

The Free Press Short Story

A PROMISED HAPPINESS

HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH

When Alan Phillips went to bed that December night he had every expectation of lying awake. After the rousing emotions of the past two weeks, sleep seemed an impossibility. Astonishingly, he had slept thirteen hours, and when he awoke he did not know where he was.

His predicament came back with a rush within sixty seconds, and Alan groaned aloud. It only he could sleep on and on. After the blessed oblivion of those thirteen hours, remembrance was torture.

Coming home from college for the Christmas holidays, Alan had been as well satisfied with life as any young fellow between the two oceans. His parents were dead, but his aunt and uncle, with whom he had lived since babyhood, had admirably filled the place of father and mother. He had inherited a comfortable fortune. Lacking the incentive of necessity, he had done only moderately well in his studies, but he had enjoyed college life immensely.

From those sunny heights he had plunged instantly to the depths of disillusion. When he reached home, a wild-eyed woman he hardly recognized as his aunt had sobbed out an incredible story. His uncle had disappeared, was, in fact, a fugitive from justice. Caught by the sudden collapse of the stock market, putting up new securities to save those he had already risked, he had sacrificed not only his own fortune and that of his nephew, but money entrusted to him by outsiders. "You know," wailed Aunt Margaret, "that he never meant to be dishonest." Alan had answered that of course he knew it, but wondered dully what difference that would make to the law.

Matters had moved rapidly. The big house and its contents had been turned over to the creditors. One of Aunt Margaret's friends had offered to pay the expenses at a sanitarium, and Aunt Margaret had been taken there the previous day, such a wraith of a woman that when he kissed her good-bye, Alan wondered if he would ever see her again. When he left the house that had been his home ever since he could remember, he had gone to a cheap downtown hotel, and taken a room. There he had slept around the clock and wakened to face a future more terrifying than the worst of bad dreams.

The few dollars in his pocket were all he had in the world. This in itself was staggering to one who had supposed that he never need worry about money. Worse than his impecunious state was the realization that the mention of his name would no longer ensure kindly attention on the part of the listener. Alan Phillips, well-born and wealthy, seemed to him quite a different person from the Alan Phillips whose name had become a household name.

For twenty-one years Alan had thought rather highly of himself, but now his struggle was more difficult because of a disheartening conviction of inferiority. After two years at the university he had no idea how to go about earning a living. He had always thought himself rich in friends, but now he could not think of a person to whom he could confidently turn for help.

Alan had gone to bed about three o'clock in the morning and had slept until four the next afternoon. After dressing he came downstairs and went to the dining room for dinner. An unappetizing meal concluded, he settled himself in the lobby with a newspaper, whose date told him something he had forgotten, that this was the last day of the year.

As he read on, he began to notice unusual noises in the street, the tooting of horns, the blowing of whistles. Presently he realized that all this was preliminary to the celebration that would be held in the town square and in the adjacent streets. In this old city the observance of New Year's Eve had been reduced to a formula. Young and old, the well-to-do and the poor, turned out to give a noisy farewell to the old year, and a similar welcome to the new. Many wore carnival costumes, clowns and gypsy maidens skipped along the sidewalks arm in arm.

Alan had never attended one of these fantastic civic celebrations. He had always given a New Year's party in his own house, or had been invited to the home of one of his friends. Disregarding the racket outside, he kept his place in the dark, uncomfortable lobby of the hotel, and bent over his paper. Because of increasingly difficulty in concentrating on the news, he studied the want ad column, without results. At last he flung the paper aside and went out into the chill of the winter night.

Already the crowd was great. The square, which was the supposed centre of the celebration, was packed with a throng moving slowly around the central fountain, blowing horns and singing snatches of popular songs.

At one of the cross streets, he escaped from the close-packed slow-moving throng and stood back against one of the tall buildings to decide upon his next move. Three other young people, who, like himself, had escaped from the crowd, stood near him. He watched

them, not so much because he was interested as because his sick heart welcomed anything that would distract his attention from his own torturing thoughts.

"I guess Betty's had enough," one of the girls was saying. "Want to go home, Betty?"

The other stoutly disclaimed any such desire. "It would spoil everything to be home before midnight. If only the people didn't push so," she added ruefully.

"That's a way crowds have," said the young fellow who acted as escort for the pair, and who judging from the resemblance was a brother of the girl who had first spoken. "Get your breath and we'll go back to the festival scene. But any time you're tired—"

The sentence was never finished, and Alan was responsible for the interruption. He happened to be starting overhead, and he saw an object topple from the ledge of a window many stories up and start its swift descent. Alan leaped forward and gave the two girls a push that sent them staggering back into the protection of the portico. Almost simultaneously with his action, a well-dressed man from the indignant escort knocked Alan flat. Even as he fell, a big water bottle crashed on the sidewalk at the very spot where the little group had stood a second before.

