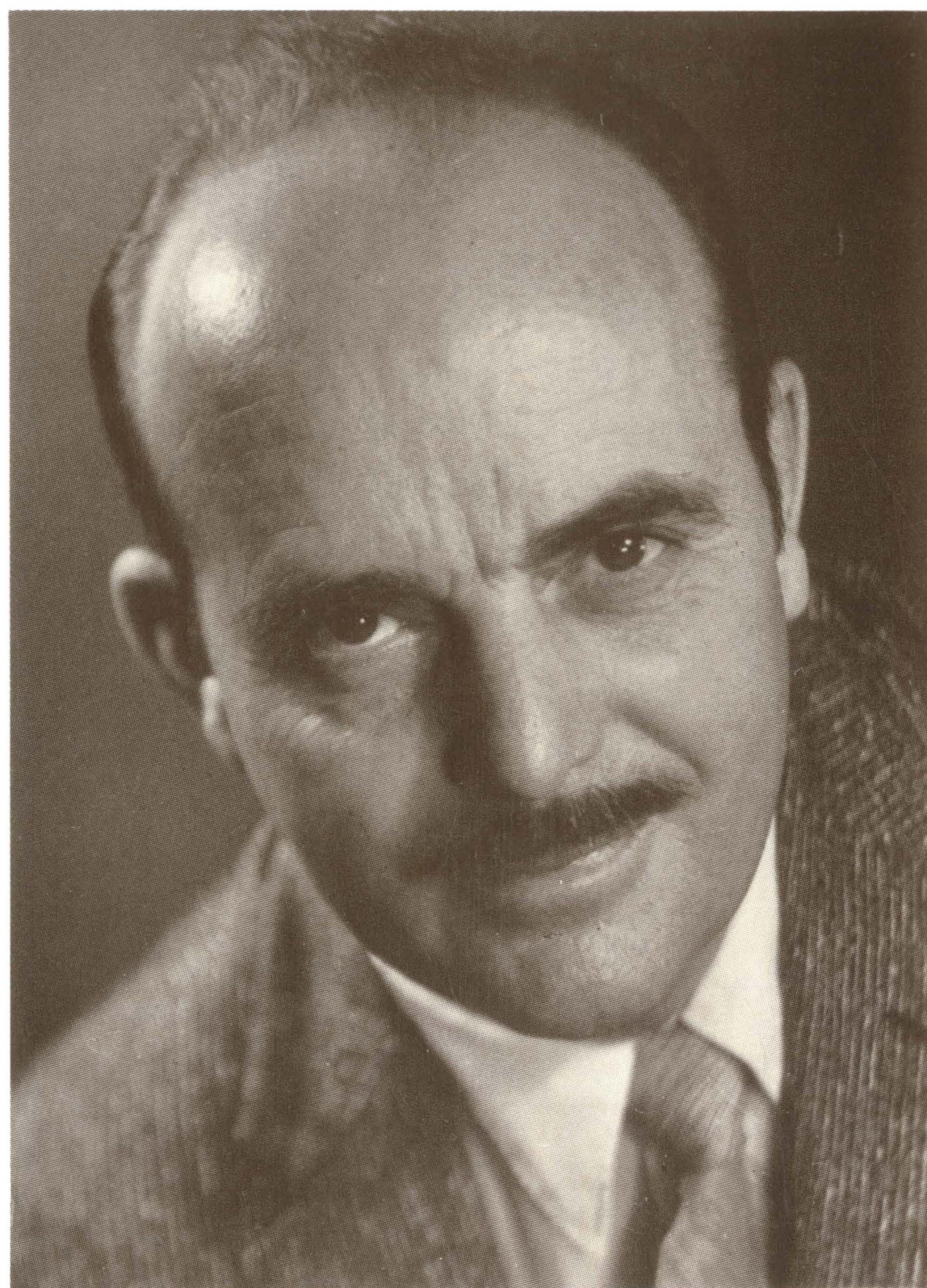




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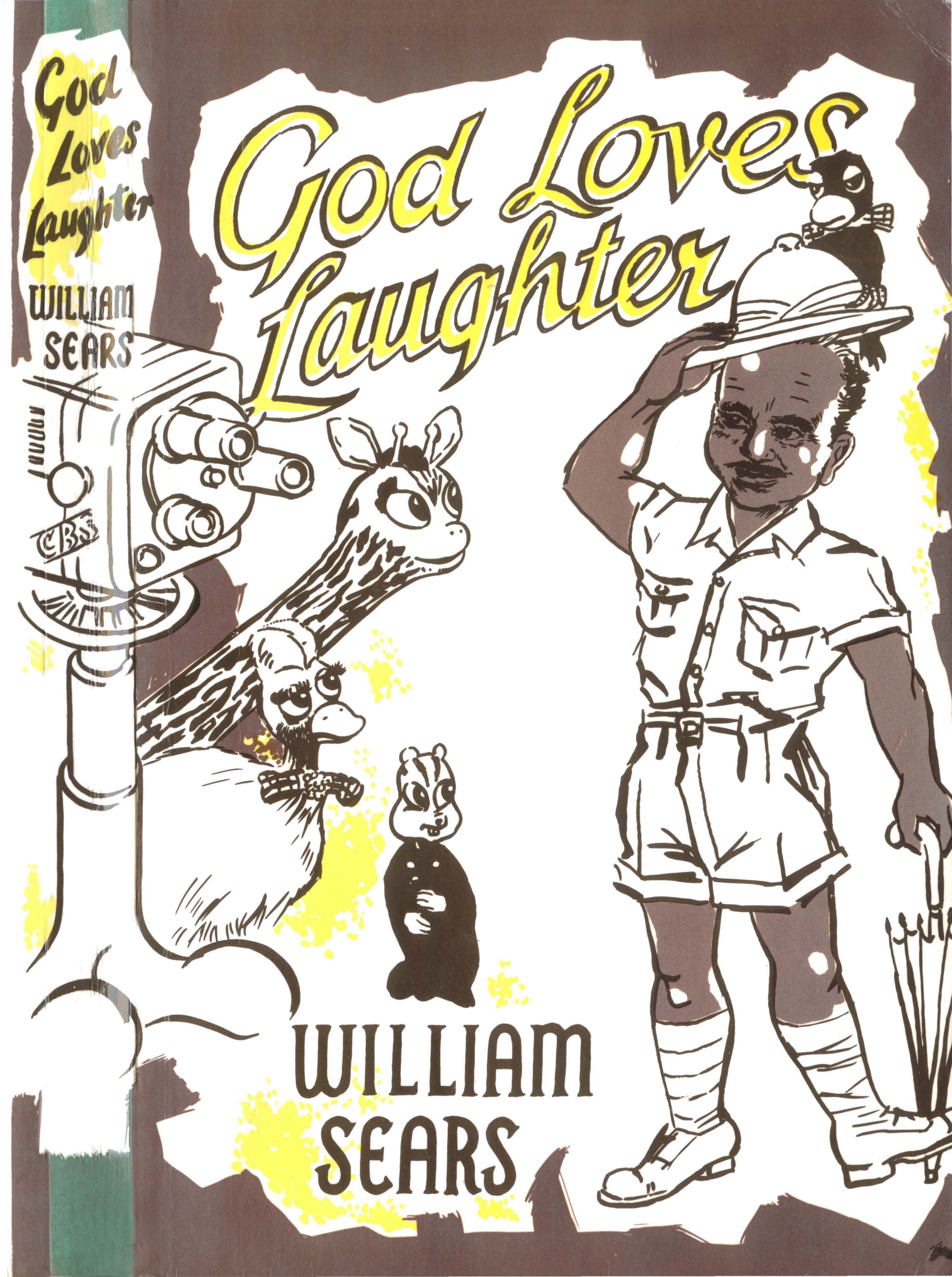
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GOD LOVES LAUGHTER

