

THE DOCTOR'S BARGAIN

BY

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A Story That is as Much Humour as Pathos and a Good Deal of Both



"SAY, are you the doc?" The surgeon paused half-way up the steps and glanced at a small bit of humanity balanced on the stone handrail.

"Why, yes, my little man, what can I do for you?" he asked tenderly, as he stepped over and put a hand on the lad's knee.

"Nothin' fer meself; it's fer me brudder." The little fellow spoke earnestly and looked straight into the eminent surgeon's kindly gray eyes.

"Your brother? Oh! I see. Well, what's the matter with your brother?"

"Cripple." The one word, with the saddened tone, told the whole story to Dr. Harrison. He knew the rest of the tale from long experience, and asked no further questions.

"Come in the house, and let's talk it over."

"Say, doc, I don't believe you want me to come in. I ain't got no money."

"Why, that's just the reason I want you to come in," the doctor replied, with a merry twinkle in his eye, and ran up the steps closely followed by the small urchin. As the door closed behind them he seized the youngster in a playful bear hug, and landed him in a heavily upholstered leather chair.

"What is your name?"

"Tom McGuire. You know Pat McGuire that tends bar down in East Downey Street?"

"No, I don't believe I do."

"Well, he's me uncle, and he says you set his leg, time of the big railroad smash-up at Hanover."

"Yes, I remember going out to Hanover with a lot of other doctors at the time of the accident; but that was ten years ago."

"That don't make no difference to Uncle Pat. He never forgets favours. Guess he ain't had many in his life."

"Where is your brother, Thomas?"

"Aw, don't call me that. I ain't Thomas. I'm just Tom. Raggy Tom they call me 'round the square. I sells papers on the southwest corner of the square. Business ain't so bad this time o' year, and I'm breakin' in Pete."

"He can walk then, can he?" The physician had seated himself close to his small caller, and was giving his whole attention to the case in hand.

"Tell me more about Pete."

"Pete was born that way. Doctor said one leg wasn't no good and never was goin' to be, so when Pete got big enough, I saved me pennies and bought him a crutch, and after 'while he got so's he could use it. Then I took him down to the corner and he helped me sell papes in rush hours. He likes to be doin' sonthin', but he gets awful tired holdin' the papes and hangin' on to his crutch."

"Is there any newsstand on that corner?" the doctor asked, becoming still more interested.

"Naw, we dassn't put one up. Billy Hahn, he's the feller what had that corner before me, he tried to get leave to put up a stand alongside of the fountain

where there's plenty of room, but the aldermen turned him down. He didn't have no pull, and I ain't got none either. Me and Pete was up on the northeast corner, and when Billy got wet feet and pneumonia and died, we come down to his corner."

"Tom, are your father and mother living?"

"Maw is. I dunno much about paw. He ain't no good. Uncle Pat says he sees him hangin' round once in awhile. Maw's got two younger'n me and Pete. I'm ten and Pete's goin' on nine. Maw works awful hard takin' care of the kids and sewin' fer a department store. She says to me one time, 'Tom, you look after Pete and I'll take care of the young uns.' Maw can't hardly get enough to buy 'em clothes, so I chip in when biz is good. Say, doc, I read in my papes 'bout that kid you fixed up last week, and I'll bet ten cents Pete's leg's just like that. Thinks I, when I read that, 'I'm goin' to see Doc Harrison and tell him 'bout Pete.' Now, Doc, on the level, how much do you charge for a job like that?"

"I received \$3,000 for that operation." There was a merry twinkle in the doctor's eye that was lost on his little visitor.

"Aw, say, doc, wot yer givin' me? You didn't make all that in one day."

"Yes, in two hours, Tom."

The youngster's eyes filled with tears, and he bit his lip to hold back the sobs.

"Don't you never charge no less?" the boy managed to ask, without giving away to the burst of tears ready to flow at his disappointment.

"Oh, yes, indeed; but you asked me how much I received for an operation like last week's, and I never performed one just like that before. It was very delicate and peculiar."

Tom slid out of the chair as if to go. "I guess it's all off, doc. I ain't in your class."

"Tom, sit down there." The doctor's tone of command was filled with more laughter than severity. "Let's talk business."

The youngster obeyed, watching

the eminent surgeon with a puzzled look, uncertain whether the great man was really in fun or in earnest.

"Tom," the doctor continued, "I know Pete."

"You know Pete?" Tom gasped in amazement.

"Yes, I have seen him down by the fountain at the square. You know we specialists always keep our eyes open for anything in our line, so I have noticed him several times as I passed the corner. Of course, I can't say positively, but I think an operation will give Pete two legs instead of one. Now, how much can you afford to pay for such an operation?"

THE youngster's eyes shone like two live coals.

So the doctor knew Pete, and thought he could cure him! Was it a dream? Tom pinched himself to make sure it was all real. Yes, he was awake all right. How much could he afford? He felt he could afford anything to give Pete a new leg, but how little that was compared with what the doctor would expect. Both sat in silence for over a minute. The surgeon knew what was going on in the youngster's mind, but thought best to let him come to his own conclusion. The boy fumbled his cap nervously while he considered the great question, and at length looked up suddenly into the surgeon's face. There was no doubt or uncertainty in his face or tone as he announced his decision.

"Doc, the only thing I've got in the world is me corner down by the fountain, where me and Pete sells papes. I can't give you all that, for I wouldn't have nuthin' left for me and Pete to live on and to help maw with the kids. I'll tell you what I'll do, doc, I'll let you have half o' that corner. You can hire a kid to sell papes fer you and have some dough left, but you won't make no \$3,000 in kingdom come."

"All right, Tom; I'll accept that proposition, and we'll draw up the agreement right now. Let's see, this is December eighteenth. We'll start the new arrangement beginning with January first."

In the course of a quarter of an hour the paper was duly prepared and signed and witnessed, and Tom saw the doctor file it carefully in the strong box in his safe. With a hearty handshake, the surgeon bade adieu to his ten-year-old man of affairs, and turned to a patient waiting in the outer office.

Tom McGuire had known all too little of happiness in his hard ten years, but this was surely the climax of his earthly bliss. A new leg for Pete! Could anything be finer! He ran most of the way back to the square, and nearly knocked the cripple over in his eagerness to tell the good news.

"Say, Pete, you're goin' to have a new leg."

"What?" the bewildered Pete was too intent on selling papers to bother about new legs.

"A new leg, I say. Doc Harrison, what I told you

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"Is that straight?" he asked, looking dubiously into the surgeon's face.