

The Free Press' Short Story

A FEBRUARY HAZARD

By HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH

RHODES OVERTON turned the corner the challenge of the florist's window stopped him as if he had come up against a stone wall. The window was a very lovely one, with big vases in the background and in front every variety of corsage, most of them with orchids surrounded by roses, or violets. Down in the corner was a neatly printed announcement, "Valentines that appeal to her."

Rhodes had a newspaper tucked into his overcoat pocket. He pulled it out to look at the date. Yes, it was February of sheer exasperation. "Idiot," he said the fourteenth, and as he realized all that the date implied, he uttered a groan loudly, and a thin, shabby man, hurrying by, looked around startled. Rhodes did not even notice him. The "idiot" was addressed to himself.

He had called Ellen on the telephone several days before to ask if she would be home Wednesday evening. Ellen had said, "Yes, indeed," and added some comment on the weather. That was all. Ellen did not believe in prolonged chats in business hours. She must have thought—any girl would have thought, Rhodes told himself—that if a fellow suggested calling the evening of Valentine's Day he meant to send her, or bring her, a valentine.

The florist was not the only dealer to remind Rhodes of his delinquencies. The collector, a little farther on, had heart-shaped boxes of candy in the window. In the department store in the block, he saw a display of boxes of silk stockings, with a valentine card accompanying each. A variety of valentines were offered, a valentine of some sort seemed inevitable.

Rhodes Overton was considered lucky by some of his acquaintances who were without jobs. When he left high school two years before he had at once secured a position which he still held. His salary had been increased slightly since his apprentice days, but to live on his salary called for economy. He paid his board at home and was pleased to realize that his board money did help out. He began saving long in advance when he needed a new suit. He practiced numberless small economies, even walking to save care fare when the weather was pleasant. For this reason the question of Ellen's valentine was a serious one, calling for a number of financial adjustments.

"I suppose old Mack wouldn't mind waiting a week," thought Rhodes, as he seated himself at his desk. He had left two pairs of shoes to be half-soled, with the white-haired cobbler who had patched his shoes ever since he could remember. The two dollars to pay old Mack were in his pocket. Undoubtedly old Mack could wait for his money, though he himself could not wait for the shoes. He would need them to-night.

When Rhodes went to luncheon he met Claude Whitney at the door of the cafeteria which both young men patronized. Each passed by the temptation of roast pork and sweet potatoes, and took a bottle of milk and a cheese sandwich. They found a table together in the farthest corner of the crowded room. As he carefully removed his dishes from the tray, Claude said, "Say, Rhodes, do you want to give your girl a valentine?" Rhodes jumped, with imminent danger of upsetting his milk. "Say," he gasped, "what started you?"

"Wait a minute, my boy. I'm not trying to drum up trade. I'm just saying if you're going to buy a valentine, I can put you on to a bargain."

"I might think of it," Rhodes said cautiously. "What is it?"

"Well, we're selling off some two-dollar specials to-day. They are less than half-price mostly things that are a bit out of style, you know, or shop-worn. But there's a string of beads that are a wonderful value. Any girl in his town would be glad to wear them. They are beauties."

"Two dollars, you say?"

"Yes, and if you can get them anywhere else in town for fifteen, then I'm no judge."

"Perhaps they'll be sold before we've finished luncheon."

"I asked the clerk to put them away. I've bought all the valentines I can afford, but rather than let these beads get away, I'd buy them and keep them for Christmas."

"I'll take them, then," Rhodes decided. He had a feeling that to refuse such a bargain would settle his status in Claude's eyes. Immediately he found a difficulty. "I'm afraid I won't have time for any shopping. I've got to rush back to the office."

"I can fix it up for you, if you'll give me the girl's name and address."

"But can it be delivered to-day? This is Valentine's Day."

"Sure! I'll make a special of it. And I'll see there are not price tags or sales slips."

"Thanks, old man!" Rhodes swallowed the last of his sandwich and took out his pocketbook.

