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HEIGHTS OF FAME.

The proprietor of The Wayside Inn sat behind his little desk by the door and gazed into the narrow snow-covered street. He was a man of thirty-five or six years, on whose genial face Care had left its imprint of lines and furrows. Yet those lines seemed to have added attractiveness, emphasizing the resolute but kindly form of mouth and chin, and drawing attention to the deep yet frankly pleasant blue eyes. The proprietor was a wholesome-looking man, whom birth, you would have said, had intended for higher things than running a tiny restaurant in a side street of lower New York.

Despite its smallness—partly, perhaps, because of it—the Wayside Inn was eminently attractive, and more than hinted at the personality of the proprietor. Outside, over the narrow entrance, a wooden signboard swung from an old-style wrought-iron crane. The front of the building was stained to the smoky hue of old oak, and the leaded panes of door and windows lent to the place an inviting aspect of comfort and good cheer. Within all was of the plainest and neatest. The two rows of undraped tables stretched away into the semi-darkness of the long room on either side of an avenue of bright carpet. The ceiling was crossed by dark beams, and the walls were wainscotted to shoulder-height and hung above with pictures, good pictures, framed plainly and inexpensively.

To-day the inn was empty save for the man at the desk. It was Christmas, and the little clock had just struck two. Outside, it was snowing softly, monotonously, and the restaurant was silent and dim, except at the front, where the white light struggled in through the tiny, snow-encrusted panes, and where the gentle sighing and rustle of the storm made themselves heard.

The proprietor looked for no patrons to-day, and yet when a figure passed the window and there followed a fumbling at the latch his face expressed no surprise. The door opened and a man entered. He shook the snow off his coat and placed his umbrella in the stand.

The proprietor slid off the high chair and greeted him.

"How do you do, sir?" he said. "A stormy day."

"Very," replied the other. He looked about him, searching the dim vista of unoccupied tables as though seeking some one, and emitting a sigh when he discovered the room to be empty, save for the presence of the proprietor and himself.

"Will you have dinner?" asked the proprietor. "I regret to say that I cannot offer you a great deal, since, it being Christmas, I have allowed all my help to go except the second cook. You see, my patrons are almost all business men, and so when the offices and stores are closed, I do not look for custom. However, I can give you a steak, or chops, or a slice of venison. Turkey, I am sorry to say, is not among the possibilities but perhaps the half of a young chicken would do as well?"

"It doesn't matter," replied the other. He glanced irresolutely toward his umbrella, as though meditating retreat. But the proprietor had drawn back a chair invitingly from the table nearest the window, and, after a moment, the new-comer allowed him to take his shabby overcoat, and sank somewhat dispiritedly into the seat.

"The fact is," he said, "I had an appointment here with a friend. I scarcely expected to find him, and yet—yet I am disappointed. Well, disappointments are not new to me, and one more won't hurt. I dare say." He unfolded his napkin listlessly.

"Perhaps your friend is delayed by the storm," suggested the proprietor. "If you care to wait a while—"

"No, he won't come. I could hardly expect it. He said two o'clock on Christmas day, 1901. Jim was never late to an appointment in his life. He won't come now, for, if your clock is right, it is already a quarter after the hour."

"The clock is right to a minute, sir. But—pardon my curiosity—do I understand that the engagement is of long standing?"

"It was made ten years ago this coming June, sir."

"Ah! then it is just possible that it has escaped your friend's memory. Ten years is a long time in this age. I am sorry you have met with disappointment." The proprietor's regret was so evident and sincere that the stranger warmed to him.

"You're very good," he said smiling for the first time since he had entered. "And, look here, I've eaten

my meals alone for five years and more, and I'm sick to death of the dreariness of it. I've been looking forward to this dinner for months past, hoping and yet not daring to hope that Jim would turn up, and tasting in anticipation the pleasure of once more dining with a human being and a friend. Well, it was not to be, but if you'll order a nice dinner for two—not too expensive, I beg of you—and join me in eating it, you'll be doing a real charity and kindness to a fellow-mortal who is quite ready to jump into the river to escape loneliness. What do you say?"

