

PENROD

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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Arrived upon the populous and festive scene of the dog and pony show, he first turned his attention to the brightly decorated booths which surrounded the tent. The cries of the peanut vendors, of the popcorn men, of the toy balloon sellers, the stirring music of the band, playing before the performance to attract a crowd; the shouting of excited children and the barking of the dogs within the tent all sounded exultantly in Penrod's ears and set his blood a-tingle. Nevertheless he did not squander his money or fling it to the winds in one grand splurge. Instead, he began cautiously with the purchase of an extraordinarily large pickle, which he obtained from an aged negress for his odd cent, too obvious a bargain to be missed. At an adjacent stand he bought a glass of raspberry lemonade (so alleged) and sipped it as he ate the pickle. He left nothing of either.

Next he entered a small restaurant tent and for a modest nickel was supplied with a fork and a box of sardines, previously opened, it is true, but more than half full. He consumed the sardines utterly, but left the tin box and the fork, after which he indulged in an inexpensive half pint of lukewarm cider at one of the open booths. Mug in hand, a gentle glow radiating toward his surface from various centers of activity deep inside him, he paused for breath, and the cool, sweet cadences of the watermelon man fell delectably upon his ear:

"Ice cole watermelon; ice cole watermelon! The biggest slice of ice cole, ripe, red, ice cole, rich an' rare; the biggest slice of ice cole watermelon ever cut by the hand of man! Buy our ice cole watermelon!"

Penrod, having drained the last drop of cider, complied with the watermelon man's luscious entreaty and received a round slice of the fruit, magnificent in circumference and something over an inch in thickness. Leaving only the really dangerous part of the rind behind him, he wandered away from the vicinity of the watermelon man and supplied himself with a bag of peanuts, which, with the expenditure of a dime for admission, left a quarter still warm in his pocket. However, he managed to "break" the coin at a stand inside the tent, where a large, oblong paper box of popcorn was handed him with 20 cents change. The box was too large to go into his pocket, but having seated himself among some wretched Polack children he placed it in his lap and devoured the contents at leisure during the performance. The popcorn was heavily larded with partially boiled molasses, and Penrod maniched mouthfuls of peanuts with gobs of this mass until the peanuts were all gone. After that he ate with less avidity, a sense almost of satiety beginning to manifest itself to him, and it was not until the close of the performance that he disposed of the last morsel.

He descended a little heavily to the outflowing crowd in the arena and bought a caterwauling toy balloon, but showed no great enthusiasm in manipulating it. Near the exit as he came out was a hot waffle stand which he had overlooked, and a sense of duty obliged him to consume the three waffles, thickly powdered with sugar, which the waffle man cooked for him upon command.

They left a hotish taste in his mouth; they had not been quite up to his anticipation, indeed, and it was with a sense of relief that he turned to the hokye-pokye case which stood close at hand, laden with square slices of Neapolitan ice cream wrapped in paper. He thought the ice cream would be cooling, but somehow it fell short of the desired effect and left a peculiar savor in his throat.

He walked away, too languid to blow his balloon, and passed a fresh tacky booth, with strange indifference. A bare armed man was manipulating the tacky over a book, putting a great white mass to the desired stage of "candy-ing." But Penrod did not pause to watch the operation. In fact, he averted his eyes (which were slightly glazed) in passing. He did not analyze his motives. Simply he was conscious that he preferred not to look at the mass of tacky.

For some reason he put a considerable distance between himself and the tacky stand, but before long halted in the presence of a red faced man who flourished a long fork over a small cooking apparatus and shouted jovially: "Winnies! Here's your hot Winnies! Hot winny wurst! Food for the overworked brain, nourishing for the weak stummick, entertaining for the tired business man! Here's your hot winnies! Three for a nickel, a half a dime, the twentieth pot of a dollah!"

This above all nectar and ambrosia was the favorite dish of Penrod-Schofield. Nothing inside him now craved it—on the contrary. But memory is the great hypnotist. His mind argued against his impulses that opportunity knocked at his door. "Winnies wurst"

was rigidly forbidden by the home authorities. Besides, there was a last nickel in his pocket, and nature protested against its survival; also the red faced man had himself proclaimed his wares nourishing for the weak stummick.

Penrod plucked the nickel in the red hand of the red faced man. He ate two of the three greasy, cigar-like shapes cordially pressed upon him in return. The first bite convinced him that he had made a mistake. These winnies seemed of a very inferior flavor, almost unpleasant, in fact. But he felt obliged to conceal his poor opinion of them for fear of offending the red faced man. He ate without haste or eagerness, so slowly indeed that he began to think the red faced man might dislike him as a deterrent of trade. Perhaps Penrod's mind was not working well, for he failed to remember that no law compelled him to remain under the eye of the red faced man, but the virulent repulsion excited by his attempt to take a bite of the third sausage inspired him with at least an excuse for postponement.