By
WILLIAM SEARS



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*Columbia
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IN THE
PARK
with
Bill Sears

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First Edition 1960
Fourteenth reprint 1991
ISBN 0 85398 019 5 (paper)

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

FOREWORD

ALL THE EVENTS in this story are true. They are about actual people. If you should notice a similarity between any character and a friend of yours it is probably your friend.

The locale throughout is authentic, although I have blended the unities of time and place from various radio and television stations where I have worked. Only the names have been changed to protect the guilty, and only those names which might reflect adversely upon some fellow labourer in the commercial vineyard.

The reasons I have made these minor changes are as follows:

FIRST: I wish to stay in television and radio.

SECOND: I wish to protect my bodily person.

THIRD: I do not wish to share the profits with an attorney.

I have travelled the equivalent of twelve times around the world, and have found people quite wonderful in every part of our planet. Therefore, it has been a great joy to write this book. In doing so, I hoped for neither reward nor gratitude, although both would be welcomed. I had no choice. I had to write it. You will understand why before you put it down.

WILLIAM SEARS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

A SEVENTH SON-OF-A-GUN OF A SEVENTH SON-OF-A-GUN

I WAS BORN in a caul. Wrapped “in a veil” my Irish father bragged. My Uncle Duffy was more picturesque.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and all the saints in purgatory! The laddie’s come in a cocoon!”

The midwife was the first to rush the news to my father. “It’s a genius that’s born to you,” she cried, “all wrapped up like the seventh son of a seventh son.”

“Never mind that,” Father told her. “Is it a boy genius or a girl genius?”

“A big boy-child, and the finger of God is on him.”

I was born on March 28, 1911, in Duluth, Minnesota, in Pumpkin Row. My father never quite forgave me for missing St. Patrick’s Day by less than two weeks. As a news event, I was a poor second to the storm that blew in off Lake Superior with hailstones as big as golf balls.

My father’s family originally came from Court MacSherry Bay at the foot of County Cork. On a Saturday night Father would stand for hours around the piano at Hennessy’s house with the only other two Irishmen in town and they would sing one short song over and over:

Ooooh . . . McGinty was dead and McCarthy didn’t know it;
McCarthy was dead and McGinty didn’t know it;
They both lay there dead in the very same bed
And neither didn’t know that the other was dead.

Then off they’d go into gales of laughter, then back to the song, then off they’d go again. Only this time it was to McMurtry’s pub.

Mother, who was French, Spanish, German, Welsh, English, and Scotch, would often tell Father, especially when he had displeased her, which was almost daily, that St. Patrick had made one great mistake.

"He should have left the snakes," she said, "and driven out the Irish."

Within a week after I was born, Father was spreading it all over town that he'd come into a great piece of fortune. "It's my son," he said. "He came in a caul, like a pea in a pod. It's a sign from heaven. He's bringing us great good luck, and in no time at all now, we'll be coming into a nice piece of money."

Mother was annoyed. "I know your whole family," she told Father, "both here and in Ireland, and you could keep all the money they own together in the toe of one boot."

"You've got no faith, woman. Just wait 'till the young lad begins to speak. He'll tell you."

I began to walk when I was ten months old, but I began to speak when I was only six months. It made my father very nervous. Especially since the first word I said was not "Daddy" but "God".

"The boy's creepy," he told Mother. "Where did he pick that up?"

"He didn't get anything as mild as that from you certainly," Mother told him.

"I don't like it. It's spooky. I don't know if he's swearing or prophesying."

By the time I was a year-and-a-half old, my father was quite frightened of me. I knew several words that he didn't. It was at this time that I first had the dream. When I told Mother about my dream she told Father. He wanted to take me to a doctor, but Mother said, "He's just precocious."

"He's weird," Father told her, "and I'm not at all sure it was wise to have him. But there's no sending him back now."

Mother told me about these things in detail years later. All I could recall myself about the dream the first time I had it was that the room had been full of a wonderful bright light, that I was very happy, and that I wanted to remain there.

Mother said she remembered the day of my dream very clearly. It was the morning that Father came downstairs after being desperately ill. He'd eaten some string beans from a bad jar and had been poisoned. For three days he thought he was going to die. At the height of his fever he confessed to Mother that ten years ago when they had first been married he'd taken Alma Jensen to a barn dance, and he didn't want to die with that on his conscience. Unfortunately for him, he recovered. When he came downstairs he was openly cheerful. He hugged Mother and gave her a playful poke in the ribs.

"I hope you didn't pay any attention to my little ravings while I was hysterical with fever."

Mother dug him a good one in the ribs in return. She laughed coldly. "Of course not, Frank. I imagine I'll forget all about it in a few years."

That's how Mother came to remember so clearly the day of my dream. Women are funny that way. The date I had the first dream was September 20, 1912.

By the time I was five I was making my poor father's life a misery. I seemed to have an inordinate interest in God, and he didn't care to discuss it with me. One day at the circus, while the bare-back riders were galloping through the big rings of fire, I turned to Father and said suddenly, "Is that what hell is like?"