"With all the pleasure in the world, sir," replied the other heartily. "I have not yet dined, and I shall be almost as glad as you, I dare say, to have a companion. There is, however, one amendment to your proposition I am forced to insist upon."

"And that?" asked the stranger.

"And that, sir, is that you become my guest, for it is one of my rules that on Christmas Day no money goes in or out of the till. And so, if you will overlook the fact that I am a stranger to you, and accept my hospitality, you, in turn, will be conferring a kindness, sir."

The other hesitated a moment, glancing the while mistrustfully at the proprietor. Finally his face cleared and he laughed a trifle harshly.

"Very well. Pardon my hesitation. The fact is, I have had so few offers of kindness within the last ten years that I am like to view any such with suspicion. I accept your hospitality, sir, in the spirit in which it is made." He bowed courteously.

"You are very good," responded the proprietor. "And now, if you will excuse me for a few moments, I will awaken the cook who is, I am certain, asleep in the storeroom, and see about our Christmas dinner. I have the morning paper here, if you care to look at it."

But the other shook his head.

"Thank you, no; I shall be quite comfortable until your return. Pray, don't put yourself out any more than is necessary upon my account."

The proprietor passed down the aisle and through a door at the far end, and the newcomer, left to himself, tilted back his chair and stared thoughtfully out of the window and through the falling flakes at the row of silent, old-fashioned brick houses across the street. He was a man of apparently forty years, and, as in the case of the proprietor, Cara had beamed his countenance. But in his case the seams had not bettered it. Instead, his face, good-looking though it was, held an expression of worry and irritation. Life had dealt harshly with him. His attire was neat and clean, and yet careful observation would have discovered that his cuffs were frayed, his coat decidedly glossy under the sleeves and back of the shoulders; that his shoes had seen much wear and were not guiltless of patches. He tugged at an imitation gold watch chain which hung across his vest and looked down. When only a bunch of keys warmed his gaze he shrugged his shoulders.

"I might have kept it," he muttered, "had I foreseen that there was one man in the world fool enough to give away a dinner."

He restored the keys to his pocket and once more returned to a listless contemplation of the cheerless scene without. A quarter of an hour passed, and then the proprietor returned and laid the table with clean white cloth and gleaming silver and glass, chatting pleasantly as he came and went. Finally, another trip to the kitchen was made, and when he returned he bore a great tray, on which reposed many covered dishes and a white-swathed bottle. He set the viands on the table, placed the glasses and filled them, and then took a chair opposite the stranger.

"I hope you will approve of my selection," he said, smiling across, as he served the clear, steaming soup. "I have omitted fish, but have tried to atone for it by adding a pate of kidneys with mushrooms to the broiled chicken, which I think you will like. It is a creation of my own. This Burgundy is good without being heavy. Your health, sir!"

They drank together, and the stranger laid aside his spoon with a sigh of pleasure. Some of the lines faded from his face and his lips took on a smile.

"Good!" he said softly, "but it is good to eat like a Christian again! Why, sir, for years I have not, I give you my word, eaten a meal with any save strangers. And it's many a year, too, since I tasted wine with my dinner. Not," he added hastily,

with a queer little pomposness of tone, "not, sir, that I am—ah—deserted. Pray don't think that. It is merely that I have no friends, and have grown to look upon eating as a duty, something disagreeable, like visiting the dentist, you understand, rather than a pleasure. That is all, sir."

The proprietor of the inn bowed politely. "A great mistake to fall into," he said. "Eating is a duty, to be sure, but it should be a pleasant duty. But I confess that there was a time when your case was my own. I was pretty well down in the world and as a last resort applied for a position as waiter at this restaurant. It so happened that the proprietor was in need of a man, and he took me on. I had two years of it, and it was hard work. But it kept me alive. And then it was that eating seemed only the means to an end, and not the pleasure that it really is. Let me help you to a trifle more. No? You're not doing justice to the dinner, sir."