Rhodes stopped for his shoes on the

lars a week more than he did, but he would have hesitated to admit as much.

"In the old days, the boys were the only ones who had spending money, so it came to be understood that they should do all the buying and pay all the expenses. But things are different now. If you and I both want to see a certain entertainment, why should you pay for us both? It ought to be arranged on a fifty-fifty basis. Either I could pay my own way and you yours, or you could ask me one time and I you the next."

Rhodes heard himself saying something about a fellow's self-respect, and his voice was hoarse.

"You've just said," Ellen continued, "that what people did two hundred years ago didn't matter to us, and what they did fifty years ago, doesn't matter either. We've got to adjust ourselves to to-day's conditions. You know as well as I do that plenty of young fellows who would like to be friends with a girl—or several girls—just can't afford it. And I say it's not right, because many girls would like to be friends instead of financial liabilities. When you said that about a fellow's having to choose between sending a girl a valentine and something else, I was glad you didn't send me any—"

"Didn't you get it?"

"Get what?"

"The valentine, I did send one."

"Oh, Rhodes!" Ellen frowned. "Don't you see what I mean? If you gave me one of those cute little cards you can buy for a nickel, that would be all right. But why should you pay money you really need for something else, for a valentine for me, because it happens to be the fourteenth of February?"

Rhodes was still nursing his grievance. "Claude Whitney promised to send it special, so you'd get it to-day without fail."

"All the better. Now that it didn't come, you can ask for your money back. Rhodes, don't you see that if two people like you and me enjoy each other's company, we ought to fix it so it won't be a burden on you or a humiliation to me?"

"Humiliation! I like that!"

"Well, I don't like it. But I am humiliated when I feel that my society costs you so much an hour. There are girls, I suppose, who slip up their friends by what they will spend on them, but I believe those girls are in the minority. Anyway, I'm not one."

"But if I keep coming here as often as I have and don't take you to concerts and things, what will people say?"

"What business is it of theirs?" Ellen wanted to know. She added, "I'm serious about your returning that valentine, Rhodes. You gave me a Christmas present. I don't want anything more till next Christmas."

"The valentine was a string of beads. I didn't see them, but Claude said they were very pretty and he's a much better judge than I am."

The corner of Ellen's mouth twitched. "Thank you for thinking of me, but I have beads to burn. And it's time we got our friendship on a non-commercial basis. There are some things we must wait for all times are better, but friends aren't 'one'."

"Rhodes had expected to see Claude Whitney at the cafeteria about noon of the next day. Instead he appeared at the office shortly after lunch.

"Say, there was an awful mix-up about those beads, old chap. After I got back to the store, I fixed it up with clerk at that counter to have them sent special. But they were held up after they got upstairs. After a while, in came a customer pretty frantic. It seems she was trying on a little necklace at that bargain counter, and she took off her beads and laid them down. And then, if you please, she walked off and forgot all about them till she was lunching somewhere and happened to see her reflection in the mirror. They all got so excited over 'selling beads' that didn't belong to them, that they forgot to tell me about it till this morning. So now they've sent me over to say that if you'll choose something else—instead of those beads—"

"I think," Rhodes interrupted, "that I'd rather have my money back. After all, what's the use of sending a valentine when Valentine's Day is over?"

He slipped the two dollars into his pocket he added, "Better luck next year. In his heart he hoped that by another February he could afford to give Ellen a valentine. She certainly deserved the best of everything. Meanwhile he was glad he could pay old Mack on the way home, instead of waiting until next week."

HOBBIES AID THE MIND

This war will never drive all the people mad so long as there are hobbies. All over Canada these weather-bound evenings the cellar lights are burning as amateur carpenters ply their brain-testing trade.

Some of them make articles that can be taken upstairs and shown around for a short time. And there are cases on record of wives having accepted pieces of hobby-built furniture for permanent inclusion among the professional products in the living room. But hobby work is essentially subjective. It is occupational therapy. The man who smooths wood is soothing his mind after the ruffings of the day's work. It does not matter how dreadful the creation may be so long as the creator is satisfied. We still have enough wood in Canada to afford this harmless destruction.