Father nearly swallowed his cigar, it upset him so.

"Don't ask me," he said angrily, "I've lived all my life in Minnesota."

Since Father had opened the subject, I said, "Where does *God* live, Father? How big is He? Does He have brown eyes?"

We left the tent immediately. Father stopped at a side-show and bought me a rubber ball. "Here," he said patiently, "play ball. Be like the other little boys. Bounce the ball on the ground."

I did, obediently. Then I looked up at him proudly. "God made the ground," I informed him.

Father threw up his hands and took me home.

About a month later, according to Mother, I had the dream a second time. I didn't say anything about it until my father came home from work. I was a cock-horse and Father was riding me to Banbury Cross astraddle his toe when I told him.

"The man came again," I said.

"Who came?" Father laughed.

"The man."

"What man?"

"The man in light."

"Where?"

"In my dream again."

I got off before Banbury Cross. "Ethel!" Father called, "He's at it again."

Mother came hurrying in. "What's wrong?"

Father was already putting on his coat. "He's seen that man in a light in his dream again."

Mother picked me up tenderly and kissed me. "Of course, he has." She hugged me to her. "We all have nasty bad dreams."

"It was a good dream," I told her.

"What did the man look like?"

"I don't know."

"What did he say?"

"Don't follow in their footsteps."

Mother nearly dropped me. Father turned in the doorway.

"Thank God I work in an underground mine and don't have to come up until it's dark."

The very next morning Father was shaving when I came into the bathroom.

"What's my name?" I asked him.

Father had often played this game with me. "Your name is William."

"Then why did he call me Peter?"

"Who?"

"The man in my dream last night."

Father cut his chin. "Ethell!"

Mother appeared from nowhere. She was very patient about it.

"Are you sure he called you Peter, dear?"

I nodded. "He said: 'Fish like Peter.' "

Father went to work that morning with his face half shaved. He told Mother to take me to a doctor before he came home.

"It's not normal. He talks like an old man, and it's not comfortable living in the same house with him. He'll be dead before he's six."

"Frank!"

Father was not at all happy. Whenever he became upset he talked with a brogue and waxed poetic. "If I'd known what was coming that dark March night, I'd have stuffed him back into the 'caul' and returned him."

When Father got home that night he and Mother decided that the best thing to do was to send me to Sunday school. So the next week I went with my sister Ella.

“Let the boy worry Father Hogan for a while,” Father told Mother. “I pay my pew-rent regularly and hardly ever use it. Let him earn the money.”

Sunday school opened up a whole new world of material for me. It gave me an abundance of new questions to ask my father. I think I must have known instinctively how terribly skittish it made him, especially after the morning he drove the family car into the oak tree in the yard. As he was coming out of the garage I called out to him:

“I thought I saw God on the front seat with you.”

Father sent me to bed early that night, then he took refuge with Mother. “We’ve got to do something about this morbid interest. It’s upsetting.”

Ella chimed in. “If you think he’s upsetting now, wait until next week when Father Hogan tells us about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Then he’ll really be creepy!”

This was too much for Father. He withdrew me from Sunday school as of that night. It was just as well, for the church and I were soon to clash. It happened shortly after I entered the third grade. It was the week I promised Margie Kelly that I would bring the stork to the church picnic.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIRDS AND THE BEES, OR THE STORK CLUB

THE ENTIRE VILLAGE called it justice from the mills of God the morning I broke my ankle. My father said that in my case it was a pity that they didn't grind "exceeding fast". I fell from the roof of Saphead Phillips's house. I had been setting a bear-trap by their back chimney when I slipped and lost my balance.

Father was quite nasty about my being up on Phillips's roof. I explained that Mrs. Phillips was going to have a baby, and that I was setting the trap to catch the stork when he came. That night, through the warm-air ventilator in my bedroom floor, I heard Father tell Mother that in some ways it was a pity I hadn't broken my neck. I could put my face to the ventilator and look right down into the kitchen. I could see that Mother was not pleased with Father.

"He's your son, Frank," she said. "It's your responsibility to talk with him."

Father was practical. "As far as I'm concerned, he can get to be fifty before he finds out there's no stork."

No stork! It couldn't be true. If there was no stork, I'd be a failure at the church picnic. All the kids were expecting it. We planned to surprise Miss Poppenburg. If the stork didn't bring the baby, who did? Naturally, I asked Father. He gave me a fast mumble. All I understood of it was that he had to go down town right away. He told me to ask Mr. Phillips. It was his stork, Father said.

I began to worry. How was I, with a broken ankle, going to get that bear-trap off the roof? If Mr. Phillips was involved in bringing the baby, that trap might surprise him when he went down the chimney. He might break his ankle too.

That night when Mr. Phillips came home from work I was waiting for him at the gate. I said to him, "If it's at night, Mr. Phillips, watch your step up there."

"What?"

"I just mean that you're no bird, and with a trap on your leg you might lose your bundle."

Mr. Phillips was pretty thick. "What are you talking about?"

I decided to be frank with him. "Man to man," I said, "we know there's no stork, don't we?"

Mr. Phillips's face was suddenly a banana pudding, then a glass of tomato juice. I realized at once that I'd made a serious mistake. Poor devil. He didn't know there wasn't a stork either. He looked at me queerly.

"Are you sure you didn't fall on your head?" he said.

When he left, Mother came out. She said, "Mr. Phillips looked a little upset. What did you say to him?"

"I gave him a nasty shock," I told her. "Now he doesn't know whether he's going to get a baby or not."

Mother laughed. "I think he's pretty sure."

I shook my head. "He was depending on the stork, and I knocked that right out from under him."

Mother eyed me narrowly. She made believe she was very interested in the cast on my ankle. "Well," she said, "if the stork isn't going to bring the baby, who is?"

I didn't answer right away. Everyone thought the trap had fallen down when I did, but I knew that it was still up there beside the chimney and all set to snap. I looked up at the shadows near the red bricks where my trap lay hidden.

"I don't know just yet," I told Mother. "But I'll be able to tell you any day now."

When Mr. Phillips got the baby in without disturbing the trap it set me to thinking. It also set me to reading. I lost all interest in Phillips's baby. I was on the trail of bigger game. I was determined to find the answer to my questions. Why was the sky blue? Where did a laugh go after you heard it? If the earth was round and people were walking on all sides of it, which side was up? Why was Sammy Agnew black and why was I white—most of the time? Did God have a wife? Where was His house? Could He speak Chippewa Indian like Uncle Walter? Did He really love everybody? Even old lady Yellow-jacket who chased us kids with her umbrella? Why did He make mosquitoes? And flies that could walk upside down on the ceiling?

