

From the Beginning

By LINCOLN ROTHBLUM

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Miss Zebiah Seagrave, unmarried, unbecomingly and of uncertain age, pulled the cane-bottom rocker closer to the window, and, folding her thin hands in her lap, heaved a great sigh.

"Zebiah," called a weak, complaining voice from the other room. And Zebiah lifted her angular form and listlessly walked to the bed where lay a frail, old woman.

"What is it, mother?" she asked gently, though her voice had a weary note in it, "aren't you comfortable?"

"It just seems as if I can't get comfortable," was the querulous response. "If I face the window, the sun bothers me; and if I face the door, I don't see the sun;—and if I set up, my—bones ache." And the voice dwindled off in a whining wail.

Zebiah did not answer. She lowered the shade to cut off the bright glare of the sun, straightened the pillows, and, drawing up a chair to the bed, picked up a book preparatory to reading.

"I don't want to be read to and you ought to know it," the old lady muttered, her brow furrowing in a million wrinkles, "you don't pay no attention to me at all, though I don't know as I ought to be expectin' much more from a stepchild."

Zebiah seemed restrained from arguing by the invalid's weakness. "Now, mother," she softly replied, laying the offending book on the table, "don't work yourself up. You know Doctor Merrifield said you should not get excited—your heart won't stand it."

Mrs. Seagrave waved her shrunken hands dramatically. "There you go mentioning that doctor again to me. Ain't I told you how I hate him with his vile taste'n medicines and pills that stick in my throat?" Her voice rose to a shrill accent. "Anyhow, 'pears to me he likes to come to see me—every other day would be enough to take kear of an old woman, to say nothing of twice a day like he's been hangin' aroun'. I suppose it's my money what he's after as soon as I'm old—running up a big bill like that." And the outburst of temper was followed by a protracted racking cough, rendering the body so weak and helpless it scarcely seemed alive.

Zebiah petted the scant, ashy-white hair. "I'm sure Doctor Merrifield does not want your money, mother," she soothed, "he hasn't taken a penny yet for all the medicines he has given you. We all want to see you get well."

Her ministrations were interrupted by the entrance of a quiet, earnest looking man, whose bald head and hollow eyes seemed strange at variance. He smiled encouragingly at Zebiah. "How did she sleep last night, Miss Seagrave?" he questioned in a low tone.

"I was up all night, doctor, as the cough gave her no rest. She is not much better this morning."

As the doctor turned with professional interest toward the patient who lay so white and still, Zebiah stole quietly from the room. It was the mirror in the gilt frame, sole adornment of the bare walls of this "sitting room" that claimed her attention. The close inspection did not please her and quick tears of self-pity came to her eyes. As she stood off so that the small mirror might reflect her figure, the flat-chested, hipless, colorless reflection brought forth audible suffering.

"Yes, I've given her my best years, even if she isn't my mother. I've stood her abuse and I've given up friends."

The thoughts seemed too great for utterance and Zebiah sank into the cane-bottom rocker which creaked sympathetically, as she buried her head in her arms, her shoulders shaking with her sobbing. Doctor Merrifield entered the room.

"Come, Miss Seagrave," he comforted, patting her head, "you mustn't take such things so to heart. Your mother has been ill a very long time and you know she has been getting steadily worse."

Zebiah rose and wiped her eyes in a handkerchief already sadly wet. "Oh, it's not that."

"I know you have been very patient and good," the doctor continued, and he added in a hesitating manner "I hope you will be rewarded."

The pent-up gates of suppressed emotion gave way. "What has my goodness and patience brought me? I have become a recluse—even the children can point out 'old maid Zebiah,' my minister questions me what disposition I will make of her money, and but yesterday I heard Widow Bliss refer to someone 'as homely as Zebiah.' What reward can atone for all that?"

"You must not let such unkindness weigh upon your mind, Miss Seagrave. We all have our crosses to bear. Even my life has not been a bed of roses."

Zebiah looked up at the kindly face in surprise.

"For a great many years," he continued, not noticing the interruption, "I turned over every cent I earned as a machinist to support my crippled mother and her mother and to put my brother through school. I longed for a study medicine, but—"

The memory seemed too poignant a pain to recall. Zebiah's faded countenance assumed a look of sympathetic understanding. "And for how long did that last?"

"When I was thirty-five," he spoke

very softly, "father died, and mother lived but a month longer. My brother married and then I started to learn all I did not know. It is not easy to learn at thirty-five—no medicine, at any rate—and it was ten years later before I got the right to hang out that sign you see in front of my office. And at forty-five, a new doctor does not easily build up a practice in a small town—indeed there were some nights when I sent myself to bed supperless like a naughty boy being punished for having spoiled his life," he added bitterly.

