The Free Press' Short Story

THE ROAD TO CAMPTON

ERNEST L. THURSTON

"What do you mean?" demanded Joe.

mischievous. "Hold your horses, Joe!

Jessica giggled; her expression

yourself; to let yourself go, for once."

Joe stared straight into her eyes;

He had been prompt in forming

When he let Jessica out at her home

was distant and his voice a little cool

as he said. "I'm sorry I blow up, Jess

Jessica was left a prey to mixed feel-

As the days mased it really appeared

to have done so Joe no longer dropped

This was the status of affairs when

the entire length of the state. was to

When the tentative line was laid out.

however, it was discovered that the

through the middle of Fletcher's Woods,

tlement fay beyond the curve. Speeding

the matter hotey and heavily. Business

Finally by a close vote, the society

location

and shoved up that gas lever."

to believe his ears.

ERBICA WILOOX eyed the young Jessies. man beside her with tentalizing laws. Of course, if I'd realized what glandes. Her brown eyes spar- would come-" She stopped in dismay. kled, color flushed her cheeks, her charming mouth was quirked with mis- swinging around. chief. She had been making trasing re-

Joe Barbour admired the girl; yet the It was all a joke. While I held your aharp barbs of speech had brought embarrassed color flooding up into the mots of his light brown hair. "He yourself, Jess!" he forced himself to say, laughingly. "Don't get me flustered in the

midst of this traffic." machine can go like a swallow. Swoop places, old slow poke."

Joe eved on-coming cars and the for your idea of fun? I'm ashamedmachines shead of him. "Sorry, Jess, disgusted-" With a desperate effort he but we're doing all the law allows now." regained self-control. His lips clamped "You're so careful, you set as if you tight.

didn't dare." sputtered Jessics. Joe attreed uncomfortably. He choked with that vivid, tantalizing amile that back the impulse to anap out, as he said, usually brought an answering smile to quietly, "I think I'd like to scoot, Jess. his line. "I vowed I'd make you lose But it isn't safe. And being a member | your temper, sometime, you image of of the town's Law and Order Society, self-control." I need to be especially careful. I-"

He maned and rooked back in his seat keen, considering, measuring glance; as wholly unexpectedly, his powerful then again, he looked ahead, unswering roadster leaned forward. Instinctively nothing. He had come from the city he acted. He swerved out to avoid crash- two years before to become assistant telling the car shead, and with a clang of er in the local bank. Oddly enough, some clipping fenders, shot by a car from the thought, he wished to develop his life opposite direction. Nothing was left to work in a small town. do, then, but get by the whole line of cars. He had to do it fast because other cars were approaching. He lifted his foot from the accelerator, but the car firm without losing his temper. aped on. They awooped down grade at Jessica, whose temper took to itself wings sixty miles an hour. Behind them a on slight provocation, this had seemed a whistle shrilled. Joe whitened; Jessica fault. She felt he lacked fire and force to blow up; yet more than once she had

isughed delightedly. "Rum away from him, Joe," she cried. seen an iron will clamp down his self-

"You can make it." Joe flashed a glance at her that almost made her regret a certain act. Finding and Order Society, a group of thought the accelerator still down to the floor as ful citizens who were interested in clearif stuck, he threw out the clutch and ing up certain unsatisfactory local conbecan braking to a stop. As he did so, dittons, and in promoting the village his eves caught the gas lever on his welfare. He had proven a quiet but steering wheel. It was far forward. No forceful speaker and an active member.

wonder the car had leaped shead! "Now how did that happen?" he muttered as he shoved it back and then apokesman swung to the road side. Behind them the putt-putt of a motorcycle sounded Joe extended his hand but his manner increasingly loud, and presently a gray-

clad trooper ranged alongside.

"What's the big idea?" he snarled. You see-" he gased down the street-"Want to pile a dosen cars in a wreak?