There is only one small addition that should be made to the Criminal Code so affecting amateur carpenters. They should be forbidden on pain of penal servitude to force their guests into going down cellar to inspect their peculiar monstrosities.—The Printed Word.

POTATOES FROM EYES

Growing potatoes from eyes rather than from sets has been introduced into Manitoba farms by the Dominion Experimental Farm at Brandon. On the Farm, 1,476 lots of 50 eyes each were prepared and sent to members of the agricultural improvements associations, and reports from 236 members indicate that 97 per cent. of the eyes produced plants. The average yield from each lot of 50 eyes was 65 lbs. of tubers. The highest yield reported was 203 lbs.

The eyes were removed by a potato baller, and each eye piece weighed about one-half ounce. The eyes were coated with finely ground magnesium limestone to prevent drying out and placed in special waxed cartons. The variety used was Certified Irish Cobbler from a Prince Edward Island strain, selected for its shallow eyes. In general, comments of the growers were of a favorable nature, indicating that the eyes yielded as well as potatoes cut in the usual manner. In some cases the yield was greater. Although definite conclusions cannot be drawn from one year's results, states the Superintendent of the Farm, this method may be found useful in the distribution of special strains of potatoes.

BRITAIN'S SHOP IS WIDE OPEN

Enemy propagandists seize every opportunity to suggest that the industry of democratic Britain is too fully occupied in working for the war to have any goods left to export.

Lord Dudley Gordon, new President of the Federation of British Industries, the largest association of industrialists in the world, meets this challenge in a special message to Canada by saying:

"The 'green' flax of Northern Ireland is fighting forces and in part those of our allies, with the best equipment obtainable has not lessened our efforts to keep going and indeed in many directions to increase our normal overseas trade."

"We anticipate, and we are ready to meet, calls on our services from all over the world especially from Canada and other Empire countries, great and small, South America and neutral European countries. Neither Britain's industry nor her Government is losing sight of the vital part exports will play in Britain's great stand for democracy."

"Inevitably the needs of the fighting Services comes first; even so, we have solid reserves of productive capacity, man power and inventive skill. In short, we welcome inquiries from overseas and are ready to meet the demands of customers, old and new."

RECORD YEAR FOR SCOTTISH YARDS

The present year will be one of the busiest ever experienced by Scottish shipyards. During the past twelve months an enormous volume of shipping tonnage, both Naval and mercantile, has been laid down, so that by now there is not a vacant berth of any size in the whole country.

To meet the needs of the Admiralty and the merchant service it is understood that some of the yards closed down by National Shipbuilders' Security Ltd., which before the war bought up redundant shipyards and put them to other uses, will be re-opened and given suitable work. Some of these establishments are already busily engaged in various industrial activities, but others have been maintained by National Shipbuilders' Security on a "care-and-maintenance" basis, pending just such an emergency as has now arisen. Sir John Gilmour, Minister of Shipping, has given an undertaking that if the facilities of these yards are required for the successful accomplishment of the national shipbuilding program full advantage will be taken of them.

A large proportion of the Scottish yards are fortunate in having been able to keep on their staffs until to-day highly skilled personnel which might have been lost to other industries had it not been for the heavy warship building programs of recent years.

"GREEN" FLAX

Britain's New Linen Fibre for the Services

"Green" flax, the result of investigations by the Linen Research Station at Lambergh, in Northern Ireland, is about to be grown widely in England and Scotland.

The fibre is quite distinct from the flax now produced in Northern Ireland and the Continent. After some years' experimenting the Research Station, already famous for its work on plant breeding, have developed new strains yielding about twice the weight of fibre given by the ordinary varieties. It has been found to be particularly suitable for the heavy type of linen required by the Services.