"On the contrary, I am doing very well, and what is more important, enjoying every mouthful of it. And so you worked up from the position of waiter to that of owner?"

"Yes. It took me six years. After I had been here two years I was made head waiter, and four years later I was in position to make the owner an offer for the establishment and good-will, an offer which he was glad to accept, for the place had been rapidly running down. I took hold of it, fixed it up as you see, and now while my fortune is still to make, I am doing remarkably well. My patrons are mostly men who appreciate good meals and are willing to pay well for them. I have five millionaires among my regular customers, and I may add, incidentally, that they are by far the most modest lunchers. Well,"—the speaker paused and smiled retrospectively—"it is not what I looked for. I had other dreams, as you may imagine, ten years ago, but, after all, I might fare far worse, and, at least, I am contented, for it is better to manage a restaurant well than to misdirect the affairs of an empire—or so, sir, it seems to me."

"You are right," answered the other, as he accepted the breast and leg of a plump, well-boiled chicken, "and I wish to heaven I could truthfully say that I have ever in my life done a single thing well."

"Ah! there you exaggerate, I am certain," responded the host earnestly. "We are liable to fall into the error of thinking that because an occupation does not fill our pockets with gold that we are poor performers. There are those who toil all their lives and never find wealth, yet live happily, contentedly, certain in the knowledge that they are doing their work well, taking an artist's satisfaction and finding their reward in that knowledge."

"It may be," answered the other, dejectedly. "I cannot say. I only know that my own life thus far has been one of the most miserable failures imaginable. Like you, sir, I had dreams of great things. I was educated for the law, a graduate of Princeton and of the Yale Law School. It was ten years ago this coming spring that I came to New York, filled to overflowing with the most reckless confidence and the most delicious hopes that even entered into a man's heart."

"With me came my friend, almost the only friend I ever had. His name was Stafford, Jim Stafford. We were in the same class, and while I was in the Law School he took up special work in philosophy, for he was fitting himself for an instructorship. The last time we met we sat just here, at this very table, it may have been.

"It was on the eve of his departure to a small Western college, where he had found a position. We had been down town all the afternoon seeing a few acquaintances and buying things he needed for his journey. Dinner-time found us at the end of this street. We came here and dined, very merrily, very hopefully, over roast beef and mugs of ale. We sat here until late, dreaming aloud of the great things we were to accomplish and toasting the future, that wonderful future. We were fools, but what happy fools! Well, sir, I have bored you enough. That is all.

"On the contrary, you interest me. The tale is sad and yet it may end happily; who can tell? The play's not over until the curtain's down. And what became of your friend?"

"Jim? I heard from him very regularly for three years; then he dropped out of my life. It was partly my fault. Misfortune after misfortune had befallen me, until I was soured and morose; I was even envious of Jim's good fortune, and I think he read as much between the lines of my letters. In the end our correspondence ceased.

"I moved here and there, ever seeking less expensive lodgings, for luck never once came my way. Five

years ago I wrote to Jim at the old address, but the letter came back. He had gone from there. Later, I wrote to our class secretary, but without success. Jim has dropped out of sight, much, I dare say, as I have. Perhaps he is dead; I think he must be, for were he alive he would have kept his appointment here this afternoon. Jim never missed appointments."

"And yet—ten years—"

"I know, but we agreed solemnly to meet here this day, no matter in what part of the world we might find ourselves. No, Jim must be gone."

"And yet, perhaps you may have passed him in the street a dozen times within the last year and not have known him," mused the host. "Ten years of work and vicissitudes altar a man's looks, you know. Do you think you'd recognize your friend if you saw him?"

The other hesitated and looked troubled. "I think so, and yet I own that Jim's features are utterly forgotten to me. Only, if I saw them again memory would cry out to me on the instant. I'm certain of that."

The other shook his head, smiling.