"I once kist my temper with disastrous results. Bince then I've fought for the Fork over your license." "I can't understand how this happencontrol you shattered. I'll-begin over. ed. officer," returned Joe, courteously, though miserably. "I never drive with ings. She laughed, recalling his surprise, the lever, but somehow it got shoved forthrilled to his instant skillful meeting of ward. I thought the accelerator was the situation, flushed in anger at the stuck. I sped on to avoid an socident." harsh treatment he had suffered, and "You speeders are always making up worried-for fear their real friendship had "But, officer." exclaimed Jessica,

a new one," chuckled the officer, grimly. bringing her delightful smile into play, "he really is an exceptionally careful around in the old way to pick her up for

"He nearly ditched a car back there. | Too, Joe resigned his secretaryship young lady," growled the trooper Bud- The members joked him, and many opdenly he looked up, a little contemplaposed his action, but Will Barlow, the ously, from the license he was reading president agreed that Joe would be less "Are you the secretary of that law and valuable as a society representative in order society in Campton? So! Preach hearings before the council and state one thing and practice another, ch? I'll commissions. To Jessica's furious anger show you up" He scribbed in a form his resignation was accepted. She had and passed it over "Follow me to the wished to clear him, but loe had put fustice of the peace in the next village" his foot down, arguing that a misunder-He shot ahead, and Jog followed, standing would still persist. downcast and miserable Jessica eyed him

considerably, mischief still in the dark the matter of the location of State Higheyes and in the corners of her mouth, way Number Seventeen became active but a little frown of perplexity in the This wonderful five-truck road, aweeping middle of her forchead. Ten minutes later they sat in a little pass through Campton. That meant

crossroads office. Before them was a business and prosperity. The business grissled, lantern-jawed old man with people were for it, so was the Law and cold blue eyes, who eyed Joe sarosatically | Order Society as the trooper gave testimony, including the young man's position.

"Are you a law and order chap, as highway would sweep around a curve the trooper says?" snapped the justice, into the village Main Street, passing "Yes," acknowledged Joe.

"And then you engage in this sort of a glorious stand of old oak timber on business?" said the man, sourly "Like the outskirts of town Certain profitlots of reformers surface obedience, but seeking landowners outside the village get by with what they limits had managed to influence this

"But, Mr. Justice exclaimed Jessica." The objections were two. A little set-"he wasn't to blume "Ten dollars and costs fif e.n. fifty, drivers considering themselves in open

total ' snapped the man country would strike the village without Joe went white then he flushed with warning almost at a point where the anger. Jessica stared at hun with a cer- large township school was located. That tain hopefuln ss that faded as the woung meant danger to children especially. In man took out his billfold and counted the second place Fictcher's Woods would out the fine. The justice endorsed the be wrecked offence on the license card and returned The Law and Order Society debated

"Why didn't you fight" demanded interests opposed a protest over the loca-

Jessica, as she and Joe left. tion. Protesting might lead to reloca-"What was the use. They wouldn't tion to pass outside the village. Save take my word. I could get no witnesses business at any cost. Joe, on the other to help, for the thing did look bad. I'm hand, favored protesting. He continued sorry-in more ways than one; besides, outspoken about the matter, although now I'll have to resign my secretary- the bank president warned him meanship of the Law and Order Society" | ingly, that his attitude was likely to hurt

"Why in the world?" demanded Jes- the baughs business.

"Our society stands for careful driving directed its officers to appear before the It wouldn't look right for me to repre- State Highway Commission in protest. sent it officially when I have this record; The officers sat with Joe and worked against me." up their arguments. "Your explanation ought to satisfy Don't simply knock," he urged. "Offer,

The second second

a substitute and back it up.

He went alone. Jessica wint also, but ed. Jessica stared at him, fascinated, with friends. She saw him seated in a fearful. dark corner. She also spotted a state trooper on duty and recognised him as the man who had arrested Joe for speed-

Jessics watched the proceedings with me." nterest. The three men of the highway commission sat bahind a long table, the gruff and scowling chairman, Barry DuBois, in the centre.

The hearing proceeded. Other delegations were heard. The time came for Campton Village, but the society officers had not arrived. Jession could see Joe looking about uneasily. She saw the state trooper approach him and speak. Joe got up and came to her. "......

late, you must speak." "No use," he said, a little bitterly, "I suspect the others are simply delayed.

attention. I reached under the wheel On taking up the receiver in the booth to which the trooper led him, Joe heard "Why, may I ask?" Joe clearly failed President Barlow's volce, weak . worried. "We went into the ditch on the Pairview curve, Joe; so shaken up "For a joke, To make your beatir we can't came on for a time. You must

"And you took a chance of causing an "Horry," 'mid Joe, "I can do you no down the hill by these cars. Let's go silly impulse?" Joe's temper flamed. "And good. That state trooper who acrested you'd wreck my record, my usefulness, me is acting as the chairman's aide."

> Joe returned to the half and nodded ed. "Did he lose it?" to Jessica to show he had to speak.