I decided that the only person who could answer my questions would be my grandfather. I tried Miss Poppenburg at school, but she told me that the only answers I needed to know were the ones to *her* questions, not mine. When I asked Father Hogan he told me to go to confession regularly, say a good act-of-contrition, and not to miss Mass on Sunday, and to leave the rest to God. My father told me to shut up. I even asked Mayor Fletcher some questions one day on the street. He patted me on the back and with a jovial laugh said he'd take my questions up with the town council, but I never heard from him again. I was sure that my grandfather would tell me to go right ahead and ask him any old questions I could think up. He might not know the answers, but he'd certainly have a shot at it.

My grandfather didn't think very highly of school, church, or politics. He said that most of those people had heads so empty he could drive his horse and buggy through them for two weeks without finding an original idea. He was the man to ask, all right.

CHAPTER 3

A PAIR OF EARLY SINNERS

I MADE DINOSAUR TRACKS in the soft, warm dust of the Old Swimming-hole road, hopping along with my two bare feet held together. I was on my way to Grandfather's. I avoided the open gate, which was too small for a dinosaur to enter, and crawled along the top of the board fence and over the empty hay-rack. Grandfather was inside the barn singing at the top of his lungs:

“There'll be pie in the sky when we die,
When we die there'll be pie in the sky;
So live every day 'till you die,
And you'll all have your pie in the sky.”

Grandfather was currying down fat old Prince. He grabbed me, gave me a whisker-rub, and put me up on top of the chestnut's back.

“Did you ever see God?” I asked him.

Grandfather thought a while. “You mean in person?”

I nodded. “Face to face.”

Grandfather swatted old Prince on the withers, brushing off the fine hay-dust that had floated down from the mow above. “Well, sir,” he said, “that's a funny thing. I've had many a talk with Him, of course, but it's been mostly one-sided.”

“Didn't He answer?”

Grandfather nudged the chestnut with his elbow. “Over, boy.” Prince did a little dance-step with his hind-legs to make room. “No,” Grandfather said, “not out loud He didn't answer. Usually I never got what I was asking Him for, and saw the wisdom of it later. The Lord is mostly like

a banker, son. The biggest part of His job is turning down fellows like me who are not good for a loan."

My grandfather was a Protestant, we were Catholics. Grandfather said he wasn't anything but a poor little old seeker. I asked him why.

"Everybody else just seems to be panning for gold and getting mostly gravel," he said. "I'm still looking for the real mother-lode."

"What does that mean?"

"You'll know some day."

My mother became a Catholic when she married father. I heard her say that Grandmother was terribly upset about it. Grandfather hadn't minded at all.

"If you've got a clean heart underneath your hide," he told Mother, "I'm sure you won't put the Lord's nose out of joint by shopping around."

When I asked my grandfather why he was still a seeker, he told me that if the church was good enough for his father to stay away from, it was good enough for him. He told me this in front of Mrs. Casey. She said angrily that Grandfather would never see the inside of the pearly gates.

This worried me greatly: I wasn't interested in going to heaven at all if Grandfather wasn't there. I knew that if you missed church on Sunday it was a mortal sin and you were damned into hell fire forever. Grandfather was over seventy, so he'd missed over three thousand times. I told him so. He chuckled. "I'm about as damned as you can get. Unless I confess my terrible sins."

I followed him out into the barn-yard.

"You are getting pretty old, Grandfather. Don't you think it's about time you went to confession?"

He stopped sharpening the scythe on the emery wheel, poured some more water on the stone, and then began to pump and grind again.

"Son," he said, "I'm afraid I'm a little too old to go upsetting any nice young fellow like Father Hogan."

I protested. "Mrs. Casey says that no one is too old to have their sins washed away."

Grandfather nodded. "Mrs. Casey would like to have them all washed right through her kitchen so she could look them over on the way." Grandfather stood up, tried the edge of the scythe on his thumb, then began cutting away the quack-grass by the patch of sun-flowers. "No," he told me, between strokes, "you'd better just let your old grandfather go to his grave the black-hearted wretch that he is." Then he chuckled. "But just between us two men, I'll bet that the Lord will look pretty close behind Mrs. Casey's ears."

Mrs. Casey lived in the next block. She was always worrying about the sinful. She kept lighting candles in church in the hope that they would all reform. Grandfather said that if she lighted a candle for every soul she felt was sinful, our town would be visible at night all the way to Minneapolis.

Mrs. Casey was death on sinners, but especially on Protestants and Jews. She said they were all going to hell for being heathen. That's why Ella and I were so upset the summer Miss Schuster was going back to Superior. She was our second-grade teacher, and we loved her very much. When we found that she was a Jewish Protestant we knew she didn't have a chance.

The night she left town on the bus Ella and I brought her three oranges and an old magazine. We wept over her so copiously that Mother finally had to come and lead us home. Miss Schuster was deeply touched by our sorrow at her departure.

"Thank you for the gifts, children," she said, smiling at us lovingly. "I'll read the magazine on the way to Superior."

Ella burst into tears. "Oh," she sobbed, "they're not for the bus. They're for when you're in hell for being a heathen!"

My keen interest in God was vastly increased when I began to realize what a great amount of time He spent bothering over one small boy, me. "God won't like you if you do that, William," Mother would say. "Don't eat the apple in bed, William, God is watching." I could never understand how God got the rest of His work done. I asked Father, but he told me to ask Father Hogan. "That's what I pay my pew-rent for," he said. "Let him earn the money." Father Hogan told me to ask my father because he was an upright, God-fearing man. What Father Hogan didn't know was that my father was also a question-about-God-fearing man.

One night I had exactly the same dream again. Only this time I was old enough to remember it clearly. Father said it was the four pickle sandwiches and the pint of strawberries I'd eaten, and refused to discuss it. Mother said, "Write it all down carefully, dear, then come and read it to me."

Before discussing a difficult or touchy subject, Mother would frequently tell us children to go to our rooms and write it all down very thoroughly so that we would have the ideas clearly in our head. This gave Mother another few hours to get her work done. Sometimes she would say, "Try to put it all into poetry with a nice rhyme so that it will be more beautiful before you read it to Mother."