Zebiah forgot herself as she saw the need for quick sympathy. "But look how splendidly you have done, doctor, in the five years you have been here. Surely that is encouraging."

"It is if it were not counteracted by hearing people speak of that old batch," "old baldy," and "howless," and wondering 'who'll he leave his money to when he dies.'"

A faint call from the sick room interrupted their exchange of confidences, and both stood over the figure breathing so laboriously. The doctor felt the pulse and looked very compassionately at the lined features.

"Guess I'm done for, Zebiah," came in a far-away voice, "and—and—don't let the Doc get my money. I'd rather—I'd rather— A weak cough stopped her. In a moment she went on. "I'd rather see you have it. I ain't been so kind to you, Zebiah, these many years. You'll forgive me, child?"

With tears coursing down her faded cheeks, Zebiah leaned over and kissed the shrunken lips. "There is nothing to forgive, mother."

"I wish I'd been your real mother, girl. I might've done better by you. Don't give the Doc any of my money." Silence ensued.

The doctor noisily arose and covered the body with the sheet. "She is dead," he said simply.

Zebiah retreated into the other room and the doctor followed. She was dry-eyed and felt horribly old. Irritating and complaining as her stepmother had been, she now had no one and the void seemed too immense to fill. Her head sank upon her chest.

"Zebiah," the doctor called.

Zebiah was aroused from her apathy by his use of her Christian name.

"Zebiah," he repeated, "will you marry me?"

Zebiah stared in incredulous amazement.

"We are both alone in the world," he continued gently taking her hand. "Your goodness to your stepmother has incensed love. I long thought 'Golly, don't you think you could learn to care for me?'"

"But, doctor, doctor," Zebiah's voice seemed another part of her, "I'm only 'old-maid Zebiah,' homely old Zebiah."

"And I'm only 'that old batch,' 'old baldy,' 'howless.' Come, it's not too late, Zebiah, lets start from the beginning."

Zebiah seemed to have lost her angles, her hair seemed to curl about her forehead and long-absent color mounted her cheeks.

"Yes, let's start again," she whispered.

The Scrap Book

"LITTLE FLAG ON OUR HOUSE"

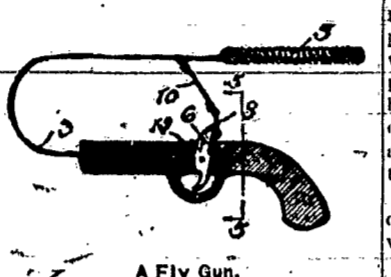
The little flag on our house is floating all the day beside the great big Stars and Stripes. You can almost hear it say to all the folks in our street, "As the breezes make it dance, 'Look up and see my own blue star—We've got a boy in France!'"

The little flag on our house, it floats sometimes at night, and you can see it "way up there" when the street lamp shines just right. And sometimes, long toward morning, when the cup comes by, perchance it signals with its one blue star, "We've got a boy in France!"

The little flag on our house will wave, and wave, and wave until our boy comes home again, or finds in France his grave. "Say—shoot—its blue star—turn to gold." Because of war's grim chance, it still shall wave to say: "Thank God we've got a boy in France!"

—William C. Demorest, in Leslie's Weekly.

"SHOOT THE FLY"



A Fly Gun.

In these days, when firearms are so fashionable, it is proper to shoot the fly instead of swatting him in the ordinary way. A pistol for the purpose has been newly invented. It carries the swatter on the end of a spring which, (as shown in the picture) is bent back and caught with a hook that may be released by pulling the trigger.

Well-aimed, the weapon is bound to kill at every shot.

In the picture the swatter is represented in section. It is, however, circular in form, of wire net, with a frame of felt padding to protect furniture or other objects from being scratched by the swat.

Rat Stole Soldier's False Teeth.

Rats destroy £18,000,000 of human food yearly in the United Kingdom, an agricultural expert stated recently. These destructive rodents, however, do not confine themselves to food, as is shown by the soldier who has been in a convalescent home, an exchange says.

During the summer they were sleeping in the tents in the garden. A winking one curled down the soldier received a shock, for a large rat was snatching off with his false teeth which had been left the night before at his bedside. The rodent succeeded in getting away with its strange and peculiar prize.

Can't.

"The Germans," said Gen. G. O. Squier, head of the signal corps—"the Germans have a detestable habit of accompanying the vilest deeds with the most hypocritical and canting homilies."

