

The Free Press Short Story

"TO MY SON PHIL"

MALDRA T. WEAVER

THE man who was about to die stood at the bedroom window, avidly watching three children playing beneath a fruit tree that, gorgeously in bloom, looked like a huge pink powder puff.

"Mr. Dunning?" a voice called sharply from the other side of the partition. "I do not wish to be disturbed, Mrs. Wingate," said the man wearily, "for at least half an hour."

He allowed the window drape to fall from his nervous fingers. Turning to the desk that stood in one corner, he clumsily procured a long white sheet of paper and an envelope from a pigeon-hole and began to write, laboriously, as though the act warranted great physical effort: "To my son, Phil, on his twenty-first birthday—"

Springs came and went. The three who had played beneath the tree added stature in the fifteen years that passed. Romaine, the youngest, was still the smallest. She came through the gate now, banging it smartly. The house looked empty, quiet and deserted, even the steps were slippery from a light rain, as if they had not been swept.

She flung her hat, coat, and an assortment of books, in a careless heap beside the cold fireplace and slithered, spreading her fingers fanwise above the screen. Romaine, she reflected, if she were coming down with a cold just when commencement dolars were peeping over the horizon and just when she wanted to cajole her mother into letting her go to Wyoming this summer, a few sniffles and a sneeze or two would certainly nip that in the bud.

"Where was Mother, anyway? She was always home from the plant at four. That was an established household rule. Until four she was Mrs. Dunning, president of the Dunning Vinegar Factory, Incorporated; but after that she was just Mother."

It was useless to ask Philip about her. Romaine could hear the clatter of his brushes as he worked, and the jerky creaks of the floor boards as he moved about in the adjoining room. Probably he had been cooped up there since nine this morning. Long and white against the gold of the table runner, a letter now attracted her attention. It was addressed to Philip, typewritten.

Romaine called him loudly. A frowning young person in a short blue smock appeared at the studio door. "What do you want, Mal?" demanded her brother. "Oh, stop dabbling for to-day, will you, Phil? It's raining and this place is like a morgue!"

"But I'm busy. I just got in myself." "Then you don't know where Mother is?" "Mother? No. Haven't she come yet?" "She'll be coming along presently. I—there she is now! Oh, is that you, Kay? I thought it was Mother."

"Haven't she come home yet?" "No, Phil, there's a letter for you on the table. Maybe that explains it. Where's your beau, Dave, Kay?" Kay tactfully ignored the question. She piled up her street wraps on another chair, remarking casually, "Mal, we're collecting a somewhat sketchy wardrobe for that second-hand girl. You're just about due, too, and I would soon clothes for her."

"Well, I have some money for that lavender tulle hat I wanted. Mother gave it to me yesterday. You may have that." "But you wanted that tulle hat rather badly, didn't you?" "Naturally. But I'll get it anyway. I'll just tell Mother what I did and she'll approve of my sacrificing spirit and buy me the hat as a surprise. Where's Dave? Do you mean to say it's not an accident that he isn't trailing along as usual?" Kay did not answer. Philip, having meanwhile discarded his smock and brushed back his shock of unruly hair, which was a peculiar shade of silver blond, joined the girls. He ripped open the envelope marked "Phil."

"It's from Mother," he said after a moment. "There's a wife and a note. The wife, addressed to Mother, of course, says, 'This at Packer Hospital. This Morning Stop Serious Stop Come Signed Bessie.' In the note Mother says, 'We explain itself. Am leaving on the 2:15, taking Linda with me. Sufficient funds in house safe. If you need more, wire care of Packer Hospital. Will write tonight. Love, Mother.'"

The brief silence was broken by Romaine's wail. "Well, if that isn't just like Aunt Tina to get sick now. I've got to tell Letty to-day if I can go to Wyoming for sure with her, and tomorrow morning in Kay, and the day after is Phil's birthday. Mother ought to be here to help celebrate such an important event as his twenty-first birthday."

little beast, which you aren't." "Oh, well, maybe I could cook Phil's birthday dinner. I'll make some fudge for one thing. I'll cut classes to-morrow and have the settlement youngsters in, too, even if Linda isn't here to help. We can't disappoint them. Anyway, there's no use changing all our plans."

"They all agreed, and little imagining just how much their plans were going to be changed, the three of them trooped into the studio to view Philip's latest brain child. The landscape stood importantly on an easel. "This is a scene with which both of you are familiar," the artist explained modestly. "Recognize it?"

"Of course," said Romaine with devastating frankness. "It's a poached egg on toast with butter oozing down the sides." "The following afternoon, however, Romaine did not feel quite so gay. The basket of wash Mandy had just delivered protruded into the hallway. The end table somehow had missed a dusting and it was a crop of gray whiskers. Kay's street coat, her gloves, and the evening paper spilled out of the chair the settlement children had broken this afternoon. One of Philip's brushes lay on top of the library table, the pile pool of Chinese red paint. The kitchen sink was piled high with pans, and dishes.

"There was not even a tea cake left after a visit from Philip to the kitchen, and Romaine had counted on those to help out for dessert to-night." Romaine gave the dinner going a vicious bait. "I've helped a little, but I don't know her sister's name." "I know her name, but I don't know her sister's name." "I know her name, but I don't know her sister's name."

"I should think Kay could make herself a little useful to-night," Philip grumbled after David had gone and he and Romaine were tidying up the living room. "What's she nutting about anyway?" "Her squabble with Dave, I suppose." "It looks serious."