Mother understood children better than Father. You could take advantage of Father and get what you wanted if you didn't mind the volcano when his patience finally gave out and he shouted, "Oh, all right!" Mother would out-guess you every time, and say "No" so lovingly that you never gave her the kick on the shins you were tempted to.

However, I had lost a lot of confidence in Mother ever since she had told me the lie about two years before. She warned me to behave, saying, "I have eyes in the back of my head." I believed her, because no matter how quietly you tiptoed into the pantry, Mother, without even turning around from the sink, would say, "Keep out of the cookies, William." She could be sewing furiously in a corner with her back to the front door, making all kinds of noise, but if you tried to sneak downstairs and outside she'd call to you, "Don't go out until you finish your homework, dear." I decided that she must have eyes in the back of her head. I also decided to find out. One afternoon when she was taking a nap I crept quietly up to her with the scissors. Gently I cut away some of the hair at the back of her head. She didn't have any eyes in the back of her head at all, but she had some pretty amazing ones in the front of her head when she woke up and saw me standing there holding her hair in my hand.

She told Father about it. "The child's not normal," she said.

"Thanks for the scoop," Father grunted.

Finally I finished writing everything down about my dream and went downstairs and read it to her. Before I started, Father got up and left the room. To this day, I still have that long-ago record, in my child's scrawl, of the beautiful shiny white figure that came to me in the dream and brought a peace and rapture such as words can never describe.

"Who was he?" I asked.

"A friend maybe," she said. "Did you really see him, or did you just think you did?"

"I saw him."

"Were you asleep or awake?"

"Asleep. Otherwise I would have asked him who he was."

"What did he look like?"

"He was all pretty white and shiny and nice, and he beckoned to me with his finger."

"What else did he say," she asked.

"He said, 'I'm waiting for you. Search for me. Be like Peter. Fish.' "

I could tell that Mother was alarmed because she tried so hard to be calm. That very night, through the warm-air ventilator in the floor, I watched Father and Mother at the kitchen-table. They thought I was asleep.

Mother said, "I'm really worried, Frank. Perhaps you were right. Perhaps the dream does mean that he's going to be taken from us."

This was news to me. Then suddenly I realized to my horror that Mother meant "taken" in the "really taken" sense, like the time Great-Uncle Robert was "taken" in the prime of his life. That night I didn't sleep at all. If someone was coming for me I wanted to be awake.

I felt sick to my stomach for several days. I hardly spoke to anyone and never went out to play. I just sat in my room, afraid. I felt I should be at home when the visitor came. I did go out long enough to say goodbye to all my friends. I took my first-baseman's mitt over to Margie Kelly, whom I liked a lot. I gave it to her as a gift.

"It's a going-away present," I told her.

"Where are you going?" she asked, surprised.

I swallowed. "I'm going into the great beyond." That was what the cowboys always said in the movies at the People's Theatre, and I didn't know anywhere else to go.

"Beyond where?" she asked.

"Just beyond."

"Beyond Duluth even?"

I nodded. "Way beyond. And I won't ever be coming back."

Margie seemed pleased. "Then can I have your roller-skates instead?"

I gave them to her. I waited for two weeks and no one came for me. Finally, I took the roller-skates back. I took them right off Margie's feet on the sidewalk one night.

"You've got a nerve," I told her, "skating around while my body's still warm."

I decided that I'd better go and tell my grandfather about my dream and about being "taken". Maybe he could explain it. I didn't think it was God I'd seen. He wasn't big enough, although he was nearly beautiful enough.

Grandfather was shovelling snow away from the barn door when I arrived. I didn't waste any time. I told him about my dream.

"Did you ever see anything like that?" I asked him.

"No. Wish I had."

Grandfather started around the side of the barn through the deep snow. I followed in his tracks, taking big giant steps.

"What are you doing?" he said.

"Following in your footsteps."

Grandfather looked frightened. "Well, get out of them. They're not fit to be followed in. Make your own footsteps, and make them fit to follow."

"Do you think God could make footprints?" I asked.

Grandfather chuckled. He said I reminded him of the schoolboy who took his pencil and began to draw furiously. The teacher asked him what he was drawing. God, he replied. The teacher smiled and said, but no one knows what God looks like. The boy answered, "When I get through with this they will." Grandfather went off into a roar of laughter. He liked his own jokes a lot more than others did, and frequently laughed at them more than they warranted. When I was turning the corner of the barn to go

home he hit me in the back of the neck with a soft snowball.

The only other person I told about my dream was Ella. This was a mistake. I think she was jealous, and from then on she had all sorts of dreams and visions.

"Your man came to *me* in *my* sleep last night," she boasted proudly.

I was sceptical. "What did he look like?"

"He was tall as a pine tree and had eyes like two big meat-platters."

I knew she was fibbing. At breakfast she told everyone.

"William's shiny man appeared to me last night."

Father missed the piece of toast and buttered the palm of his hand.

"That's nice, dear," Mother said. "Write it all down carefully for us and read it at dinner."

Ella was enthusiastic. "He was tall and skinny and had a long black coat, a tall black hat, a black beard, and very sad eyes."

My sister Frances nodded. "And he kept saying over and over, 'Four score seven years ago our forefathers . . .'"

Everyone knew that Ella wasn't telling the truth. I heard Father tell Mother that he wished he knew whether *I* was or not.

"This is one time," he said, "when a big fat lie would be greatly welcome and go unpunished."

One Sunday I skipped church and took a chance on mortal sin. I went with Grandfather in his buggy down by the Mississippi River. There'd been a bad storm, and all the people who lived along the flats had been flooded out. Grandfather was helping to rescue their things. We worked until very late in the afternoon. When we came back Grandfather got a tongue-lashing from Grandma, and I was sent upstairs to bed until Father came home to deal with me.

I knew right away that this wouldn't be a "man-to-man" talk, or a light willow switch, this was a razor-strapper. Father swung his razor-strap as though he were chopping wood, and sometimes he got lost in his work and didn't seem to know when a boy had already had more than he needed to straighten him out. What was even worse, was the way he walked up the stairs. His feet could play on those stairs with more feeling than Mr. Tilley on the church organ on Sunday. Father's footsteps on the stairs were always much worse than the actual whipping. In the mornings after he had called us at least twice and we still hadn't got up he would run up a few stairs in a frightening manner. "I'm coming up there after you," he'd say. "And if I do, you'll be sorry." Then he'd run up and down on one stair and make it sound for all the world as though he had zoomed right to the top. I would zip out of bed like a shooting-star and land right into my trousers. One morning Father was in particularly good form. "If you're not up in five minutes," he said, "I'll come up and get you by the back of the neck!" Ten minutes later he said, "Here I come!" The sound on the stairs was so awesome that I was proud of him.