As he fell Alan's head came in contact with one of the pillars of the portico. When he came to himself, one of the girls was on her knees beside him, and he could hear the other sobbing. Without opening his eyes, he asked, "Is she—hurt?"

An incisive girlish voice replied, "Not nobody's but me."

Alan opened his eyes and tried unsuccessfully to get up. "I saw something falling," he began. "I didn't have a time—"

The girl beside him interrupted. "I know it was that as I saw that bottle crash. You were trying to push us out of harm's way." She turned to the young fellow who had delivered so drastic a punch. "You were too hasty, Roland!" she cried. "If he's badly hurt because he tried to keep us from getting smashed by a water bottle that fell out of the sky—"

Again Alan made an effort to sit up, and this time he succeeded. Not feeling equal to looking higher, he addressed the knees of the young man who had knocked him down. "I don't blame you at all for hitting me," he said. "But I know if I took time to explain, the thing would smash right down on the three of you."

"I thought you were getting fresh," the young fellow said. "You know there are some idiots who think an occasion like this excuses everything. I hit without waiting for you to explain. Of course I didn't expect you to throw your head against that post."

"No, that was a little addition of my own," Alan replied, and Roland laughed. He said in a friendly tone, "Well, we'd better take you home without wasting any more time. Where you live?"

"I don't live anywhere."

At this astonishing statement, the three young people looked at one another. Hastily Alan explained, "I mean my home has just been broken up. I stayed last night at the St. Martin's."

"You're not going to stay at the St. Martin's to-night," Roland said. "After knocking you out, the least I can do is see that you have a comfortable bed. Your grip's at the hotel, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Well, we'll go around and get it. Our car's just two blocks away. Do you think you can walk if you hang onto my arm?"

Alan was sure he could walk without assistance, but a few steps proved him mistaken, and he was very glad to accept Roland's arm.

At the hotel he paid his bill and secured his belongings, and then, in the back seat of the automobile, he lay back with closed eyes. His head was aching violently. The drive was longer than he could have wished, for the motion of the car added to his discomfort. At length they reached a big, pleasant house in the suburbs, and Roland assisted him up the walk. The resourceful sister, Adelaide, had hurried on ahead and evidently had explained to her parents the status of their guest. When Alan got inside, he was introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Maynard, who asked him no questions.

Apparently Mrs. Maynard had had experience in similar emergencies. After Alan was in bed she applied distinctly soothing remedies where they were most needed.

At breakfast he was uncomfortably conscious of his unbecoming black eye and of the lump on his head, but he was hungry, and he knew that as far as his injury was concerned, he had nothing to worry about. The family scattered after the meal. Mr. Maynard retired to his den with the morning paper, and Mrs. Maynard hurried into the kitchen to aid in the preparations for dinner. Betty Newman, a visitor from the Middle West, and Roland went skating. Alan and Adelaide were left together, and

after half an hour of talk Alan said, "If your mother can spare a minute, I'd like to say good-bye to her."

"Why you're going to stay to dinner!" Adelaide exclaimed, but when Alan shook his head, she said resignedly, "Of course you have lots of old friends and we are very new."

"I'm not sure I have any friends at all," Alan replied, bitterly.

"Why not?"

"You might as well know—first at last, I'm a nephew of Alexander Phillips."

Her face was blank for a moment. "Alexander Phillips," she repeated. Then, with a start, "Why you must be the nephew whose money he stole."

Alan winced at the word. "He was welcome to it," he protested.

"Why do you think your friends would go back on you for that? Why, you're one of the victims."

"Laten," Alan said, "if my uncle is arrested and put on trial, I'll stand by him."

After a rather long silence Adelaide said, "Do you think you are being fair to your friends?"

"What do you mean?"

"You stand by your uncle, although he has wronged you. Is it fair to suppose that your friends will go back on you when you are perfectly blameless?"

Alan heard himself saying, in an unsteady voice, "I seem such a worthless chap. I've had two years in college and I haven't any idea how to learn a living."

"Perhaps Father could help you there. We told him last night that you wanted work, and he said he was going to need another delivery man. It's not much of a job, but you could earn your living till you found something more suitable."

"Perhaps if he knew—"

Adelaide interrupted a little impatiently. "Why should you think you are the only person to whom loyalty means anything?" She went on without giving him time to answer. "You are going to stay to dinner with us, aren't you?"

"Why, if you really want me."

"Of course we do. And after dinner you can have a talk with Father. And when everything is settled, you must look up all your old friends."

Alan had found his handkerchief at last and Adelaide rose tactfully. "I must see if Mother wants any help."

