

The Free Press Short Story

AN HOUR OF VICTORY

EARL REED SILVERS

THE windows of Professor Gladstone's room on the top floor of the engineering building were three squares of yellow light; otherwise the building was just a dark blot against the blue dome of the sky. Sitting on the porch of his home directly across the street from the campus, Neil Douglas regarded the windows with open antagonism.

"I'll be taking my exam in surveying up there tomorrow," he thought miserably. The door behind him opened, and his father joined him on the porch.

"What about studying a bit, Neil?" he suggested.

"I'm going upstairs in a few minutes. But it won't do me any good, Dad. I'm afraid that I'm not cut out to be an engineer," Neil could feel, rather than see, his father wince.

"It's a little too early in your course to decide that, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," Neil answered; but he knew, in his heart of hearts, that he had no aptitude for engineering. Mathematics did not appeal to him, and now in his sophomore year, he found the more technical subjects increasingly difficult. He was, in fact, in imminent danger of flunking his course in surveying. Only a miracle would give him a passing grade in the final examination.

Neil knew that his father was worried. For the past two years the contracting business had been at a standstill, had brought in no revenue. Gradually his surplus had been exhausted until now he was facing a crisis. Unless he received the contract for the new Municipal Hall, which was about to be erected with the aid of Federal funds, he would be compelled to close his offices and dismiss his force.

"Do you think you've got any chance for the big job, Dad?" Neil asked impulsively.

"I don't know. We've estimated as closely as possible, but other firms have done the same thing. I'm not especially optimistic."

"When will the bids be opened?"

"Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock." "The same time as my surveying exam starts," Neil said, and smiled wryly. "A rather important hour for both of us, Dad."

"Yes." They lapsed into silence. The sound of men's voices came to them from one of the dormitories down the street. A group of men were singing on the steps of the porch, something about pledging to Alma Mater their loyalty and faith.

Neil stirred uneasily. As long as he could remember, he had lived on the border of the campus. As a small boy, he had heard seniors singing in the early summer evenings, had looked forward confidently to the time when he, too, would graduate from his father's college.

He could not graduate, however, unless he passed his examination in surveying. Failing, he would shatter a dream which his father had cherished for years. That he would win his engineering degree and take his place as a member of the firm of Douglas & Company had always been understood. Especially since his mother's death four years ago, it had been a tangible objective toward which he had striven. His failure would break his father's heart. Recognizing his own inadequacy he resolved to do his best.

"I guess I'll go upstairs and do some studying," he announced. "I'll give it a battle, Dad."

"Good luck," his father said. Neil climbed the stairs to his den, on the third floor and seated himself at his desk near the window. On the wall in front of him hung a picture of the Freshman football team, with himself in the centre, holding the ball. He had been captain of that team, and had made his letter as a Sophomore. Two glorious years of football lay before him, unless failure in examination placed him on probation. He shut his lips grimly.

"I'm not going to fail," he said aloud. The text of the book which he opened served only to confuse him, however. He was woefully ignorant of the fundamentals of the subject, and after a minute he pushed it aside, hopelessly learning back in his sweater chair, he clasped his hands behind his head and took honest stock of himself.

The thing for him to do, he reflected, was to take his failure in surveying and transfer to another course. He could make up his deficiency in summer school and qualify for the arts college in September. That was where he belonged. He could major in psychology or English and receive his bachelor of arts degree. All would be clear sailing then.

This change would mean, however, the shattering of his father's dream. The gray-haired man downstairs had experienced trouble enough during the past two years. That was as much as his father could bear just now. One other disappointment might be too much of a shock.

Neil reached for the textbook and forced himself to study, but after a time he leaned back again and gazed idly out of the window. The engineering building was directly across the street. Through the lighted windows on the top floor, he could see Professor Gladstone

writing at his desk. As Neil watched, the professor walked over to the blackboard facing the window, picked up a piece of chalk and began writing sentences on the board. Neil's heart missed a beat. They were, he decided, the questions for the examination in surveying the next day.