I laughed and called to Ella, "That was a good one. It sounded just like Father came right up into the room." I looked up. "Good morning, Father."

Now, after missing church, I was waiting in my room again for "father's feet of doom". They came.

"Let's get it over with," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"This hurts me a lot worse than it does you."

"But not in the same place."

That got me a few extra strokes, but as soon as Father had finished "beating on the kettle-drums", as Ella always called it, I went down to join Grandfather at the barn. He was sitting on the oats-box.

"Have a seat, son," he said.

I shook my head. "Not just yet."

Grandfather nodded sympathetically. "You're thinking that if you'd lied about where we'd been this afternoon you'd have a more comfortable seat on your breeches right now, right?" I nodded. Grandfather laughed. "Better to be miserable on the bottom end and proud of yourself on the top end," he told me. "That's character. Forget your rump. You did a good thing helping those people at the river."

Grandfather looked quickly at the barn door as though he'd seen Grandma's shadow there, then he said, "Course praying's good, too. But you can pray just as well by working. I don't want you to think your old grandfather doesn't believe in praying, because I do. But there're different ways. Now, if I got down on my knees to do it the Lord would say, 'Mel Wagner, you old hypocrite. Get up off your knees and get those hogs butchered. Let them knee-pray that know how. You get out and help those people down by the river, you hear?'"

"Did God really tell you that?" I asked him.

"He could have."

Grandfather got me a soft cushion out of the buggy. I settled into it very carefully. I liked being with Grandfather. I liked the smell of his clothes, his wrinkled cheeks with those short, sharp whiskers that scratched when he hugged me. Inside the barn was a world that belonged only to me and Grandfather. I loved every minute of it, the aroma of dry clover and alfalfa when Grandfather forked the hay down into the mangers; the dust that tickled the throat; the sweet-sour smell of the harness; the way the horses pricked up their ears, whinnied, and became restless whenever we rattled the oats-bin cover; the friendly shove that fat old Prince gave me when I rubbed his satin-soft

nose with my cheek; the times I would pat his neck and then watch the shafts of sunlight coming through the cracks in the barn wall making miniature spotlights whose rays were alive with bits of dancing dust.

Before I went home that night Grandfather gave me a grizzly-bear hug and whisker-rub. "Never stop asking questions," he told me. Then he made me promise, cross my heart and hope to die, that I wouldn't stop. "That's how you learn," he said. "After you get older, you quit asking and you just accept; and what you accept usually isn't so very good, after all. That's what's the matter with the world, son. Keep asking. There must be something better somewhere than what we've got so far. Some day you'll find out what your dream means. I hope I'm around when you do. I've been looking for something myself, for over seventy years."

Father's finger came in the barn-door at this moment, beckoning to me, thus ending our consultation.

CHAPTER 4

THERE'LL BE PIE IN THE SKY WHEN WE DIE

THE NEXT MORNING when I got up from the breakfast-table Father called me back.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“Down to Grandfather’s.”

Father’s voice was very stern. “Take your cap off. You’re staying home.”

“But Grandfather is bringing some sheep home, and he said I could hold the lambs.”

“You stay home, and that’s final.”

“Why?”

“Because I said so, that’s why.”

I didn’t see Grandfather for a whole week. It was all my own fault, too. I shouldn’t have told Mother and Father about my conversation with Grandfather on the Sunday afternoon we drove back from the flooded river. I had counted seven churches on the way, and asked Grandfather how God was able to visit all of them every Sunday morning at the same time.

“Easy,” he said. “God is like the air. It’s everywhere at the same time. You breathe it up here in the buggy, and the team of sorrels breathe it out there at the end of the buggy-tongue.”

“Does God stay longer in some of the churches, Grandfather, or like them better?”

Grandfather thought about it a while. “I guess not,” he said. “I don’t expect God sees any reason to play favourites.

To you and me, son, that daisy there is yellow and white and those cornflowers are blue, so they're different. But to God they're all just flowers, and as long as they're growing right and staying beautiful, He's not going to stick His nose in and complain or take sides. God's big. It's only His creatures that make Him small."

When I told Father at the dinner-table that Grandfather said some of the churches were dandelions and some were hollyhocks he thought it was very amusing. Then I told him that Grandfather said that God was very good and generous and that He didn't care a hang about what church a man went to as long as he loved God and his fellow men.

Father's eyes became chilly. "Just what kind of a God is it that your Grandfather tells you about?"

"He's not far off and scary like in church," I said. "I hear Grandfather talking to Him sometimes. When he comes down to the barn in the morning Grandfather says to Him, 'Good morning! I see you looked after the horses during the night. Much obliged, sir. Now, if you'd like to get a little nap yourself, I'll look after them for the rest of the day.'"

I was sent upstairs to bed without my dinner. Father insisted that Grandfather was a bad influence on me, so we weren't permitted to see each other for a whole week. When it was chore-time at sundown I would slip out of my bedroom window, crawl along the wood-shed roof, and shinny down the maple tree. Mother made me promise that I wouldn't go to see Grandfather and that I wouldn't speak to him, but she didn't say that I couldn't walk by the barn and look at him. I stood by the fence and looked through the boards of the hay-rack while Grandfather was leading the horses up to water. When fat old Prince walked by he was so close I could almost touch him. Prince whinnied and stuck his nose out towards me. Grandfather's eyes were

looking right into mine, but he jerked Prince up by the halter.

“Get along,” he ordered. “Get on up to the water-trough. There’s nothing there under the hay-rack.”

Then I knew that Grandfather must have had instructions not to talk to me either. When the horses were all watered and led back to the barn I walked down by the Mississippi bridge. I sat looking at the water until the sun went down. I watched logs from Swanson’s lumber-mill float down the river. I made believe they were great ships and that Grandfather was the captain of the biggest one, with me as his first mate, and we were on our way to New Orleans to search for secret treasure. The sun had turned into a big glowing pumpkin and was staining the river into orange-juice.

I heard a horse and buggy coming across the bridge. It was Grandfather and Prince. I kept my promise to Mother by sliding over the edge of the bridge and hiding underneath. Grandfather stopped the buggy right above me.

“Anybody there?” he called. I didn’t answer. Pretty soon I heard him say, “Clllkkk! Clllkkk! Giddap, Prince!” and the buggy rattled away.

