

The Free Press' Short Story

FOUNDATION STONES

By FRANCES McKENNON MORTON

DONALD MORLEY stood on the steps of the big auditorium surrounded by a group of architects and engineers who had just marched up with him to receive their diplomas.

A rough hand upon his shoulder gave Donald a shove that threatened to send him sprawling down the steps. He felt helpless in that cumbersome gown, though he tried to smile at the thought, for he had rushed madly down many a rain-soaked football field and crossed the goal line in a muddy plume.

The next instant the same hand drew him back with a firm grasp. "Brace up, big boy," thundered the deep voice of Sandy Martin, who but for Donald's own good record would have been first honor man, "and tell us—where do we go from here? You should know. Let's see: you are president of our national chapter, retiring football captain, crack tennis player, class president, first honor man, and general high moul of the campus. We expect something big of you. We can't get any jobs and we don't know what to do next."

"Oh, Mack will have a job," interrupted Ted Anderson, a business administration graduate who had joined the group, "he's been riding the gray train too long to get off now."

Sandy flushed with embarrassment as he caught the white look of misery that flashed over Donald's face; but the next instant Donald managed the generous smile. He had seen at once that there was no malice in Ted's remark. People had been so wonderfully kind and helpful to him as he had gone through school that no wonder it looked like a "Gravy Train."

Ted laughed and caught Donald by the arm. "Just a figure of speech, old man," he said, "and I'm partly jealous because I didn't qualify."

By this time the men had reached the street and were pushing and shoving each other as noisily as if they were freshmen instead of graduates. As a low blue roadster drew in to the curb all was quiet and dignity again. The horn honked and Donald turned at once toward the car with Ted, clownishly mocking the eager look on his face. "Oh," said Ted, "it's for you, and I thought she was calling for me. More jealousy and another place where I can't qualify."

when he was sixteen, and before he had spent all three years on his education. It somehow gave him the feeling of being cheated and disillusioned.

Donald was not ashamed of work, for he realized that no labor is menial when well done. Somehow he had expected to start higher on the ladder rather than below the point where he had left off as a high school student. To go to work as a day laborer on the campus of the very school where he had won and carried off all his fine honors so gallantly not only gave him a let-down feeling but a sense of letting his friends down also.

Here was Jean calling for him to-day as honor man of his class in a really great university. To-morrow at this same place he would be a soiled and weary workman going home from a day of hard labor. He could not ask or expect her to align herself with a man who could not hope to fit into her scheme of living for years to come, if ever.

University life, he thought bitterly now, did that sort of thing to unsuspecting young people, leveling their social and financial differences in the democracy of school life, letting them learn to care for each other and then throwing them out into a topsy-turvy world where all sorts of artificial differences conspired to separate them and break their hearts. He wondered dully if it would take the heart out of Jean as it was taking it out of him now, but at least he knew that he would never be so poor a man as to trade on her sympathy.

Like a flash the conditions which he faced had raced through his mind. In spite of them he greeted Jean's cheery call of "Get in, and let's go for a spin," with a friendly smile. "I'll get rid of these incriminating garments and then I'll be with you." As he was just in front of the office where the caps and the gowns were to be checked in it was indeed only a "jiffy" before Donald was back at the curb. Jean was waiting, chatting easily with Ted who leaned over the door of the car.

Jean moved over and motioned to Donald to get in and take the wheel as she smiled brightly at Ted. "Can we give you a lift, Ted?" asked Donald as he stepped on the starter.

"Thanks, no," laughed Ted. "There's a crowd, especially at a farewell party." Ted, still wearing his mocking smile, lost himself in the crowd.

BACK TO UNCLE SAM



Mayor D. Laurence MacLaren, of Saint John, N.B., is shown Above with the historic quadrant used by the first Admiral of the United States Navy, John Paul Jones. Mayor MacLaren returned the historic instrument to the United States personally through President Roosevelt, during commencement exercises at the Naval Academy at Annapolis. The quadrant will be placed in the naval academy museum.

thing big," as he thought of the huge blocks of stone and the heavy stone hammer he would handle the next day. Though she seemed most reluctant to part with him he did not ask her for an appointment that night nor did he make any plans to see her again before the left life did not feel equal to it.

