



# With Respect to His Friends

How an Old-Fashioned Policy Paid

By BETH PORTER SHERWOOD



"THERE, now, I'm all done. I've hunted everywhere from cellar to attic. At your request I've ripped his mattress all to pieces, but I've had my labor for my pains. I'm sure it's not in the house. You can continue the search out-of-doors, if you want to, but as I said before, I'm through."

Without turning toward her husband, whose approach she had heard, and not heeding his warning "ahems," Mrs. Simpson made known her decision and went on gathering up the fragments of a dismantled mattress.

"Um, ah, yes, here's Susan, Lida." Mr. Simpson jerked out the words at last as if he feared something might be added to his wife's declaration of independence.

With an unwonted flush on her usually serene face, plump, easy-going Mrs. Simpson wheeled around to greet her caller, a slender, plainly-attired woman, whose dark, resolute eyes widened with surprise as she viewed the littered apartment and disordered dress of her sister-in-law.

"Oh, I didn't know you were here, Susan," she apologized, extending a limp hand. "I don't know what James brought you in here for, anyway," a note of irritation creeping into the usually gentle drawl. "He knew the place wasn't fit to be seen. Come out into the sitting-room and take off your hat."

"I can't stay, Lida," explained Mrs. Duncan, as she followed her hostess from the room. "Walter was going over to Smith's for some more clover seed, and I came along to see if you'd lend me Laura's skirt pattern."

"Yes, you're very welcome to the pattern, if I can find it, but," hesitatingly, "I've been so upset lately with your father's death and—everything, I hardly know where anything is."

"What?" began Mrs. Duncan, then stopped, withholding the question she felt she had no right to ask.

"Well, really, I suppose there's no reason why you should not know, and I'm sure I'll be glad to talk about it to someone besides James. There's a lot of money missing."

"A lot of money," repeated Mrs. Duncan, incredulously. "Whose?"

"Your father's. He did not tell us anything about it, you know his way, and we never knew anything about his business only what he had a mind to tell us, and that wasn't much. When he made over the rest of his property to us he kept that little place in the village till last fall, when he sold it for two thousand dollars. Five hundred dollars he put in the bank for Laura, but what he did with the rest the Lord only knows."

"I've done positively nothing since his death but look for that money, and I declare I'd be glad to know he gave it to somebody; for it's just worrying my life out. I suppose he—he didn't—" she stopped and looked questioning at her visitor.

With a faint smile Mrs. Duncan shook her head. "You mean did he give it to us? Indeed he didn't. He never forgave me for marrying John instead of the rich old man he had picked out for me. I never expected him to leave me anything; though it would be very acceptable just now, when Walter has his heart set on going to college, and John's brother Will talks of going West. If he does John would like to buy the old Duncan homestead; but I'm afraid he can't," she finished with a sigh.

"Well, it's too bad," sympathized Mrs. Simpson. "But I have thought sometimes that if you hadn't been so independent your father would have been more friendly than he was. I think he softened toward you at the last; and there were some things of your mother's, some old-fashioned ornaments and a number of odds and ends, that I know he wanted you to have. I put everything into his trunk, and set it out here."

She rose as she spoke, and with her guest, went over to the trunk and lifting the lid, together they stood looking down into it.

"Are you sure the money is not in the trunk, Lida?" asked Mrs. Duncan.

"Oh, yes, we've looked thoroughly. We've even tried if it had a false bottom or sides. I think very likely he's given it to some charity or lost it in some speculation. Anyway, it would have saved us a lot of trouble if he'd have told us what he did with it."

As her sister-in-law was speaking, Mrs. Duncan took from the trunk a large, old-fashioned album with a spray of tarnished metal filices-of-the-valley sprawling across the crimson cover.

"I am glad to have this," she said, opening it.

Then her dark eyes snapped, and her cheeks flushed indignantly as she looked at the arrangement of the photographs.