The next morning I heard Grandfather’s buggy going by the house and I ran to the window. I saw him wave to me, and I waved back. He was driving a new team of dapple greys, and I knew he just wanted me to see how fine they were. That night I borrowed a piece of paper and a pencil from Mother and began to write Grandfather a letter. It was hard to think of what to say. I started out: “Dear Grandfather, I sure wish I could come down to your house to play . . .”

That’s when I fell asleep. Mother came to tuck me in. I awoke and saw her reading my letter. There were tears in her eyes. I made believe I was asleep. Mother tucked me in twice and hugged me very hard. She kissed me goodnight

and took my letter downstairs. I scrambled out of bed and put my eyeballs down to the warm-air ventilator. Mother showed Father the letter. Father went to the telephone and rang two longs and two shorts. That was Grandfather's ring. I slipped back into bed. I couldn't keep my ears open any longer to listen. They were tired, too, and closed with my eyes.

The next morning I was told by Mother that it was all right to go over to Grandfather's house again. Somebody must have told Grandfather that it was all right for him to come to my house, too, because as soon as I ran out of the front door I saw Grandfather's buggy coming up the road with fat old Prince and Beauty hitched together. They were kicking up happy little puffs of dust.

"Whoa!" Grandfather called, louder than he had to. He held out his hand to me. "I've got to look at a sick mare out by Tamarack Swamp. Can you spare the time?"

"Guess I can make her," I told him.

I got up beside him. Grandfather handed me the reins.

"Get up, Prince! Beauty!" I cried.

Grandfather slapped me on the knee, rubbed my cheek with his whiskers and laughed out loud.

"Here's the way she lies, son," he told me. "I can talk to you about God as much as you want, but we've got to leave the churches out of it."

We drove on past the old, abandoned Soo Line railway station before Grandfather spoke again. Finally, he said, "I guess the only thing for you to do, son, is to read the Good Book yourself. See what you make of it." He squeezed me against him. "But don't you quit asking questions and searching for what's in your heart, you hear? Or your dream will never come true."

Grandfather made me stop the buggy. He crawled down and, hopping along on his canes, he scooted across the road

and up over the split-rail fence. He disappeared from sight. I was about to go after him when he came popping up into view again and hurried back to the buggy. He had his hat in his hand and it was full of nice, big, red strawberries. We ate them with great relish as we rode along the old river-road. Grandfather spat the stems out on to Beauty's back-side, and she made funny quick wrinkles that twitched, as she did when flies landed on her. Her tail came back and nearly caught Grandfather in the face. He laughed very loud. He passed me the hat of berries again.

"Sam Krieger's sons have been stealing water-melons from my patch for years, it's only right that I should even it up with a few strawberries."

Then Grandfather told me a story. Once upon a time, he said, there was a little boy. With all his family and friends he was lost in the valley of darkness. Then, quite by accident, he found a flashlight. When he switched on the light of the torch everybody in the dark valley saw it and came hurrying towards it. With his light, the little boy began to lead the people out of the valley of darkness and up the path of the mountainside. First a hundred followed him, then a thousand, then tens of thousands. Every time he looked back there were more people behind him. The more people he saw, the more pleased he became with himself and with the fine work he was doing. He kept looking back more frequently to see how many he was leading out of the darkness. How proud he was that so many people were following him. He stumbled and dropped the torch, which was scooped up by someone behind him. The crowd trampled over him and left him behind in the dust as they swept on up the hill. They had not been following him at all. It was the light they were following, and without it he was left in the darkness.

"The world is like that, son," Grandfather said. 'It's a

valley of darkness. If you find the light, never stumble or let it go, and always remember that you're not very much by yourself without the light. We're all like balloons, and the spirit that shines in each of us is like the air in the balloon. Unless the balloon is filled with the spirit, it's a shrivelled and useless thing."

As we crossed the Ripple River and turned on to Tamarack Road two dogs came running out of Jim Peterson's farmyard and barked at the horses. Grandfather leaned down and barked back at them. The dogs were so surprised that they stopped in the middle of the road, turned, and trotted home.

A flock of sparrows fluttered up from the centre of the road as Prince and Beauty approached, and fled for shelter in the big oaks by the saw-mill. A herd of Holstein cattle was drinking lazily along the river bank. The big yellow sun kept following us right down the middle of the road. The horses' hoofs padded along in the soft road, and the harness jingled in rhythm with Grandfather's voice as he entertained the countryside:

"There'll be pie in the sky when we die,
When we die there'll be pie in the sky . . ."

CHAPTER 5

THE GOOD BOOK AND THE BAD BOY

I TOOK GRANDFATHER'S ADVICE and started to read the Bible. I found it very difficult for a young man, and was just about to give up in favour of Nick Carter, Master Detective, when I was told that no one was encouraged to read the Bible for himself. From that moment on, it became a "must". I kept skipping through the chapters looking for the shiny white man in my dream. When Father heard that I was reading both the Old and the New Testaments he became quite alarmed.

"I don't want the boy to be a religious fanatic," he told Mother. "At least not until he gets older. I've had enough dreams."

Whenever Father saw me reading the Bible he'd take it away from me. He hid our two copies, so I borrowed one from Saphead Phillips. He had a hard time finding it up in his attic; no one had looked at it since his grandfather's first communion.

I began reading at night in bed. Father didn't approve. He said that night-time was the time for young men to sleep. I'd say, "Yes, Father." With my lips I said that. With my inner self I said, "Unless you can catch me, Father, I'm finishing Pharaoh and his chariots swallowed up in the Red Sea to-night . . . in bed." That was the beginning of the great religious feud between me and Father. I think that if everyone hadn't made such a mystery about God I'd have given up at Genesis, but Father tried so hard to keep me from reading that I felt there must be something good in there.

He would open my bedroom door, say, "Time to sleep, son," reach in and click off my light, leaving me trapped with Aaron and the golden calf. Naturally I didn't like this state of affairs, so I would tiptoe out of bed, saying to myself, "Time to read, Father," and click on the light again.

Later, Father would stick his head out of his bedroom and see the light through my keyhole. In the still of the night, he would unleash his son-frightening foghorn: "William!" I would crawl nearly right up the wall. I'd whip out of bed, switch off the light, and whisk back under the covers: Whooosh! Click! Whssst! "Did you call me, Father?"