"Serious? Of course not. Love's a disease. Phil. You can't get rid of it with one application of squabbles." It was quite late when they finished. Romaine remembered to lock all the doors and the windows; then she prepared for bed.

The wind rose. Great clouds, huddling together like so many sheep, shut out the moon. Somewhere a shutter slammed. A clock chimed twelve. There was a short rapping sound. Romaine awoke with a start. She listened intently a moment, then she slipped out of bed, thrust her feet into slippers, and catching up a negligee, moved slowly and carefully into Philip's room. Gliding noiselessly toward the bed, she was startled to find her brother's eyes wide open.

"You've got a fright, Mal. I wake up with a jerk and then you come trawling along like a ghost." "S-sh!" She silenced him with a gesture. "You heard something too?" "Downstairs, I thought." He threw back the coverlet. "I'll go down to see."

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"Kay," said Philip slowly, when she had finished. "I don't know but that you belong in a feeble-minded institution yourself." "Why? Because I love this?" "No. Because you're a liability when (Concluded on Page Two)

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OWNS INVADE SANCTUARY Jack Miner recently went up to Hudson Bay territory on a fishing trip, and was gone between three and four weeks. On his return home, he found that several of his flourishing doves' nests had been robbed of their young.

After two days of investigation, he found a pair of monkey-faced owls in his tame tumbler pigeon house. The owls had taken possession, and in their nest were two young owls, nearly full-grown, as well as two freshly laid eggs. These so-called "mouse-eaters" had not only cleared the pigeon house of all the young pigeons, but where they had been feeding, remnants were found of between fifty and one hundred young and full-grown mourning doves. These had been killed by the parent owls to feed themselves and their young. The wings and legs of the little doves were left. Several of the latter bore tags that Jack Miner had put on them.

Had these doves been allowed to live, they would have consumed millions of weed seeds. Because of a number of doves' crops and stomachs that have been analyzed, some have contained over ten thousand weed seeds.

Jack Miner was heard to say, as he looked at the remains of his slaughtered mourning doves: "I am certainly not in favor of laws protecting a hawk or owl that commits an act like this and preys on valuable bird life; while, at the same time, we have other laws that prosecute and imprison humanly for its crimes."

"In other words," said Mr. Miner, "I am not in favor of imprisoning humanity for stealing chickens or shooting song and insectivorous birds, or sportsmen for shooting game birds out of season, and protecting hawks; owls and vermin that do the same act 365 days in the year."

"Furthermore," said Jack Miner, "the habits of hawks and owls and vermin are no different outside of a bird sanctuary than they are inside."

FORGING AHEAD Believe with all your heart that you will do what you were made to do. Never for an instant harbor a doubt of it. Drive it out of your mind if it seeks entrance. Entertain only the friend thoughts or ideals of the thing you are determined to achieve. Reject all thought enemies, all discouraging moods—everything which would even suggest failure or unhappiness.

VERY TRUSTING! Recall (very wealthy): "What advice can you give me? I'm so afraid the men care only for my money." Julia: "My dear, don't marry any man to whom you would not trust your whole fortune, and then — don't trust him with it!"

Household Hints

By MRS. MARY MORTON

Menu Hint LUNCHEON Asparagus on Toast Apricot Pluff—Soft Custard MILK DINNER Roast Veal With Dressing Potatoes Baked With Meat Buttered Young Beets or Greens Lettuce, Watercress and Radish Strawberries Cup Cakes Tea or Coffee

The luncheon menu is not heavy but it is appetizing and nourishing. I always advised the plan of luncheon for the busy housewife, whether there are children or not. It is more important, maybe, that the luncheon menu be carefully planned when there are children, but women who do their own housework use a good deal of energy which should be replaced by food. A nourishing meal in the middle of the day and a rest before resuming her duties will keep the wife young and attractive. The apricot pluff is nice to serve at any season of the year.

To-day's Recipes Apricot Pluff—On cup cooked dried apricots, four egg whites, six tablespoons powdered sugar, one teaspoon vanilla, two and one-half cups milk. Cook the apricots slowly in water to cover, add one-half cup sugar to the pound. Slice and cool. Beat the egg whites stiffly, gradually add the sugar and beat well after each addition. Fold in the apricots and a dash of salt to the apricots and fold in the eggs. Bring the milk just to the boil in a large shallow water to cover, add the vanilla and mixture into the hot milk. Let stand two minutes, dipping the hot milk over the puddings. Turn them and repeat and let to cool. Bring the milk to the boil before adding more puddings. Soft Custard Sauce: Four egg yolks and one egg, one-fourth cup sugar, two cups scalded milk, one-half teaspoon vanilla, dash of salt. Beat the eggs with the sugar and slowly add the milk. Cook over hot water till it coats the spoon. Remove immediately from the hot water compartment or it may separate.

Three-Minute Cup Cakes—Beat the following together for three minutes, but not any longer or the cakes will be tough: One-third cup butter, softened; one and one-third cups brown sugar, two eggs, one-half cup milk, one and three-fourths cups cake flour, three teaspoons baking powder, one-half teaspoon cinnamon one-half teaspoon cloves. Bake in greased muffin tins at 350 degrees about 25 minutes.

Don't overlook the medicine closet during spring housecleaning. Discard old bottles and stale medicines. Make fresh labels for those that are soiled or discolored, and see that everything is properly marked.

'SALADA' TEA is delicious TAKE HOME WRIGLEYS P.K. CHEWING GUM WRIGLEYS P.K. CHEWING GUM TWELVE PIECES SWEETENS THE BREATH

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