The growing and processing of "green" flax is now being organized by the Ministry of Supply in consultation with the National Farmers' Unions of England and Scotland and with factories which already produce flax.

Contracts for flax straw at fixed prices will be made by the factories with farmers in Norfolk, Northants, Essex, Kent, Dorset, Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire and Perthshire.

The Ministry of Agriculture have agreed that the crop will qualify as with other types of flax, for the £2 per acre ploughing-up grant in England and Scotland.

A considerable quantity of processing machinery will be needed to deal with this unexpected extension of flax growing.

SUMMED UP

The teacher was lecturing the class on birds and their young ones.

"Now, children," she said, "you must imitate the young ones when they come out of the shells."

The children started waving their arms, except one little lad, who sat quite still.

"Why do you sit still, Johnny?" said the teacher with surprise.

"Because I am a bad egg," was the startling reply.

DUTY FIRST

"Man overboard," came the cry of dread. Instantly all was commotion. Boats were lowered and a search was made in vain. Then the roll was called and the mystery deepened. All were "present and correct."

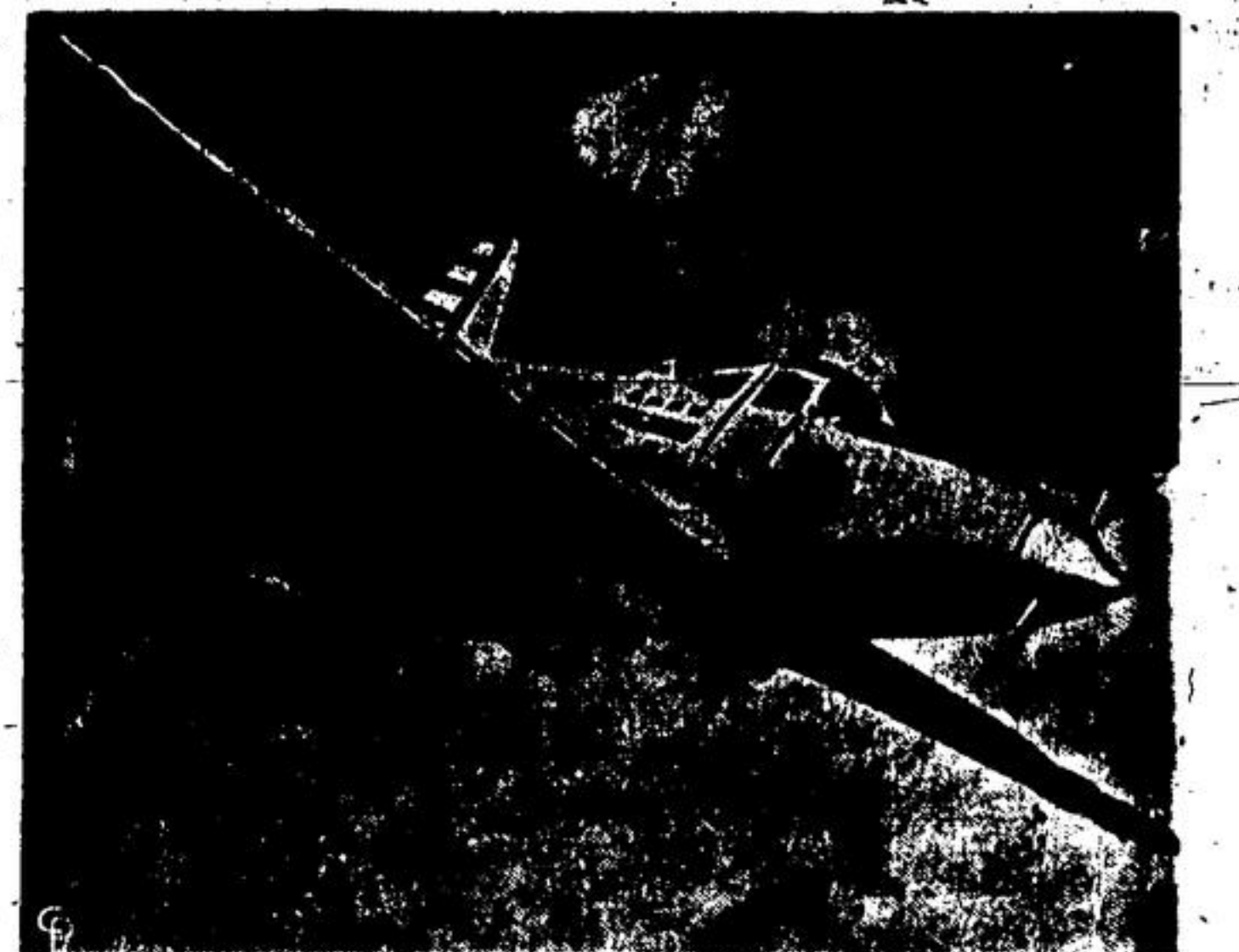
At last a very scared-looking A.B. approached the officer of the watch.