"The Germans are exactly like the second-hand dealer who said to his son: "Tommy, I made a mistake in giving change to the customer. Who just bought a Palm Beach suit. I gave him a dollar too little. That teaches us, Tommy, my dear boy, that we should always try to profit by our mistakes."

Alligator Was Obstinate.

Soldiers had to be called to the rescue when the big alligator at the Cincinnati zoo was moved from his winter to summer quarters this week. A rope was tied about the animal in the usual way and three or four of the zoo guards started to lead him in the usual way from the winter quarters to the concrete pool outside. But the big alligator refused to budge. Four soldiers who were passing saw the officials' plight, and volunteered their services, eventually succeeding in moving the alligator.

Bobbie's Good Suggestion.

Junior and Bobbie are both four. Junior wears his hair bobbed, while Bobbie has his hair cut short. They were playing soldier, and Junior spent most of his time pushing his hair back out of his eyes. Finally Bobbie said: "Say, don't you know soldiers don't have long hair? You better hike home and tell your mother to have your hair cut like men's."

Had the Evidence.

Glady's—Men are all flirts—you can't trust any of them.

Reggy—More so than a woman?

Glady's—Well, I'm engaged to three of the nicest men I ever knew, and I've found that every one of them is flirting with some other girl.

Turkey Ranches.

In order to relieve the food shortage, turkey ranching has been tried in the foothills of California and some parts of Arizona. In other western states it has become a recognized industry, though as yet an infant one.

Those Girls.

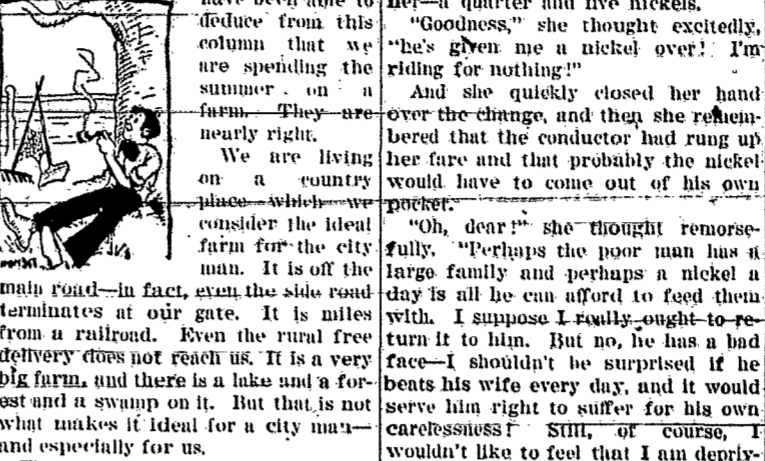
Myrt—Glady's thinks her features are very delicate.

Gert—Gee, your features would be delicate too, if they got the hot-towel-jag, pommeling, painting and powdering that hers do.

FARM JUST TO HIS LIKING THEN IT CAME HOME TO HER

Newspaper Man is Spending the Summer in What He Considers Ideal Spot for the Purpose.

Certain of our readers have so far developed the detective instinct as to have been able to deduce from this column that we are spending the summer on a farm. They are nearly right.



We are living on a country place—which we consider the ideal farm for the city man. It is miles from a railroad. Even the rural free delivery does not reach us. It is a very big farm, and there is a lake and a forest and a swamp on it. But that is not what makes it ideal for a city man—and especially for us.

There are no horses, cows, chickens, ducks, geese or other live stock on this farm. There are no crops to bother with. The pruning shears and the mid-night fox-hunt are by far the best poultry to interest such rascals. We used the strawberry patch, we hoe the potatoes, we inspect the peas and beans, and our day's farm labor is done; we retire to a well-earned repose and are sung to sleep by the frogs and the owls and the whippoorwills.

It would be a dandy place for a gang of counterfeiters—or moonshiners. Do we hear any offers?—Exchange.

Ancient and Modern Roads.

Modern road engineers seem to have great difficulty in determining how a really good and substantial road should be built. This is hard for the layman to understand, when we consider the roads built by the Romans a thousand years ago, which, except for neglect of the surface, are still giving good service. Then there are the notable roads of the Continent, that have survived hundreds of years' traffic. It would seem that a study of such roads would furnish much needed information; but possibly the trouble lies in a futile attempt to get something for nothing, by spreading the cost of one mile of good road over ten miles of makeshift.—Scientific American.

Nine Kinds of Bread in Sweden.

Only nine types of war bread are permitted in Sweden; according to information furnished by commerce reports.

A decree has been issued restricting the breads to be made to the following types: Dry, hard bread and so-called "coffee cake," and their weight prices are prescribed by law. In making bread only wheat, rye, barley or oat flour may be used and flour substitutes are prohibited. For ordinary bread no butter, lard, or other fat, milk, or cream may be used. Soft bread may not be sold until it is at least 12 hours old.