"I wish I could read them from here," he thought wistfully. He remembered the transit which he used in his field practice was on the table in one corner of his room. He had brought it home late in the afternoon, intending to take it back to the laboratory the next morning.

Impulsively he went over to the table and picked up the transit, examining it with impersonal curiosity. The transit, of course, magnified objects at a distance. By making use of it, he could read the questions which Professor Gladstone was writing on the blackboard across the street.

His hands trembled slightly as he carried the instrument to his desk and focussed it on one of the open windows in the engineering building. He found the writing on the board as clearly distinguishable as if he had been standing beside the professor. His face lighted in a relieved smile as he drew pencil and paper from a drawer in his desk, and deliberately copied the questions.

When he finished, Professor Gladstone was sitting at his own desk in the classroom. Neil watched with varied emotions as he stood up, picked a straw hat from a book on the wall, switched out the lights and departed.

"I was just in time," Neil thought happily. Resting his elbows upon the desk, he read the questions critically. Without advance information, he could never have passed the examination, he admitted. Now, with less than an hour's work, he could pass with an honor mark. It was almost too good to be true.

He heard a car drive up and stop in front of the house, and he looked down curiously. A man whom he recognized as the city clerk got out of the machine and joined his father on the porch. Neil frowned, forgetting for the moment his own concerns. The city clerk was the person who would open the sealed bids for the Municipal Hall the next morning. What business could he have with his father at this time of night?

Neil had heard rumors of illicit practices in city affairs. According to reports, the party which controlled the common council was not above accepting remuneration for favors received. The city clerk was a member of the controlling party. Could it be that he was going to make it possible for Douglas & Company to secure the big contract? If so, his father's worries would be ended. Municipal Hall would give work to the firm for the next two years.

An hour ago they had both faced probable failure; now, by a stroke of good fortune, the prospect had changed. Had it, though? Neil looked down at the examination questions which he had written in his own hand. He knew, when he copied them, that he was dishonest, but he had shut the thought from his mind. Now, he faced it squarely. Was he willing to brand himself a cheat simply to pass an examination in surveying?

He answered the question defiantly. As far as he was concerned, he would never consider such a reception, but he was doing it, not for himself, but for his dad. He was stooping to dishonor in order that his father might continue to cherish a dream.

"I owe that much, at least, to him," Neil concluded. He was not satisfied. Unwillingly, he remembered the slogan on the wall of the locker room:

"FAIR PLAY IS MORE TO BE DESIRED THAN VICTORY"

He had subscribed to that sentiment as a Freshman on the gridiron, and as a Sophomore. He had discussed it with his father.

"After all, Dad," he had said, "victory doesn't mean anything, unless it's fairly won."

"In life as well as in football," his father had added.

Neil remembered these incidents. Against his will, that slogan forced itself into his thoughts. All his former arguments seemed feeble by comparison. He told himself grimly that this was not so much a question of ethics as of loyalty. Cheating or no cheating he decided, he was going to stand four-square behind his dad.

With sudden resolution, he turned to the examination paper and read the first question. He wet dry lips with his tongue and opened the textbook. The answer was clear before him, but he pushed the book aside and stood up. His face was lined as if in pain and he never cheated before. He decided that he would go downstairs for a pitcher of ice water.

"I'll be needing it if I'm going to stay up here a couple of hours," he reasoned. He descended quietly, not wishing to disturb his father, but at the bottom of the stairway he halted as the voice

of Callahan, the city clerk, cut through the darkness. "I'd be the last man to urge you to do something unethical, Mr. Douglas. But if you don't do it, some one else will; it's common practice in the city hall."

Neil thrilled at his father's answer. "I've never condoned such practices, Callahan."