"Mighty good," he murmured feebly, placing the sausage in the inside pocket of his jacket with a shaking hand. "Guess I'll save this one to eat at home after—after dinner."

He moved slightly away, wishing he had not thought of dinner. A side show, undiscovered until now, failed to arouse his interest, not even exciting a wish that he had known of its existence when he had money. For a time he stared without comprehension at a huge canvas poster depicting the chief attraction, the weather worn colors conveying no meaning to his torpid eye. Then, little by little, the poster became more vivid to his consciousness. There was a greenish tinted person in the tent, it seemed, who thrived upon a reptilian diet.

Suddenly Penrod decided that it was time to go home.

CHAPTER XIII. Brothers of Angels.

"INDEED, doctor," said Mrs. Schofield, with agitation and profound conviction, just after 3 o'clock that evening, "I shall always believe in mustard plasters—mustard plasters and hot water bags."

"Of course I didn't know what he'd do with the dollar," said Robert. She did not reply.

He began plaintively, "Margaret, you don't—"

"I've never seen papa and mamma so upset about anything," she said rather primly.

"You mean they're upset about me?"

"We are all very much upset," returned Margaret, more starch in her tone as she remembered not only Penrod's sufferings, but a duty she had vowed herself to perform.

"Margaret! You don't—"

"Robert," she said firmly and, also, with a rhetorical complexity which breeds a suspicion of rehearsal; "Robert, for the present I can only look at it in one way—when you gave that money to Penrod you put into the hands of an unthinking little child a weapon which might be, and, indeed, was, the means of his undoing. Boys are not respon—"

"But you saw me give him the dollar, and you didn't—"

"Robert!" she checked him with increasing severity. "I am only a woman and not accustomed to thinking everything out on the spur of the moment. But I cannot change my mind—not now, at least."

"And you think I'd better not come in tonight?"

"Tonight?" she gasped. "Not for weeks! Papa would—"

"But Margaret," he urged plaintively, "how can you blame me for—"

"I have not used the word 'blame,'" she interrupted. "But I must insist that for your carelessness to—wreak such havoc—cannot fall to—lessen my confidence in your powers of judgment. I cannot change my convictions in this matter—not tonight—and I cannot remain here another instant. The poor child may need me. Robert, good night."

With chill dignity she withdrew, entered the house and returned to the sick room, leaving the young man in outer darkness to brood upon his crime—and upon Penrod.

That sincere invalid became convalescent upon the third day, and a week elapsed, then, before he found an opportunity to leave the house unaccompanied—save by Duke. But at last he set forth and approached the Jones neighborhood in high spirits, pleasantly conscious of his pallor, hollow cheeks and other perquisites of illness provocative of interest.

One thought troubled him a little because it gave him a sense of inferiority to a rival. He believed, against his will, that Maurice Levy could have successfully eaten chocolate creams, licorice sticks, lemon drops, jaw breakers, peanuts, waffles, lobster croquettes, sardines, cinnamon drops, watermelon pickles, popcorn, ice cream and sausage with raspberry lemonade and cider. Penrod had admitted to himself that Maurice could do it and afterward attend to business or pleasure without the slightest discomfort, and this was probably no more than a fair estimate of one of the great constitutions of all time! As a digester, Maurice Levy would have disappointed a Borgias.

Fortunately, Maurice was still at Atlantic City, and now the convalescent's heart leaped. In the distance he saw Marjorie coming in pink again, with a ravishing little parcel over her head. And alone! No Mitchy-Mitch was to mar this meeting.

Penrod increased the feebleness of his steps, now and then leaning upon the fence as if for support.

"How do you do, Marjorie?" he said in his best sickroom voice as she came near.

To his pained amazement she proceeded on her way, her nose at a celebrated elevation—an icy nose.

He stood staring after her, but he kept try-

ing to talk, telling us over and over it was all your fault."

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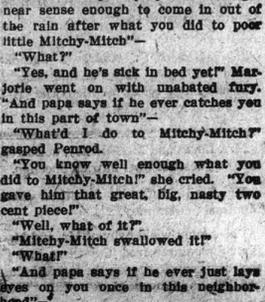
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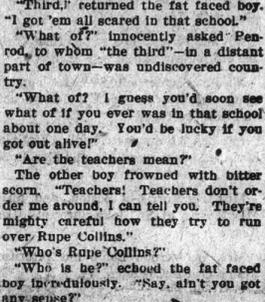
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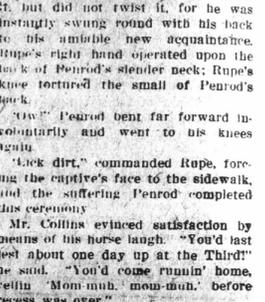
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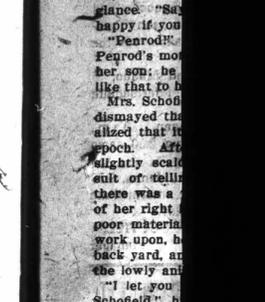
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