What Was Coming.

On the night of the first big minstrel show in Richmond a private entered one of the boxes with a magnificent bejeweled and befringed young woman on either arm. Lord Chesterfield had nothing on him for chivalrous bearing and grandiloquent concern for the comfort of the ladies. They were conspicuously long in getting settled. Not being able to stand it any longer, or, perhaps, prompted by jealousy, a soldier in the balcony yelled down:

"That's all right, old top; you'll be washing dishes tomorrow."—Judge.

Flanders Mud.

The following is a Munichian tale, showing the quality of the mud in Flanders at the present day:

A soldier walking along a road noticed a hat, which he attempted to kick out of the mud. What was his surprise to find a hand under it and to hear a voice calling for help.

When the man was extricated he said: "I was on horseback." So together they proceeded to dig out the horse. The horse's mouth was found to be full of hay taken from a wagon which had sunk still farther down.

Save the Twine.

With binder twine high in price, having it in quantities will be great economy. Small bundles use up considerable more twine than large ones. It takes only a moment to adjust the size of the bundles and in no two grains should the bundles be the same size this year. Every operator should regulate the size of the bundles to just about what grain will cure out nicely and still be small enough to handle.—Farm Life.

In a Receptive Mood.

"Uncle Jake, how's your rheumatism?"

"It sho' is bad, sah."

"Do you think a quarter would cure you?"

"It might not cure me, sah, but 'twould be mighty stumblin' to de sperrits, help 'as how dey's low dis mawnin'."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

Etiquette Explained.

"My dear, don't eat peas with your knife at the table."

"Of course, I wouldn't. Don't you suppose I've got sense enough to know they'd roll off?"

For Both of Them.

"Willie Jones, does your mother know you are learning to smoke?"

"No; I want it to be a surprise."—London Opinion.

MIDNIGHT HAPPENING

There is a woman living on the Heights who is rather timid about fires. And the night was cold, and her husband was out of town, and when she retired at night she felt nervous.

"After an hour or maybe two or three, she was awakened by the sound of a loud gong, beating rapidly. She sprang from her bed. The house stands close to the street, and the gong was clanging in front of the house. She rushed to the window and threw it open. There were no fire engines visible, but a street car was standing on the track, and somebody was calling "Fire! Fire!"

"Don't stand there and yell 'fire!' she shrieked to the street car crew both of which were standing in the street. "Turn in an alarm!"

"Go back to bed, lady," answered the motor man. "I wasn't yellin' fire. The trolley was off and the conductor couldn't get it back on and I was yellin' 'Higher—higher!'"

And that's all there was to it.

GAVE HERSELF AWAY.



He—I bet you've told everyone what I told you as a secret last night. She—Why, the ideal! There's a whole lot of girls I haven't seen yet.

Joyous Assumption.

A "cut-up" scatters carousal chat. He is indeed a happy elf. Who thinks he should make other laugh by watching him enjoy himself.

Physical Prowess.

"That man ought to be awarded for beating his wife." "How do you know he beats his wife?" inquired Mr. Meekton. "His confession!" "Maybe what he told you was a confession and maybe it was only bragging. Wait and hear the lady's side of the story."

What Pa Said.

"I'm—aw—beautifly fond of—aw—fol-lowing the hounds, docher know?" "Inferred as much from what papa said."

"Veally? And what did youah say, thah say?" "Oh! he said you seemed to be going to the dogs."

Poultry Finance.

"An egg is mighty valuable these days." "Of course," assented Farmer Corn-tassel. "An egg will bring almost enough to pay for feeding the hen until she lays the next one."

A Case for the Censor.

"Billings thinks he knows how the war should be conducted." "Hope he does. Maybe they'll make him stop talking for fear he'll give away our most valuable military secret."

Happy to Lose Her.

Corah—Miss Anlique is to be married. Dora—Indeed! Who is the happy man? Corah—Her father, I think.

Not Very Much.

She—I could never marry a man who has no money. He—But there's germs in money. She—And there are germs in kisses, but that don't bother you.

BEST THING.



Smart—I never saw anything good about the work of Doctor Berryman. Wise—Oh! yes, He takes a vacation of three months every year.

The Egg.

The egg is exceedingly strong. Though world calistrophes appeal. A simple toothache comes along. And makes a man smart along.

Those Pie Acts.

Bacon—Now they say pies are going up. Ebert—Well, why shouldn't they? Look at the demand for them in the movies for hitting fellows over the head.