"But this is as easy as falling off a log, Mr. Douglas. The bids are supposed to be sealed, but I've seen them. You are only a couple of hundred dollars higher than the lowest bidder. You can peel two thousand off your estimates and still make money; we won't hold you too close to specifications. I get the two thousand as a campaign contribution and you'll make ten times that amount on the contract. That's a fair deal, isn't it?"

"It's a deal, but not fair," Mr. Douglas said.

"I'm only making this offer because I know you're up against it," Callahan argued. "And I'm thinking some of that boy of yours. If you go broke, he can't stay in college, and if he isn't in college he can't play football. It will break his heart if he has to quit now; in another year he'll be an All-American half back. Have you thought of that?"

"No," Mr. Douglas said.

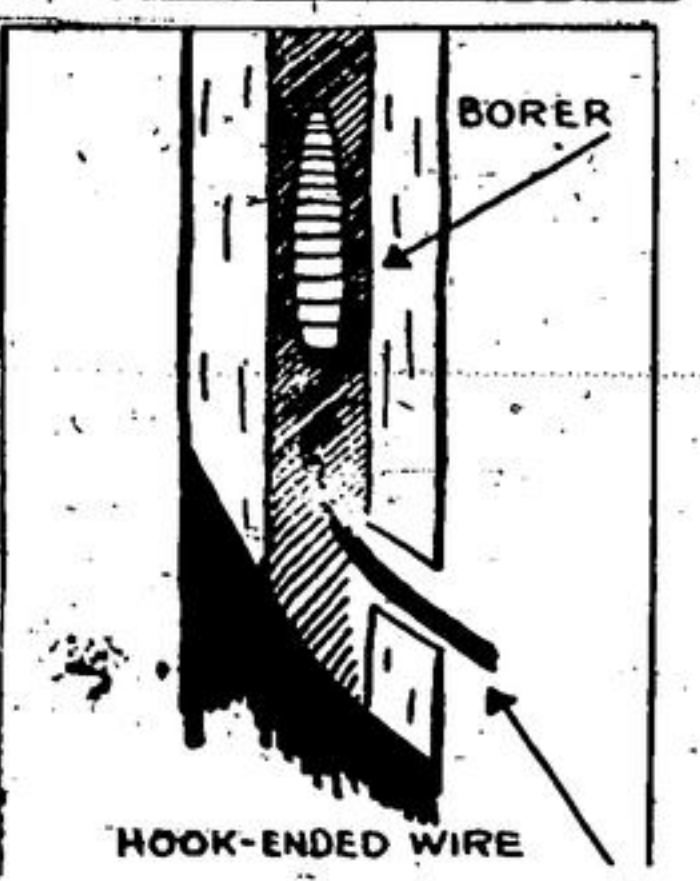
"All you have to do is to change a couple of figures on your bid, and I can attend to that for you. It means that you'll be sitting on easy street for the next two years and that Neil can stick in college and play football. Just one word to me means the difference between success and failure."

Neil heard his father push back his chair.

"I shouldn't be standing here eavesdropping," Neil thought, but he seemed incapable of movement. His left hand gripped the banister of the stairway, and his right hand groped for support against the wall. He realized that his father was facing a situation practically parallel to his own. Before each of them lay the opportunity of solving a problem through the simple expedient of cheating. He himself had practically made his decision, but his father had not yet decided. The city clerk spoke again.

"After all, Mr. Douglas, what does a little irregularity matter when compared with your own future and that of your son? And nobody will ever know about this except you and me. You

Weekly Garden-Graph
Written by DEAN HALLIDAY for Central Press Canadian



Most borers attack trees and shrubs which are stately or low in vitality as a result of the shock of transplanting. Newly transplanted trees or shrubs, therefore, should be watched closely for a year or two to make sure they are not victims of borers. This is especially liable to happen to young apple trees, dogwood and lilac after transplanting.

Wrapping the trunk of a newly transplanted tree with strips of burlap or heavy wrapping paper is one method of guarding against the attacks of borers. The wrappings on the tree trunk helps to keep the moisture in the sapwood and therefore safe from the attacks of borers, since these pests prefer to tart their operations in dry wood.