"Who knows? A beard gone, a whitening of the hair about the temples, a new design in wrinkles, any of these is sufficient to alter a man so that, in ten years, even his mother might hesitate to greet him. I've seen it. But let me help you to some more salad. This is Christmas Day, a day of good-will and of peace, so let us forget our troubles and worries, even if it be for only a short hour on two. Is it a bargain?"

"Well, you have a way of making troubles seem trivial," said his guest, smiling, "and so I'll do my best. But I fear the bargain is a bit one-sided. I'll wager you have no worry on earth."

"Wrong," laughed the other. "Yesterday I lost my head waiter. He was too good to remain down-town any longer, so he graduated, and tomorrow begins his new life in a Fifth Avenue hotel. Well, I wish him luck—but he has left me in a dilemma. Head waiters, like poets, are born, and not made."

The other paused, with fork in hand, and stared intently out into the snow-carpeted street. The host watched him closely, with a little smile on his lips. Presently the stranger with a sudden paling of his sallow cheeks, turned his gaze across the table.

"Give me the place," he begged, in a voice that trembled. "For God's sake, sir, give it to me. I'm at the end of my rope. I pawned my watch this morning for two dollars, all they would give me on it, for it is only brass, in order to come here, and, if Jim turned up, pay my part of the score. If he did not come—Well, I refused to think of that. Somehow, wrongly, as it has turned out, I was certain I would find him. And, now—Look here, I've tried the law and I've failed; I've tried writing and I've starved; I've canvassed, and made a pittance, and three days ago I bought a lot of tin toys with almost all the money I had left, and went into the street in front of one of the big stores to sell them. The first person my eyes fell on was a woman I'd known years ago. I saw the look in her eyes as she recognized me. I turned and fled. I sold the toys to a Jew vendor for half what I gave for them. Yesterday I tried to find work as a porter. To-day—"

"You see, I've tried almost everything but I've never tried waiting. They say that every man is capable of doing something well if he can find it; perhaps I can wait; I don't ask for much; give me my meals and a dollar or two. I can learn quickly—for God's sake, sir, give me the place!"

"I may explain," answered the proprietor of the inn, with a kindly smile and a suspicious moistness of his blue eyes, "that I am somewhat of a believer in fate. When you entered an hour ago I said to myself, 'Here is my new head waiter.' You see, sir, I was not mistaken. The place is yours; may it lead to better things."

"You—you mean it?" gasped the other, breathing hard and reaching a shaking hand across the table.

"I mean it." The two clasped hands.

Then the stranger dropped back against his chair and sat with lowered eyes that the other might not see the tears in them.

The host arose, humming a song, and removed the plates from the table, substituting a dish of red grapes and a bowl of walnuts and raisins. He brought cigars from the little case beside the desk, and a tray of matches. All the while he smiled happily. Once, when he could not be seen, he brushed a tear from his cheek. He filled the stranger's glass and his own until the red wine flooding, stained the white cloth. Standing behind his chair, erect and gravely smiling, he raised his glass

OUR CURBSTONE OBSERVER.

ON COAL SIFTING

The winter is almost over, at least we would naturally suppose that spring was at hand, and soon the snow will be gone, the long and lingering cold will have gone to its lair in the Arctic regions, and the coal-scuttle and poker will have a rest for a few months—thank goodness. It might seem more timely were I to write some spring poetry at this moment, than to dabble in coal and the sifting thereof. But I am not a poet, and I detest spring poetry, so I prefer to take a hand at coal-sifting. I am not obliged to suffer from the spring poetry, for the very good reason that no person obliges me to read it; but I cannot escape the coal-sifting—for if I have none of my own to do I must endure that of my neighbors. I am in a complaining mood, and as I do not wish to say harsh things that might not make friends for me, I will just tell my own experiences, and I am sure that others there are who will agree with me.

