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Children Cry

FOR FLETCHER'S

CASITORIA

All Around the Mulberry Bush

Story of a Wife's Devotion.

By JOHN BARTON OXFORD

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All the afternoon the third of flatrons on the ironing board had gone on steadily.

Now, with the coming of dusk, they began to lag. In the overheated little kitchen, the smell of starch and clean linen, Mrs. Whalen paused at intervals more and more frequent to listen for the sound of familiar footsteps on the back steps.

At last they came—dragging, tired footsteps, pausing at the rubber mat on the top step to wipe the mud from the big boots before they should enter that spotless domain.

Mrs. Whalen whisked her iron back to the stove and sped to the back door to throw it open.

"Wherever have ye been all this long, dearie?" she gently chided the gray haired, bent figure on the doorstep. "I was beginnin' to feel a wee bit worried about ye."

The pallor of his pinched face made his eyes seem unusually large. His clothes hung loosely and baggily on his shrunken frame.

"Now we'll have supper," she announced. "A bit of tay'll be puttin' the heart into ye. I've made ye the filigant mutton broth this afternoon too."

"Ye've been ironin' the livelong day," said Whalen at length. "I take ye to myself to think av yer doin' it, Nora."

"Tis no worrk for me at all; I love it," she declared briskly, but Whalen noticed how tired her eyes looked and how thin the gray hair was getting at her temples. A spoonful of the mutton broth he was swallowing at the moment seemed to choke him.

"Ye'd say that anyway," he averred, looking at her with admiration. "There's foin money in doin' this fancy stuff," she declared. "Tis dollars a week we can be countin' on now!"

The little clock on the mantel was striking 9 when from the bedroom she heard sleepy, half audible mumbings. She put down her iron and tiptoed to the threshold. Whalen was tossing restlessly on the bed.

"Foin me anny kind av worrk, Brady—anny kind," Mrs. Whalen heard his uneasy mutterings. "Sure, I'm strong enough for worrk now. I can't see her workin' like she does to kape us goin'. She's too old for it, Brady. Foin me somethin' to do. Yep, I'll take tin dollars a week to start in on, if I have to."

"So?" she breathed softly to herself. "That's why he's so tired ivry night, hey? 'Tis no sittin' on a park bench that does it. 'Tis lookin' for a job already he is and himself not half over the sickness yet."

She sat for a long time staring thoughtfully at the distorted reflections in the polished nickel of the stove.

At last she arose, smiling and nodding to herself as she whisked another skirt from the basket beneath the

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board and, with a hot iron, began to smooth out its many founces.

There were several bundles of laundry to be delivered the next afternoon. No sooner had Whalen poked abroad, ostensibly for his brief walk to the park, than Mrs. Whalen donned her rusty best clothes and faced forth herself.

The little suburban town was mellow with the warmth of early summer. Mrs. Whalen delivered her bundles and then turned her eager steps to one of the town's more pretentious streets. Here each house had its trim bit of lawn; a few shade trees and not infrequently a hopeful little garden.

Up to one of the smaller houses Mrs. Whalen made her way and whirled the bell.

"Would I be findin' Mr. Evans at home?" she inquired of the trim maid who answered her summons.

Mr. Evans was home, and Mrs. Whalen was ushered into a dim library, where a pleasant faced man was poring over a pile of papers.

"Why, it's Mrs. Whalen," said he, rising to get her a chair. "You want the money for the past few washings, of course?"

Mrs. Whalen shook her head. She began pulling at the fingers of her black cotton gloves.

"Ye-ye couldn't be usin' a man about the place, could ye, Mr. Evans," she asked diffidently, "sort of a gardener, say, or the likes av that?"

"A gardener—me?" Evans inquired, with a slow shake of his head. "Why, that little patch of lawn isn't enough to keep me in trim. Nora. A gardener?"

Mrs. Whalen pulled more nervously at the glove fingers.

"Twill cost ye nothin' at all," said she.

Evans looked puzzled.

"Tis like this," she hastened to explain. "Ye know the sickness Mike has had and the bad shape it's wint and left him in. Well, I'm doin' foin wit' the washin' and keepin' things goin' first rate. But Mike do be worried to death all the time about the way I have to worrk. I've found out he's been tryin' ivry day to get him a job instead av polkin' out to the park to set on a bench like he tells me he does—him that ain't the strength av a foy."

"Tis in him yet. And I'm afraid he'll get a job somewhere, wan that'll lay him out again be the worrk in it. 'If he had aisy worrk, now, somethin' that wouldn't hurt him none, but would take up his mind and let him think he was earnin' the money that's keepin' us goin', 'twould not be bad at all, I'm thinkin'." So I thought maybe you'd take Mike on as a sort of a gardener here and see he didn't do too much. And if ye would and pay him tin dollars for it I'd send ye the tin ivry Saturday mornin', so yer could be payin' it to him Saturday night."

"I see," said he. "Why, yes; I think I could afford a gardener under those conditions."