If signs of borers are discovered in a newly transplanted tree or shrub, measures should at once be taken to root them out. Sawdust droppings found near the base of a tree indicates that borers are at work. Locate the tunnel and then grapple for the pest by means of a piece of wire with a slightly hooked end. This is inserted into the tunnel in which the borer is lurking, as shown in the Garden-Graph.

Other means of eradicating borers include squirting a few drops of carbon disulphide into the hole after which the opening is sealed with grafting wax or gum.

don't need to worry about getting caught."

"I'm not worrying about that," Mr. Douglas said.

"What's holding you back, then?" "My son," Neil's father answered. "Do you think I could sit opposite him at the breakfast table to-morrow morning and look into his eyes, if I knew in my own heart that I was a liar and a cheat? Do you think—"

Suddenly he stopped, as if realizing that the man to whom he was speaking could never understand. Some glimmer of comprehension must have penetrated into Callahan's mind, for Neil heard the man push back his own chair and climb to his feet. When he spoke, there was a new note in his voice, something which the younger man in the house recognized vaguely as respect.

"I don't think it will do me any good to talk to you any longer, Mr. Douglas. You're doing an unwise thing, and yet I can't help handing it to you. I guess you're the reason why Neil's known all over town as a square shooter on the football field." He hesitated a moment, then cleared his throat. "You won't be saying anything about this?"

"I'm considering it a confidential matter between ourselves."

"Thank you, sir!" Neil noticed the "sir." "I'll be going now. I'll be sorry



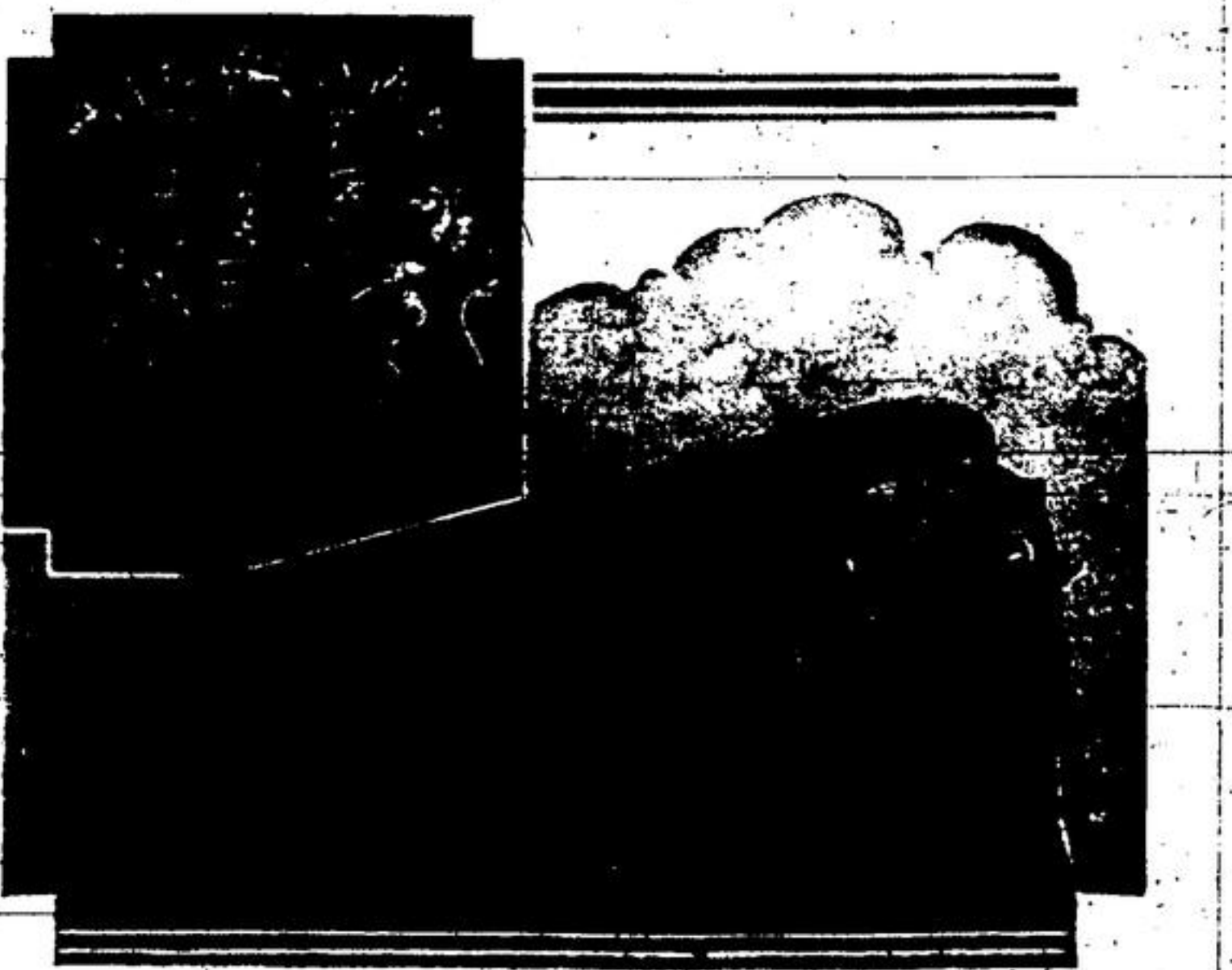
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AS soon as it has completed its assignment hauling the Royal Train, the "6400", giant locomotive of the Canadian National Railways, will be sent to New York to be placed on exhibition at the World's Fair. This locomotive was one of five C.N.R. engines specially overhauled and prepared to haul the train carrying King George VI and Queen Elizabeth and the members of their retinue for a distance of 4,212 miles in Canada. It is one of the largest streamlined locomotives in the world. Finished in royal blue and silver to harmonize with the exterior decorations of the Royal Train, and bearing the Royal Coat-of-Arms in front and on the sides of the tender, the 6400 is a striking and beautiful example of a modern "Queen of the Rails." The picture shows the Royal engine and (above) the Royal Coat-of-Arms as it appears on the side of the tender.

