



A Fight Against Odds

(Kate Anderson, in the 'Union Signal.')

(Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.)

[The Kilgour family are engaged in a desperate struggle to save the idolized youngest son, Claude, from the curse of cigarette smoking. The death of his brother Willie has aroused the remnant of his manhood, and he is now himself resolved to break the habit.]

CHAPTER VII.

As there was nothing else which appeared better to do, Claude was set at comparative liberty, and in something of his old fashion he went to work to make himself useful about the premises. Allie returned to the office, and Claude constituted himself his mother's right-hand man. He did all the hard sweeping, made beds, ran errands, did the heavy part of the family laundry work, and even set the table and washed dishes upon occasion, besides which he attended to all the outside chores and kept up repairs.

His beautiful flute-like soprano voice, prematurely changing, was forever impaired.* Claude's mother, however, wisely gratified her son's passion for music by having him take piano lessons, rightly believing that the three hours spent daily in the study and practice of this ennobling and inspiring art would have an incalculably beneficial effect on the tone of thought and morals.

A certain sum was laid by weekly to Claude's credit in recompense for his work, a sum sufficient to cover the cost of instruction, and leave a small balance to apply on his debts, believing that this plan would encourage a sense of responsibility for past wrongs, and a desire to make honest restitution.

His brother had done his best to gather from Claude the extent of his pilfering. From what Ralph knew to be only partial confessions, and from what he could ferret out for himself, the sum was placed at \$100. Up to the time that Claude was discovered to be using cigarettes, he had thoughtfully been allowed unlimited control of his own pocket-money; of which he had always an abundant supply, being a shrewd trader with his rabbits, fowl and eggs, and quick to pick up any job or errand.

He had not been stealing merely to provide himself with cigarettes, but, flinging all self-denial to the winds, he had indulged himself in fruit, candy, expensive meals in restaurants, drinks, ice cream, low theatres and pernicious literature. He seemed to have lost the power to deny gratifying any indulgence which he could steal from his frugal, hardworking and self-sacrificing family. He had become absolutely hardened in this respect.

Money had been scarce, and expenses heavy in the household during the past two years. Every cent had to be carefully counted, in order to clear off the mortgage. By common consent, absolutely no luxuries in the way of clothing, travelling or expensive delicacies had been indulged in. The children, however, had started a little fund to be used in sending their delicate and always self-denying mother, away for

*It may not be generally known that cigarette smoking will gradually destroy the finest and strongest voices, adults being no exception to the rule, only in the case of an adult who persists in the use of cigarettes, the voice once gone or impaired, is usually completely and hopelessly gone, even should he finally cease the habit.

an imperatively-needed change. Among Claude's other robberies, had been a steady pilfering from this little bank into which the dimes and quarters—fruits of many self-denials—had been dropped. Claude had always expressed and appeared to feel poignant remorse and abasement at each discovery, but the next time temptation offered, he would repeat the vile offence.

It had been a miserable and anguished state of affairs to be obliged to keep every cent securely and cunningly hidden from this marauder; to know it was unsafe to lay down a purse for five minutes, or leave a quarter on the mantelpiece; to be obliged even to keep a watch on small valuables, which might get 'lost,' and not to dare to intrust a cent to Claude's keeping with which to run an errand—as he had contracted a habit of 'losing' money. Upon each fresh discovery, Claude had always vowed he would repay every cent, and he eagerly begged of them to sell, as payment, any articles belonging to him.

Ralph had sold his old watch and chain, so that the last birthday gift Claude had ever received from his father, a beautiful gold watch, might not be sold out of the family and had bought it, placing the purchase-money to the credit of Claude's thefts, thus to enable the boy to redeem the gift at some future day. His wheel had been sold for what it would bring, his hens and rabbits confiscated, with whatever money had been placed to his credit by Ralph the summer he had worked at the hotel.

Over forty dollars yet remained to be wiped out, and after another month Claude was allowed to accept a position which Ralph had procured for him in the car-shops, placing him under the especial surveillance of a trusty foreman, an intimate friend of Ralph and formerly of the boy's father—one who, moreover, was a sturdy, consistent Christian.

'It's a terrible risk, I know,' said Ralph, 'but what can we do? It may be an effective but hardly practicable method of dealing with the saloon and cigarette problem, to keep their victims under lock and key until these places are forced to close up for lack of patronage. Claude is now standing on his own feet, and I must at least say that if he again falls, it need not be through any inordinate craving, for I am satisfied that the habit is sufficiently broken to enable him to put forth an independent effort to straighten up. If he persists in going to destruction it will be through no fault of ours, but through simple waywardness on his part. Do you know what reforming an inebriate makes me think of? It is like a rescuing a man, all bitten and crippled from an attack of pursuing wolves, taking him home, curing his wounds and strengthening his frame, and then sending him out again to run the gauntlet, harassed and pursued on every side by his old enemies. Of course he is weaker after each fray. On his way to and fro, Claude passes three places where cigarettes may be obtained. Poor Kelly, who is making desperate efforts to break off drinking, passes no less than five places where the fumes reach his nostrils. Why is such wickedness permitted? Surely awful judgment must some day fall on our rulers in high places!'

Claude let cigarettes alone, and so far as could be noted, he attended to his work and behaved in an exemplary manner; he also kept up his beloved music. A comparative peace fell upon the mother's anguished brow, and the family began to talk of Claude's starting to school again after the holidays and preparing himself, according to former hopes and plans, for a course in medicine. Claude, however, objected vigorously to this. He did not wish to go back to school; he had all the education he needed, and he would not be a doctor. Neither did he wish to take a business course in the college, nor to enter any bank or office.

'What do you want, Claude?' asked his mother, despairingly of this boy who had once been the family's brilliant star of promise.

'Oh, I guess the shops are good enough

for me, I ain't afraid or ashamed of hard work,' was the flamboyant answer. 'I'll work myself up there, and if I get tired of it, maybe when my voice comes back I'll go in with some concert troupe.' Claude of late was by no means unaware of his gifts of art and personality which would make him an undoubted success with the public.

And there his once noble and lofty ambition ceased.

'Never mind, mother,' said Ralph cheerily; 'don't notice or argue with him. What else can you expect at this early stage? Let Claude only keep straight, and he will gradually and naturally regain his senses and ambition. Loss of ambition is all a part of the disease, you know. I know lots of really good fellows who take a notion to leave school and look up a job.' Claude had certainly lost all worldly pride. To the fingertips he had been a natural little aristocrat with a very uncompromising and youthfully undiscerning detestation of vulgarity in any form. His companions had always been among the boys of the most cultured families in the city.

(To be continued.)

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