Donald walked the streets until after midnight; but he was on time at his new work the next morning. He was chastened of life; and somehow the artificial pride had gone out of him so that he welcomed the hard labor. As he accustomed himself to the task he found that he was able to take up a special design course that was being offered at night through the summer. It kept his ambition stimulated and he could almost feel himself growing in power.

Now with this new slant on life, he felt childish to think that he had ever feared honest labor might lose him any friends worth the keeping; or that he could have felt so bitter toward Jean for honoring Ted above him. He could now clearly see that she had been wise to insist on her father not tempting him out of his chosen work by offering him a place as secretary. Here in his chosen work he had already begun to climb from the lowly subcontractor to the stone inspector; and now soon he would have his own contract on that school chapel.

After all, did not the deepest dreams of a man's heart call him to the work for which he was best fitted? Were they not really God's dreams for him so that he must be true to them if he would rise to the full height of his humanity?

His thoughts ran on as he carefully measured the space for the capstone of a high arched window through whose opening he could see the street below. Before his quick vision there passed a picture of a low blue roadster with Ted at the wheel and Jean at his side. Swift as the glimpse had been it was enough to show him that a change had come over Jean. She was thinner and somehow less glowing and vital than the picture of her he had kept in his mind. It disturbed him. Why had he let her go out of his life without an effort to hold her? He felt a sort of contempt for the mixed emotions that had dominated him that day when he had laid aside his cap and gown and begun to break alone on the campus. He was deeply disturbed by this glimpse of a troubled Jean and when he saw the blue roadster, the next day, he was even more disturbed. Ted was at the wheel again and the car was idling down the avenue as he seemed completely absorbed in the conversation of his companion, who was not Jean at all. She was a younger girl, a brilliant blonde and dressed in that severe, over-smart style some of the younger set affected.

Next day at the same hour the blue roadster came by again, and again Ted was at the wheel but the girl beside him was not Jean; and a hard sort of anger settled around Donald's heart. Donald thought harshly of Ted for trying so quickly of a girl like Jean and then using her car to play about with another girl. No wonder Jean had a hurt, bewildered look; and how he would like to give Ted the trouncing he deserved.

Donald climbed into his own car, which he had been able to buy, and he noticed grimly that his large, steady hands were shaking as he put them to the wheel. At that instant Jean appeared walking across the street. Instinctively he honked his horn to attract her attention. At the smile of welcome she gave him, he jumped out of his car and was walking toward her when a car

swerved recklessly around the corner, caught Jean with its fender and hurled her to the pavement.

Donald cleared the distance between them at one leap, at the same time making a quick mental note of the number of the car. At his feet Jean lay white and limp. The next second he had picked her up and started to his car with her, his first thought being a hospital. Holding her close as if by his own strength he would give life back to her, he did not know that he was speaking low words of tenderness to her until she opened her eyes and smiled at him. For an instant she shivered as if suddenly coming back to life; and then her conscious reactions sprang to activity.

"For pity's sake, Don," she laughed shakily, "let's get out of this before the police come. I am not really hurt a bit. A fall always did knock the breath out of me, but I am all right now."

The ever-watchful traffic officer was already at their side as Donald placed his burden in the car and alighted beside her. As the man was a friend of Donald's, in a few low-spoken words the necessary business was settled. As Donald turned to Jean the world seemed suddenly radiant with the smile she gave him. His words began stumbling over themselves while he tried to tell her that which had been so long in his heart to tell. He forgot everything but the love that had to be told, while Jean sat strangely silent until Donald was almost frightened at his audacity.

At length she spoke, with a sort of sob in her throat. "Why Don, I have half a mind to get out and walk the rest of the way home. To think that you really cared like that all of the time and then left me to break my heart about you all summer. The idea of your thinking I cared for Ted that way when you and I had been such friends. I think maybe Ted had always been my 'fame dog' that I had to 'help over' sides. We were both motherless children and close neighbors, and I was six months older. You see how I would feel responsible for helping him. But now he has really grown up. Father says he is a fine business man and I believe he is. I sold him my blue roadster and he has himself engaged to a girl—he is very much in love with; so I can wash my hands of any further responsibility."

"But I had no money, Jean, and only a job at soap-cutting and—" Donald began defensively, but Jean interrupted. "And you wanted to rob me of all the glory of working and saving and helping you."

"Oh Jean," he said brokenly, "you'll never know what it meant when I thought you were killed just now."

"Yes," she said softly, "I do know, Don, for I thought this summer I had lost you."

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