If the boy has to quit college. "We can make a go of it, I think, Callahan."

"I hope so." A brief period of silence followed. "Good-night," Mr. Douglas.

Neil waited until the city clerk had driven off in his car. He was strongly tempted to walk out to the porch and tell his father that he had overheard, and to try to express to him some of his own affection and admiration. First, he had to job to finish.

Turning, he tiptoed noiselessly up the stairs. His den was just as he had left it—the textbook face down over the desk, and beside it, the copied examination questions. Neil walked over to the window and looked out. The campus was deserted, but a group of men at the dormitory had resumed their singing. They sang of faith, loyalty and honor, while Neil thought of the man down stairs, his father, who had risked failure so that he might leave those qualities as a heritage to his son.

Neil knew now that loyalty could never be expressed through a dishonest act. Reaching down, he picked up the examination questions, tore the sheet of paper into bits.

Thrusting his hands into the pockets of his flannel trousers, he turned to the window again. He would not take his test in surveying the next morning. It was probable, he reflected, that he would have to leave college, but he had just a chance by transferring to the arts course, to carry on. It would mean hard work and sacrifice, but what did that matter?

He had learned a more vital truth in the past hour than any he could hope to learn in the coming years. Now, whatever he chose to do, he would do it with understanding. Smiling, he turned off the light, and with shoulders back and head held high, made his way down to the porch, where his father was waiting.

EXPLAINED
Graham—What are you crying for? Willie—Cause Uncle John d-dropped a b-b-big box on his t-toe.
Grandma—Oh, that's nothing to cry about. Why didn't you just laugh? Willie—That's what I d-did.

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