"I think, sir, as 'low the man overboard has been me," he said. "I went over, but I managed to grab the anchor and chain and climbed in again."

"They why didn't you report to me at once?"

"I would ha' done, sir, but, being in one of the lifeboat's crews, I had to go away to look for a man overboard."

Swift Plane Available to Allies



A view of the "Aircobra," new fighting plane which is going into production for use by the U.S. Army. It will be made available for export to Britain and France. It is considered one of the deadliest weapons of the air ever developed. It carries a cannon and multiple machine guns and is said to be capable of an unusual variety of acrobatics in flight. The plane climbs 5,000 feet a minute, has a speed in excess of 400 miles an hour in level flight and 700 miles an hour in power-diving.

CARROLL'S
LENTEN FOODS FOR LEAN BUDGETS

SALMON
Clover Leaf
Sockeye 1/2-lb. tin 20c
Fancy Pink 1-lb. tin 14c

MACARONI or SPAGHETTI
4 lbs. 15c

Telephone or shop in person
FREE DELIVERY

BACON Carroll's Sliced, Side lb. 25c
PICKLES Queensland Sweet Mixed 27-oz. jar 18c
TOMATO JUICE Silver Ribbon 2 25-oz. tins 15c
Mother Parker's TEA 1/2-lb. pkgs. 32c, 37c
COWAN'S COCOA 1-lb. tin 27c
BISCUITS Tea Time Sandwiches 2 lbs. 29c

KRAFT DINNERS pkg. 19c
Ingersoll Cream Cheese 2 pkgs. 27c
Chateau Cheese 1/2-lb. pkg. 16c
Shirriff's Puddings 2 pkgs. 15c
Dessert PEARS 3 15-oz. tins 25c
Peanut Butter Pilsbake's 10-oz. 19c

Special—Catelli's Spaghetti
With Cheese and Tomato Large (28-oz.) tin 15c

Special—Wagstaff's JAM
Raspberry or Strawberry 32-oz. jar 25c with pectin

PANCAKE SYRUP 16-oz. bot. 17c
Tenderized PRUNES 16-oz. pkg. 18c
CAKE Christie's Walnut Beauty each 20c
NORTHERN Toilet Tissue 3 Big Rolls 25c
S.O.S. Scouring Pads pkg. 14, 23c
O'Cedar Polish—Beautifies Fine Furniture Bot. 22c, 43c

OLD DUTCH Cleaner, Chases Dirt tin 9c
LUX SOAP 3 cakes 16c
IVORY FLAKES lg. pkg. 23c
OXYDOL pkg. 9 1/2c, 21c, 59c
Sunlight Soap 10 Bars 49c
KLEENEX Facial Tissues Box of 150 10c

Johnson's Giant FLOOR WAX
Each Tin contains a pound and a third 59c

Fresh Iceberg LETTUCE, per head 9c
Fresh White CELERY HEARTS 2 for 25c

Cooking ONIONS 10 lb. bag 21c
New Fresh CARROTS, per bunch 8c

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