"Why, father must have been crazy! He always used to hate pictures of people like that," she cried, holding toward her companion the open album with its photographs of kith and kin strangely intermingled with those of the most incongruous characters.

"Your father wasn't to blame for that," defended

Mrs. Simpson, her color rising slightly as she spoke. "Minnie Burke was visiting here last fall, and she and my sister Nell got those dancers and prize fighters and such like, out of some pictures the boys had. They had great sport over it," she added, not noticing her companion's indignation. "They do look funny. Your grandmother, so stiff and shocked-looking, alongside of that sport; and your grandfather by that actress. And see your father's picture. It seems as if his hair is rising with horror at being beside a chorus girl. Oh, you'll think I am as bad as the girls, for laughing at them," she finished, apologetically.

Mrs. Duncan turned the remaining leaves rapidly; her lips setting themselves in a straight line. Then she snapped the book shut and tucked it under her arm as if to protect the pictured faces of her kindred from further insult.

"Did father see them, and what did he say?" she asked.

"He never said a word, but I know he didn't like it, for he took and put the album on the table in his room, and it's been there ever since."

"I wonder some of you did not take those things out when you knew he was displeased."

"Oh, he had more time than anyone else, and if he was satisfied with it, the rest of us ought to be," replied Mrs. Simpson indifferently.

"Well, when I get them home I'll fix them up and I'll burn those creatures," declared Mrs. Duncan. "That is," she said more gently, as if ashamed of her heat, "if none of you wants them."

"The boys are tired of such things now; you may do what you like with them."

"Mamma, come out and stop papa from digging up my garden," begged Laura, a girl of fourteen, who came rushing into the room.

"What does he want to do that for?" questioned Mrs. Simpson.

"He says grandpa worked about the garden so much it would be the most likely place for him to hide that money. I wish the money was in Jericho. It makes me tired to hear about it," she avowed, pettishly.

"Laura," reproved her mother, "what will your Aunt Susan think of you?"

The girl turned and took her aunt's free hand in both her own. "You wouldn't like your pretty garden dug up, would you, Aunt Susan?" she said, ingratiatingly.

"I certainly would not," returned Mrs. Duncan, smiling down into the girl's velvety brown eyes; "maybe your mother can stop him."

Laura laughed shortly. "Papa's just like grandpa. When he takes a notion to do anything he'll do it or break something."

Together they followed Mrs. Simpson to the garden, and heard the animated discussion concerning the digging.

"Now just listen to mamma," exclaimed Laura, impatiently. "After all, she wants the digging done just as much as papa does."

"They're going to lift the plants without disturbing the roots, and they'll put them right back, so it won't hurt your garden hardly at all, Laura," explained Mrs. Simpson, conciliatingly, as she joined her daughter and Mrs. Duncan. "Here, let's sit down and rest and watch them for a few minutes, Susan," she said, pulling forward a chair for her guest; and seating herself. "I'm tired enough to sit awhile, anyway."

She leaned forward, her arms upon her knees, and watched her husband and the man lifting Laura's plants with not too great a measure of success, as the soft loam fell away, leaving the roots exposed, and causing Laura to moan in distress over the destruction of some favorite plant.

By and bye there was a sharp sound as a spade struck some metallic object. Mrs. Simpson straightened up, and looked at the men, in whose faces excitement was plainly depicted.

"It's nothing but an old tin kettle, I know," declared Laura, positively. "Just before grandpa was taken sick he sunk it, filled with water to keep those new lily roots damp."

A little heave, a disgusted grunt, and out it came, as Laura predicted; a tin much disfigured with rust and punctured with many holes.

The man laughed, and threw a sly glance at the interested spectators upon the piazza, but Mr. Simpson, with a grimmer set to his jaw, only delved the deeper. Again there was a sound, as his spade struck some object, but it had not the metallic clink of its predecessor. Again and again, and soon a flat surface was laid bare, and the men, enlarging the hole, lifted out and placed upon the ground a fair-sized box.