EXPERIENCE NO. 1.—I loved one winter on the third flat, and I had to go down thirty steps of a cork-screw stairs to reach the lane. We lit our furnace in the early winter, and I began my twice daily tramp up and down the stairs with my coal ashes. I put it in the barrels at the lane door. Each time I went down I found heaps of coal dust and ashes scattered all around the lane; and one day I saw a coal-picker come along, upset the barrels, scatter the ashes, and pick out the half-burned coal. A few days later a City Hall official rang my door-bell and informed me that I would be fined if I did not put my ashes in the barrels. I told him that I did so; he said I did not, because they were scattered all over the lane. What was the use of arguing with him? I continued to tramp up and down, till one of my neighbors came and told me that the sifting of my ashes in the lane soiled her clean washing on the line. Now I did not sift my ashes, for the good reason that if I did it in the lane the City Hall people would be on me; if I did it on my gallery, the neighbors would devour me; and I could not do it in my house. So I burned one ton and a quarter more coal that winter than I would have burned had I been free to sift my ashes; and I got a curved back from climbing up and down stairs, just to be able to swear that I put my coal in a barrel, although I knew it would not remain there an hour before it was scattered by the coal-pickers.

EXPERIENCE NO. 2.—The following year I made up my mind that things would go differently and I simply did as I saw all my other neighbors doing; as long as the snow was not deep on the ground I went up and down with my ashes, and I sifted them in the lane. But after a while I found that the neighbors in the rear had lodged a complaint against me, and I finally received a visit from a city official. I took the gentleman with the brass buttons upstairs, and into my shed, and down the back stairs to the lane. After he had seen all that was to be seen I took him up again and then I asked him the square question: "Now, sir, what am I to do with my ashes all this winter?" He thought for a

moment, then he looked out the window at the lane, as much as to say, "throw it out there," but he was silent and did not say that. After a moment I repeated my question, and he simply answered: "I am blown if I know." Well, when I saw that the official who had been sent to put me on my guard could not tell me what to do, I made up my mind to do as I pleased—I did so, and I was bombarded all the winter with big words from my neighbors,—until I discovered that what I did in broad day-light they all did the moment they were sure that everyone was in bed. Now, who is to blame in all this? That is a question that I will not attempt to answer. I got sick of living on a third flat, so I removed to a lower one, and for the next year I had the glorious privilege of doing as best suited, and of eating all the dust, dirt and snow, ashes, cinders and refuse—as well as ice—that my upstairs neighbors saw fit to throw down upon me. I said nothing; took it all; and removed to a new block where each of the flats had a yard.

EXPERIENCE NO. 3.—Here things went well until spring came. On the second of April I was notified to clean out my yard. I had never put anything in it all winter, but as there were no fences, my neighbors had made a dumping ground of it. I went and secured the services of a man who, for thirty years, had worked for the Corporation, and did odd jobs on his own hook. He came and examined the place, said it was worth \$1.75 to clean it out according to regulations. I said for him to go ahead. On the tenth he came, cleared out my yard, I paid him and took a receipt. After the yard was clean the kind neighbors still continued to throw debris into it; I could not sit up all night to watch them, so on the 19th I got a summons to appear before the Recorder. I appeared; explained my case; called the man who cleaned the yard to testify, which he did; and I produced the receipt. It was made perfectly clear that I was summoned on the 19th for refusing to do that which I had done on the 10th; the Recorder gave judgment, to the effect that I had shown good will, had obeyed the law, had done what the city ordered me to do, and that no fault was to be found with me—the case was dismissed and I was condemned to pay the costs. So I had to pay costs because I was innocent of the accusation, and because the city made a mistake in summoning me to court. The logic of that I could never understand; but that is many years ago, and quite possibly there was a different way of looking at things then from now.

THE RESULTS.—What between coal-sifting, lane cleaning, top-flats and bottom flats, Recorder's summonses, and neighbors that were on a par with the fellows that parade the lanes to upset the barrels, I made up my mind to give up house-keeping, and to decline, in future, to be a citizen—in the sense of a taxpayer, of the city of Montreal. I may some day, in the future, again take up my citizenship, but it will be when the city has some regulations, and representatives capable and willing to put them in force, and make life tolerable here.

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