

The Ten and how They Came to the Rescue

(Agnes Noyes Wiltberger, in the 'Congregationalist'.)

The Rev. Frank Reed was in his study, the one furnished room in the otherwise empty parsonage, looking over his accounts. It did not require a great deal of arithmetic. He presently leaned back in his chair and read the statement aloud.

'Thirty-four dollars from the church in the last seven months. Two cheques from the Home Missionary Society make it one hundred and thirty-four. Nineteen dollars and fourteen cents a month is not a princely income to ask a young lady to share.'

He ran his fingers through his hair, and puckered his forehead with an air of grim humor.

'I need some new shoes,' he continued, turning his foot up on his knee to inspect the badly worn sole. 'This suit can't hold together much longer; it's frightfully weak in the joints now. I owe the boarding house five dollars for board. I have got to have some coal. And I have just seventy-five cents in my pocket. I shall have to board myself and live on corn meal mush and molasses. Looks like getting married, doesn't it?'

The quizzical look left his eyes, and in its place there came something as near discouragement as Frank Reed ever allowed to appear in his face.

Often during his three years in this Dakota church the unceasing work and the close privation had seemed hard to bear. His was a nature full of courage. Yet when there came to him the possibility of winning for himself a life-long happiness, and that possibility was made impossible by the fact that he was bound to a home missionary field that was either too poor or too indifferent to pay the salary pledged, the natural man called the situation hard.

He had argued the question again and again, and as often he had reached the same conclusion—he could not leave the field while there remained so much work for him to do, simply for a consideration of dollars and cents.

For two years there had been drought; the next year a severe hailstorm destroyed the crops; and Mr. Reed's salary, which was left to the end of the year for collection, had fallen short from one to three hundred dollars every year. There was no severe want among the people. They lived in a plain, comfortable way, with all of the necessaries and many of the comforts of life. They seemed interested in the work of the church. They attended services regularly; they were hearty in welcome of strangers; and they were interested in the salvation of souls in a general and sometimes in a special way. But they were not interested in paying the minister's salary. Right there they drew the line; and if anyone invited them to step over it, they held back and cried, 'Hard times!'

Mr. Reed felt the hard times to the depth of his soul. Renunciation is hard to a young lover, and he was young and in love. He looked unusually sober as he put on his hat and started down to the village post-office.

'I may as well call on Will on the way,'

he thought, as he approached the store where Will Beardsley, the church treasurer, clerked.

Mr. Reed usually ran in to see Will on Mondays, on the chance that something might have been paid in on Sunday. He never asked for money. If there was any, it was given to him. If not, which was the usual case, they talked for a few minutes of the weather, or trade, or the number out at service yesterday, and then the minister went out. He was sensitive and proud. He shrank from avowing his need of money. If he had been asked, he would have found it extremely humiliating to tell the delinquent members of his flock that they had paid him but \$34 in seven months. The shame should have been theirs; it would have been his. It even galled him that the treasurer must know how little he had to live on.

He leaned against a counter while young Beardsley tied up a package and made change for a customer.

'Well, how goes it, Will?'

'Pretty slow. Mondays are always dull. I've something for you to-day; given to me at church last night.'

He handed a dollar to Mr. Reed, who took it without comment. It was so pitifully small beside his needs.

'Anything I can show you to-day?' Will asked, assuming the air of a brisk tradesman. 'A good dress suit, or a silk hat, or some patent leathers? It makes me uneasy to see you with so much money in your possession.'

Mr. Reed laughed, and his laugh was good to hear. With it he seemed to throw off the weight that had oppressed him.

'I think,' he said, balancing the coin on his forefinger, 'that I shall ask the cobbler to peg that to the soles of my shoes.'

Someone entered the store just then, and Mr. Reed turned at Will's 'Good morning, Nora,' to look at the face that had been in his thoughts all the morning. The consciousness of what his thoughts had been made his greeting somewhat embarrassed. But Miss Gardiner knew nothing to be embarrassed about, so she speedily besought his aid in selecting a tie for her brother.

'I came in to ask my cousin to help me,' she said; 'but he might be too much interested in selling to be impartial.'

Mr. Reed was secretly counting on walking home with Miss Gardiner when her errand was done. It was rather annoying to be called out just then to confer with a man who wanted to use the church building for a concert—the church to sell tickets and have one-half the proceeds.

Mr. Reed gone, Will and Nora relapsed into silence. Will snapped the string on her package with a jerk, and handed it across to her with the impatient exclamation:

'It makes me hot!'

'What's the matter?' she asked, surprised.

'It just makes me hot!' he repeated, with emphasis, thrusting his hands into his pockets and kicking a little box that was on the floor. 'I'm going to resign!'

'What is the trouble?' she asked again.

'How much do you suppose they have paid that man this year?' he asked, abruptly.

'I do not know,' she replied, flushing. She was not used to discussing Mr. Reed's affairs.

Will told his story. His profound admiration and warm personal liking for Mr. Reed made his indignation intense, and Nora felt her cheeks growing hotter and hotter as she listened. At first she was conscious mainly of her own super-sensitiveness to that which concerned Mr. Reed so closely. She knew she was blushing, and the knowledge made her blush the more. But all consciousness of herself was soon dispelled by the contagion of Will's impetuous indignation.

'It's a downright shame!' she said, with eyes flashing.

'Ginger! I get so mad I can't sit still. I am going to give them a piece of my mind, and then quit the business.'

'Don't do that. Let us do something,' she said, rather vaguely.

'Do what? I have talked to the trustees till I'm tired. They put it off, and talk hard times, and have always some excuse ready for not making a canvas yet.'

'Call The Ten together to-night, and we will think up some scheme.'

'All right, if you say so; but I'm going to resign.'

The Ten were a set of young people of Mr. Reed's church and congregation, bound together by a common love of fun and frolic, and also by a strong belief in their power to accomplish whatever they undertook. They had carpeted the church, and painted the parsonage, and Nora had faith that they would not be found wanting in this emergency.

Evening found them gathered in the Gardiner parlor, and again Will gave the treasurer's report for the year.

'They talk hard times,' he said, 'but I notice they manage to get what they want for themselves.'

'Yes,' said little Kittie Falconer from a piano stool; 'my father talks hard times, but he has promised me a piano for Christmas.'

'I believe it is because they don't think about it,' said Nora; 'they would make some effort if they did.'

'Think! You can't make them think about it! I've tried. They are trying so almighty hard to get what they want for themselves, and then to get ahead, that they have no time to listen if you remind them that they are eating other people's bread and butter. I like hogs; but I don't like to see them put their feet in the trough.'

'Plain language,' commented Dick Burton.

'Plain facts,' replied Will.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' began John Dixon, slowly removing his leg from the arm of his chair and bringing his long, loose figure to a standing position; 'I move you that this honorable company turn its attention to itself. I should like to ask what part of the \$34 came from the pockets of this august body?'

Silent astonishment answered his question. Kittie Falconer ceased the 'pianissimo' runs and trills with which her music-loving fingers had accompanied the discussion, while a flush slowly mounted to her forehead. Harry Martin looked as if he thought the question quite irrelevant. Mame Fiske was half indignant, and Will