Left to himself, the Maynards' guest blew his nose hard and wondered if he were indeed the same Alan Phillips who had entered their home the night before. That Alan looked despairingly on a life that was over. This Alan was actually looking forward to new work, new friends, new hope, new confidence—a new year, in truth.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

A pale-faced passenger looked out of the railway carriage window with ex-cooing interest. Finally he turned to a fellow traveller. "You likely think I never rode on this line before," he said, "but the fact is I just got out of prison this mornin', and it does me good to look around. It is going to be very rough, though, facin' my oldtime friends. I s'pose you ain't got much of an idea how a man feels in a case like that."

"Perhaps I have a better idea of your feelings than you think," said the other passenger with a sad smile. "I am a member of Parliament, and I'm going back to my constituents for re-election."

BIRDS REPEL ARMY WORM

INVASION

A striking illustration of the value of birds to man was witnessed in the eastern part of the Province of Quebec in August last, when a severe outbreak of army worms threatened the grass and grain in the areas affected. Playing their usual role as man's allies in controlling insects pests, many kinds of birds were seen to gather in flocks to devour the army worm invaders. Robins, warblers, larks, various native sparrows, and even gulls and shore birds consumed army worms in large quantities, day after day, and as long as any of the insects remained every bird in the region had a round outline and a satisfied air.

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THE HOLY MONTH

December deserves its name from the fact that it was the tenth month in the old Roman Calendar. The Saxons called it "winter-monath," but after their conversion to Christianity this was changed to Halligmonath or Holy Month, in honor of the nativity of Christ.

Many queer customs are observed all over the world at the beginning of the month, one of the oldest being that at Craig-madden, Strirlingshire, where there is a triangular hole beneath a number of Druidical stones. Women who can't crawl through this believe that they will avoid dying childless. Curiously enough, a similar custom prevails in the Temple of Malabar Point, Bombay, where there is a narrow opening in the rocks. Men who squeeze through, are supposed to leave their sins behind, while women believe that they will conceive children.

"You find Communism in countries where people are not educated. I believe in educating the people to think,"—Lady Astor.

SLATS' DIARY
OLIVER N. WARREN

Sunday: Well, Sandy Chee is still the good old fellow he were when I was just a kid. He's not every thing I eat for except about 40 leaven. But I s'pose he didn't have room for all I eat in his slay or ottomobiel or aeroplane. Becos there's a few other kids across my path.

Monday: When I awoke up this a. m. I had a misty fine senishen in my feelings. I didn't haft to get up right now & when I did haft to all I had to do were to play. Holidays are fine things in any family.

Tuesday: More of the same about arising up out of bed. I wonder if all the other good kids are injoying Christmas and etc. like me. If so then they is no doubt about all the benifits of Christmas. None at all. What so ever.

Wednesday: Still more of the same about arising up out of bed. But I see that even Christmas has its drawbacks. The turkey has all went except a few bones & soup & etc. & also the minits ple are a gettin' mitey soggy & they can be too much of a good thing.

Thursday: This a. m. had 48c of my Christmas money still left. Went down town & saw Jane & Elay clost to the drug store. That it 2 cold for ice cream so I walkt up boldly & sed Merry Christmas. The dames didn't think it so offle cold & so now I only nave 19c. Theys all ways sum thing to make me miserabel.

Friday: Jake got in a file & it must of been a good I becoss he got 2 teeth noht out. His Pa sed cum out hear to the wood shed & get's licken for loosing them teeth & Jake sed he aint lost them & that he has got them in his pocket. So his Pa laft & didn't lick him.

Saturday: Pas editur give Pa 2 back scratchers for Christmas & none of us was sure what they was for & so Ant Emmy sed they ott of been 5 of them so we could use them as they are 5 of us & sum of the saidt forks have become lost.

TO-DAY'S OBLIGATION

This day is before me. The circumstances of this day are my environment; they are the material out of which, by means of my brain, I have to live and be happy, and to refrain from causing unhappiness in other people. It is the business of my brain to make use of this material. My brain is in its box for that sole purpose. Not to-morrow! Not next year! But now! To-day, exactly as to-day is! The facts of to-day, which, in my unregeneracy, I regarded primarily as anxieties, nuisances, impediments, I now regard as so much raw material from which my brain has to weave a tissue of life that is comely.

1938

1937—another better year for dairying.

Income of the Dominion's dairy farmers for 1937 is estimated at \$228,230,000. This is \$20,000,000 more than last year, and \$38,820,000 over 1935.

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McLAREN'S STUFFED OLIVES 3-oz Jar 10c

HEINZ TOMATO KETCHUP Lg. Btl. 19c

EASTWEST SHORTENING OR DOMESTIC 2 1/2 Lbs. 25c

PURE SUNLIGHT SOAP Cake 6c

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CHRISTIE'S RITZ BISCUITS Pks. 15c

OUR OWN OLD CHEESE Pound 25c

VICTORY SWEET MIXED PICKLES 27-oz Jar 23c

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SINGAPORE SLICED PINEAPPLE No. 2 Tin 9c

OUR GOOD COOKING FIGS Pound 10c

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