little courage. Every day sends to their graves a number of obscure men who have only remained in obscurity because their timidity has prevented them from making the first effort, and who, if they could only have been induced to begin, would in all probability have gone great length in the career of fame.

The fact is, that in order to do anything in this world worth doing, we must not stand shivering on the bank thinking of the cold and danger, but jump in and scramble through as well as we can. It will not do to be perpetually calculating risk and adjusting chance. It all did very well before the flood, when a man could consult his friends upon an intended publication for a hundred and fifty years, and then live to see its success for six or seven centuries afterward; but at present a man writes, and doubts, and hesitates, and consults his brother, and his particular friends, till one day he finds that he has lost so much time in consulting first cousins and particular friends that he has no more time left to follow their advice.

There is so little time for over-squeamishness at present the opportunity slips away; the very period of life at which a man chooses to venture, if ever, is so confined that it is no bad rule to press, upon the necessity, in such instances, of a little violence done to the feelings, and of efforts made in defiance of strict and sober calculation.—Sydney Smith.

**DISTRACTED EFFORT.**

"Father—You know I promised to give you a bicycle if you passed your examinations, but I heard to-day that you had failed. What have you been doing during the term?"

Small Son—"Why, dad, I've been learning to ride a bicycle."

SLAT'S DIARY

By ROSE PARQUEAR

Friday—got a ticket from a traffic officer again today.

It was the same officer which got so mad when pa put a peace about him in the nose paper which pa writes at pa note a peace when this man got a job as a Piece-man and spoke of him as the new Member of the Piece FAREO.

Saturday—Gladis Dextle stuck out her tongue at me today when she asked me in her fokes new otto mobile file I was delivering a package for Mr. Barnhart with Mrs. Craven (the drug store. & after she had paid I wondered if she use to remember when I would blow her nose for her. But I guess not.

Sunday—I did for church today and I and Jake got to thinking was a Pleasant time we had if we did paint black mustache on all the women in the quire and meby a nice 1 on Mrs. Crivitch gets in the a Men corner every Sunday morning.

Tuesday—Corry Blast is the one woman in town which ever got married by telephone and she has sent her husband sense the nite of the wedding and she is beginning to think meby she got the wrong number perhaps.

Wednesday—Stell Grimm has left a nuther husband and has come home for a few weeks till she can find another 1. she told Ant Emmy her last husband was sent such a bad fello and if it hadn't been that he used a Quill tooth pick at the table she cud of lived with him at least for a year if every thing else had of ben all rite.

Thursday—Ant Emmy had a letter from a ole friend yesterday and Ant Emmys ole friend told her that her husband had just ben sent to the penitentiary for life for Burglary. & Today I sen a letter Ant Emmy was writing to her old friend to cheer her up and she started it off saying Cheer up Matty you no Life is Very Short after all.

FEEDING FOR PROFITABLE MILK PRODUCTION

By ROSE PARQUEAR

Profitable milk production requires careful planning of the feeding program for the entire year. It is essential that cows have an abundance of palatable nutritious feed in order to produce milk in large quantities and this feed must be obtained at minimum cost in order to make a profit on prevailing low prices of dairy products.

Milk is produced during the summer more cheaply than at any other season, so provision should be made to have an abundance of pasture during the entire summer. In most cases, the permanent grass and clover pasture is satisfactory for early summer. The yield and quality of permanent pastures can be greatly improved by top dressing with fertilizer. Information regarding pasture fertilization may be obtained by writing to the Superintendent, Experimental Station, Fredericton, N. B.

During the late summer and early fall, provision should be made for grazing the aftermath on fields of clover and timothy which have been cut early for hay. Where this is impossible, annual crops, such as a mixture of oats and peas, can be grazed or the pasture can be supplemented with a feed of hay each day in the barn.

At the Fredericton Experimental Station, the milch cattle obtain the bulk of their summer feed on pasture. When the permanent pastures begin to dry up, the cows graze on the aftermath from hay fields. Grain is fed in limited quantities to maintain the milk flow at a reasonable level throughout the year. When pastures are luxuriant, the milk flow will be good without feeding grain, but when production begins to go down, it is wise to feed about 1 pound of meal to every 6 pounds of milk produced. This helps to maintain production and the cows enter winter quarters in much better condition to continue profitable production during the winter.

**A MINIMUM.**

"Ah," sighed a love-sick youth, "if you only gave me the least hope I—"

"Gracious," interrupted the hard-hearted girl, "I've been giving you the least I ever gave to any man!"

THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEN FEED FOR POULTRY

By ROSE PARQUEAR

Although an abundance of green feed is essential for the young growing stock as well as for the laying hens at all seasons of the year, it is in the late summer and winter, when the grass roots dry out or are frozen, that the fowl are often deprived of necessary succulent green feed in their ration. A short supply of green is frequently the cause of ill health or low production as the right kind of green feed acts as a tonic stimulating the appetite, and as roughage, securing more nourishment from the feed consumed.

If the birds are confined or running in barn yards in the fall, green alfalfa and clover furnish a fine feed when cut green and larger quantities will be consumed if it is run through a cutting box. Cabbage and mangels are desirable green feeds for occasional use but, though cabbage contains an appreciable amount of only vitamins A, B, and C, all vitamins are absent in mangels, while all the known vitamins are found in green alfalfa and clover.

An investigation at the Dominion Experimental Station, Harrow, Ontario, pointed to alfalfa as a most desirable and economical green feed for winter use for poultry when fed in the following manner: To retain as many of the leaves as possible second or third cutting alfalfa was cured as green as safety from moulding would permit. The cured alfalfa was cut in half-inch lengths by the use of a cutting box, steeped in a tub or tank by covering with cold water for twenty-four hours, drained off, and fed in butter tubs or sawed-down milk cans. One hundred hens will readily consume from six to eight pounds dry weight per day when fed in this manner, without any undesirable features in color of white or yolk of egg. When this supply was maintained with a correct dry mash and a carefully balanced supply of scratch grains, cannibalism, feather pulling, and kindred vices were unknown.


Melanovantherium smithae Monell is the scientific name of the black yellow aphid which attacks shade and ornamental trees in Alberta and Saskatchewan.—Dominion Entomological Branch.

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