"The matter of the entrance of Highway Seventeen into Campton Village." announced the chairman. "The Law and Order Society, represented by its president, Mr. Barlow."

"Mr. Chairman" Joe rose to his feet, 'Mr. Barlow and the other society orficers were in an automobile that skidded off the key pavement at Pairview. They are too shaken to appear. Mr. Barlow requests me to speak for him. I

church connection, friendly in meeting people, courteous always. He could be of frenk organization is this?" When Joe started to explain the pur-

poses of the society, the chairman turned and begun talking to a property owner.

er and spoke to him.

truffic rules? Yes? And do you?" At the last election he had become the

"Yes, air."

"It would appear," he remarked, with laurh, "that the Law and Order Society truffic case to the commissioner of motor wishes law observance on the part of others than its own members. Do other members, Mr. Barbour, make a practice of breaking traffic laws?"

With an effort visible to everyone

er it right to represent them?"

road incident?'

"Joe." she urged, "if the others are

I've a phone call now."

"That will be better than having our hearing go by default."

"I've done iti" Jessica favored hi

am Joseph Barbour, a society member." "The law and Order Society? Mm1" Chairman DuBols studied him disconcertingly or a long moment. "What sort

went on talking. He beckoned the troop- cerned." Joe talked on, struggling to keep his

"So," said Dullois, "you are a member the property owners interested in the Joe flushed. "I do, sir," he said quiet-

society's secretary, and its routine ly. "And you drive a car?"

> "Let me se your driver's license." The chairman grinned. He turned it society's views." the judgment and penulty for Joe's speed-

swered courteously, "I hope, Mr. Chair-

man, that you will not judge others by The chairman scowled. "You consid-

"In an emergency, yes. I may say that when this case went against me I resigned my scoretaryship in the society."

"The car leeped under me and thought the accelerator stack. I speeded as the best way to avoid trouble. Later I discovered my gas lover, which I never uso, was shoved far forward." "You unconsciously showed it forward,

'How did it happen, then?" Joe suw the trap too late; he was mucht. Though he remained courtoous res in his tones as he said. "I cannot

"I cun, Mr. Chairmani" oried Jessica, "I did it. I was riding with him." "Explain," he directed curtly,

Jeanter giggled. "I winhed to see if could make him lose his temper. He has reached under the steering wheel and shoved up the lover." Laughter ripoled as the chairman ask-

"It got -alightly misplaced:" gusped

The apectators foured. "There appear to be a few extenualing circumstances," said Duliois, "Now, Mr. Burbour, you came to Cumpton Village

from the city?"

"Did you not, in a fit of temper -that was your defense strike and injure a friend?" Joe rocked on his feet,

"That is true, air. Also, it is the reason for my fight for self-control." He straightened up. He stared aquarely into could know how much that sunny smile cost in nervous energy. His voice rang. corned in this hearing. It is a mustler of "Go ahead," anarled the chairman, and life and death to chikiren that is con-

"Cio ahead!" snaped the chuirman. Joe begun. He stated the objections instantly having to most the protests of original location. Clearly and logically Does it stand or obedience to he presented his case, unflustered under tire. Referring to a large scale highway map, he suggested an alternate location, beginning a mile outside the village.

"Time is up for this delegation," snapped DuBois. "Thank you, Mr. Barbour, for an able presentation of your-your

"Thank you sir." said Joe, "for the opportunity to be heard."

"By the way, Mr. Barbour," said the chairman and middenly his eyes were no longer cold "step in and explain that vehicles or let the young lady do it. I've telephoned him you are coming "

The commissioner was ready for them They had a very cheerful audience, and Joe looked angry. His hands clench- Joe came out with a new liceuse card



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"And Joe," oried Jessies, as they left agether, "you wan on the highway mat-

"How can you imagine that?" "You know your facts. And you showed by your control that the matter meant more to you than any hurt feel-

"Still, I don't see-" "Clocate! Dad knows DuBola and gave me a pointer. In hearings, as soon as "Hu! What was your defense in the he's convinced, he checks his memorandum in a certain way. I saw him check

> "Come on, Jess," oried Joe in the old roadster. "Lat's go places."

> > UNITAPPY PR

Weep to the tale of Willie Ta. Who met a girl whose name was K8. He courted her at a fearful ILB. And begged her soon to become "I would if I could," lovely K8. "I pity your lonely, unhappy at8. But alas, alas, you've come too la. I'm married already. The mother of 8." Like a Bargain



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