"There's a letter for ye the post-man just brought, dearie," said Mrs. Whalen that night as Mike came shuffling in somewhat later than usual. "Who's it from?" she asked when her husband had torn it open and read the brief missive.

"Just a bit of an advertisement that don't amount to anything at all," said he.

"He's afraid I won't have him take the job," thought Mrs. Whalen, noting him closely.

Whalen was early away from the house next morning—indeed, quite early enough to stop on his way to his new job at the Cobb place and catch Charlie Cobb before he should leave for town.

"Well, well, Mike," said Cobb as he met Whalen coming up the walk, "what brings you round here at this time of day?"

Whalen caught the other man by the arm in his eagerness.

"Would ye be doin' me a favor, Mr. Cobb?" said he.

"You know anything I can do for you, Mike?"

"Would ye mind, now," Whalen went on, "takin', say, a few av yer clothes over to Nora for her to press and mend? 'Twill cost ye nothin', he hurried on, catching the perplexity and doubt in jovial Charlie Cobb's eyes.

"Not many, mind ye, just a few. And I want ye to tell her ye'll be payin' her tin dollars a week to look after the clothes av ye for awhile."

"Ye see, I've just got the foin, aisy job weedin' a few pansy beds and the like that's to pay me that much, but Nora did she know av it would put her fut down and say I wa'n't ye well enough to do the worrk."

She'd say she'd kape on wit' the washin' she's doin', which same, God knows, is cruel hard for a woman av her age. But she can't know I'm workin', or she'll be unhappy and worried to death. So I'll slip ye a tin each Saturday, and when Nora brings back the mended clothes av ye ye can slip it to her, and 'twill be aisy for her and she none the wiser where it comes from. See?"

And so, after going into details somewhat more minutely, it was arranged that Cobb should furnish Mrs. Whalen an easier job than the washing she had heretofore been doing.

Now, on Saturday afternoon at 4 o'clock Charlie Cobb came into the Evans yard and made for Mike Whalen, who, seated comfortably on a low stool, was holding the nozzle of a sizzling hose with which he watered the lawn.

"Mrs. Whalen's just brought back the suit I sent over to her this week," said Cobb. "She's waiting over at the house for her money, although I've had hard work to convince her the work is going to be worth \$10 a week. So, if you'll just slip me the ten, Mike, I'll pass it over to her."

"The boss ain't handed me me pay yet," said Whalen. "She's waitin', yer say? Well, I'll run up to the house and—"

"Oh, never mind," said Cobb. "I'm going to have a word with Evans, anyway, before I go back. I'll just tell him to pass your wages over to me."

"Sure!" said Mike and went on comfortably with his sprinkling.

Evans looked up quickly in the library a few minutes later at Charlie Cobb's request.

"Come again, please," said he.

"I say I just saw Mike out here, and he says for you to pass the week's wages that are due him over to me. You see, it's like this—"

Whereupon he explained the deal into which he had entered with Mike Whalen.

"Wait!" said Evans, holding up a hand before Cobb was fairly through.

"Now listen to me!"

And he told of his little business arrangement with Mrs. Whalen.

Charlie Cobb began to laugh delightedly, but in the midst of it he stopped short. His face became grave.

"It's a fine circle to chase around, isn't it?" he mused. "But I'm hanged if I'm not going to find a beginning and an end to this particular circle. Why, if you'd see that old coddler hatching up that scheme with me so that Nora wouldn't have to wash any more and at the same time not be worried to death about him?"

"Or if you'd seen Nora planning it out so he would think he was earning the money," Evans interrupted. "I'm hanged if it isn't worth \$10 a week to have my clothes looked after!" said Cobb vehemently, bringing down a doubled fist on the corner of the library table.

"Oh, no, it isn't," Evans demurred. "Never in the world, Charlie. But, I'll tell you what, maybe it's worth \$5 to you and \$5 to me to have Mike look after the lawn. I always did hate watering it and weeding the pansy beds. But we can't be bothered chasing around the mulberry bush with that \$10 each week. Suppose you trot back and bring Mrs. Whalen over here in your car, and then maybe all together we can straighten this thing out satisfactorily."

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Heat very ripe grapes in a crock in the oven or in a double boiler or fireless cooker. When the skins are tender drain in a jelly bag. Heat the resulting juice, add sugar and bring to the boiling point and pour into sterilized jars or bottles.

If you use bottles, sterilize the corks and after they are in the bottles cover with sealing wax.

Use either half as much or a quarter as much sugar as grape juice. The amount added depends on the taste. Remember that it is an easy matter to add more sugar to the grape juice, but it is impossible to take any from it later on.

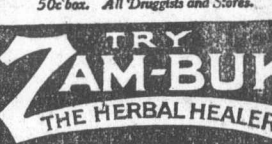
If you desire a clear grape juice let the bag drip without squeezing. A more economical method is to squeeze the bag. The resulting grape juice will be a little cloudy, but its flavor will be quite as good.

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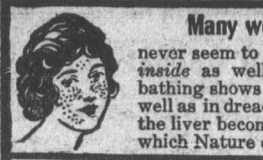
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