"If the money's in that it must all be in pennies," giggled Laura, who, with her mother, arose and ran down the steps.

In a moment the lid was pried off, and a quantity of what proved to be clothing, mildewed and earth-stained, was exposed to view. One by one they lifted

out the neatly-folded garments and laid them on the ground.

"Ah, that's where they went to!" exclaimed Mrs. Simpson involuntarily.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Simpson, shortly.

"Those are some old dresses and things of your mother's. They'd been about the house for years, taking up room and gathering dust, and I gave them to old Mrs. Green. I wondered that she had never used them. I did not think your father would ever miss them; but he did, and he has bought them from her, rather than that she should have them. Well, I never." She shook her head over such inexplicable conduct, and returned to the piazza.

"It's like father," said Mr. Simpson, turning to his sister. "Do you remember that old overcoat of our grandfather's that mother gave to a tramp and father gave him five dollars for it and then burned it?"

Mrs. Duncan smiled. She remembered the intense, if sometimes unreasonable, loyalty of her father to the memory of his kindred; and her thoughts turned to what must have seemed to him the desecration of the photographs.

At that moment a frank-faced athletic-looking young fellow drove into the yard, and Mrs. Duncan went forward to meet him.

"Have you room for a trunk, Walter? I am taking home some things of my mother's," she explained.

"Lots of room. I can take Laura, too," he said merrily to his cousin, who came running to greet him. "Can you? I'll go and ask mother, and I'll just stay away till they get my garden made up again. I hate it the way it is now," she said vehemently, stamping her foot.

In a moment she returned. "Mother says if you'll wait a moment she'll go too, and get those verbena plants. She thinks now is a good time."

"All right; tell her to hustle," he answered gaily.

A little later they drove away. Walter and Laura perched upon the trunk, the matrons occupying the seat.

Upon their arrival at the small, though trim, little cottage, with its neatly-kept lawn and garden, Mrs. Simpson and Laura, accompanied by Mildred Duncan, went to look at the growing plants; and Jamie, Mrs. Duncan's youngest child, hastened forward to greet his mother.

"Uncle Will's been here," he said excitedly, "and he's going West next week."

She looked past the boy to his father, who had been helping Mildred nail up a climbing rose. He smiled and answered her unspoken question.

"Bradley will have the old place," he said, with assumed indifference. "Will offered it to me for a thousand dollars. It is really worth a good deal more, but he might as well have said a million. What have you got there?" he asked abruptly, not wishing to dwell upon an unpleasant subject.

"Father's old album," she replied, "and really, I am almost ashamed to have you see it. It came the nearest to making me angry of anything I have seen in a long while."

"What is it?" he questioned, looking puzzled.

"I suppose that's because they have all those fancy people with them," remarked Laura coming up. "Mamma thought that was funny, and papa just laughed."

The golden sunlight streamed through the fresh, young leaves of a wide-spreading maple, and the soft, warm breeze of early summer strayed about them as Mrs. Duncan seated herself upon the steps beside her husband and opened the old album.

With quick, impatient fingers she drew out the objectionable photographs and threw them on the ground; then more gently she began to take out the pictured faces of her loved ones, when her husband checked her movements with an exclamation that brought all the others to the spot.

"For heaven's sake, Susan, what is that?"

"Why, I believe it's money!" she exclaimed; her hands trembling with excitement.

From the space between two large photographs she carefully extracted the strip of colored parchment. With flushed cheeks she continued her investigation and drew out, one after another, fifteen one hundred-dollar bank notes. Attached to the last was a slip of paper upon which was written: "To the person who has enough regard for our relatives to want to see them in decent company, and who does not think it such a mighty joke to pair them off with such filth, I present the money placed in this old album, to be used as he or she wishes.—James Simpson."

"That means you, all right, Susan," said Mrs. Simpson, with her usual placidity, "and I believe your father meant it for you all the time. Well, I'm glad the money has been found, and I am really glad you've got it, Susan, and I know James will think just as I do about it."