Father did. He called me a lot of interesting things. That's when I began to hang the blanket over the door so that the light wouldn't shine through the keyhole or cracks. This gave me four wonderful nights of "no father". It carried me right up to Noah and the Ark. The Ark was just settling down on Mount Ararat with creaking wooden noises when I realized that the noise was out in the hall. Father! He was coming down the passageway on tiptoe in his stockinged feet.

I knew because he stepped on the board I'd loosened in the hall, and it creaked. It creaked my hair right up on end and had the weird effect of shooting me out of bed like a bullet to whip the blanket off the door, click off the light, and zip back into bed: Whoooosh! Wheeeep! Click! Whssst!

Father opened the door quietly. He called softly, "William?" No one answered. Father closed the door and went off to his room making "Father noises".

The next day I took the inside out of my mathematics book and fitted it over the copy of the Bible. It fitted perfectly with a little squeezing. Father was quite surprised and pleased that night when he walked into my bedroom and

saw me studying mathematics. He let me keep the light on for half-an-hour extra. He thought I'd turned over a new leaf. I had: to the chapter about Nebuchadnezzar in the land of Babylon. After several nights Father became suspicious. I had never studied school work this earnestly before.

"Don't you ever write any of the arithmetic problems down, son?"

"No," I told him. "I work them out in my head."

I realized then that I should have used the cover from my history book. Father knew I hadn't the head for mathematics. He came towards the bed.

"Let me help you with some of the sums," he offered.

I felt as though someone had unscrewed my foot and emptied me out. I shoved the book frantically under my pillow and cried out, "No, Father, I must do this work all by myself."

Father's eyes chased mine all round the room before he caught them. I was sure that his looked right through my head, through the pillow, through my mathematics book cover to "Daniel in the lion's den". Father didn't say anything, but he looked something. It was his: You'll-pay-for-this-later-look. He gave me the old icy-eyes again and went back to bed.

When I came out of the bathroom the next morning I found that my mathematics-Bible was gone from its hiding-place under my pillow. I said to myself, "Now who could have taken that: don't you wish you didn't know." When I sat down to breakfast I saw that Father was reading it. He lowered the book, looked into my eyes, and spoiled my bacon and eggs.

"Mathematics," he observed coldly, "has changed since I was a boy."

"Is that so?" I said, very interested, and hoping that it

really had and that I was foolishly mistaken in thinking that the roof was going to fall on me at any minute. It fell.

“Take this interesting problem in long division,” he said, pointing to the book. “Right here in *Ezekiel*, chapter thirty-eight, verses twenty-one and twenty-two.” Father read out loud: “Every man’s sword shall be raised against his brother . . . with pestilence and blood . . . I will rain upon him, and upon his bands . . . great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.” Father looked up. “Isn’t that just a little bloodthirsty?”

“That’s nothing,” I told him enthusiastically. “Boy, wait until you get to the next chapter. It takes them seven months to bury the dead—corpses everywhere!”

I looked into my father’s face and lost interest in life. Father said this wasn’t a razor-strapper, but that it did require some punishment. He asked me what I suggested. I suggested that we forget the whole thing and start afresh. He said all right, but just so that I would remember he’d give me a few chores to do: chop firewood for a week, clean the cellar, clean the garage, wash all the windows, and clean the attic.

“If I know your rate of speed,” he said, “that should keep you busy for a month.”

However, I had to play in a baseball game the next day, so I did them all that one afternoon. Father was astounded. He told Mother that he thought perhaps at last I had learned something. I had. I’d learned it while I was cleaning the attic. I’d learned that I could run a long extension cord with a socket on it right down into my bedroom from the attic. This meant I could read in bed with a second spare or emergency light when Father blew “taps” on mine.

I wasn’t taking any chance on this light being discovered, so I ran the cord along the pipes, down the wall, and took it right into bed with me. Mother thought I’d reformed also,

I heard her tell Father, "Something wonderful has happened. William is making his own bed each day."

At night I would make a nice little tent out of the bed-covers, then take the electric light right under the sheets and blankets. Inside my teepee I could read to my heart's content. Father couldn't see the light even if he came right into the room, which he did nightly. I read all through *Nabum* and the prophecies about the "last days" when the vehicles would run as fast as automobiles and would have headlights and traffic would be so heavy the cars would jostle each other in the streets, just like Main Street when they had a band-concert. It was exciting and scary.

One night I dipped into the New Testament, and the first words that hit my eye were: "... and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light".

It was my shiny man! I let out a yell, straightened up in bed, and jerked the extension cord so hard it caused a short-circuit and burned out every light in the house. I hid the cord and went out into the hall to help Father, who was trying to find out what on earth could have happened. I could hardly wait until the next night to get back to my reading. I pored over the words. The more I read, the more certain I was that what I'd seen in my dream was the Messiah. It was Christ. He'd returned and was waiting for me somewhere. I was positive when I read the words:

"I go away but return again."

"You shall see the Son of Man coming in the glory of the Father."

"When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will lead you to all Truth."

Boy, this was the stuff!

I knew if I could get in touch with the Spirit of Truth he'd lead me to the answer to my dream. The very next morning

at breakfast I said to Father, "Where can I find the Spirit of Truth?"

Father put down his morning paper. "Well," he said, "I thought for a while that Theodore Roosevelt might have it, or even Taft, but I'm convinced now that all politicians are as crooked as the banks of the Mississippi. If there's truth in any of them it might be in this Woodrow Wilson."

"I mean the Spirit of Truth in the Bible," I explained.

"Did you call me, Ethel?" Father cried, leaving two perfectly good eggs on his plate, which I ate.

I read inside my tent in great peace and security for a whole week. I kept searching through the Bible for more about the shiny white figure. Then came the night of the big explosion. It was a Monday. I remember because my teacher, Miss Poppenburg, kept me after school and made me write on the blackboard two hundred times: "I will not come to school with live frogs in my pocket."

I had just turned back to David and Goliath. It was a great fight, and I was so interested in the under-dog that I didn't hear Father slip quietly into the room and come alongside my bed. Normally, every time Father stepped on the loose board in the hallway I just switched the light off. But Father had done a very unfair thing. He had nailed down the loose board, so I wouldn't hear a thing as he sneaked to my room.

I was so worried about David missing Goliath with the sling-shot that I didn't hear Father approach the edge of the bed. Father had looked into my room and wondered what was the funny glow coming from beneath the blankets. I'd been careless. So Father slowly lifted one end of the blankets and peered in at me. David was just getting ready to let fly at the giant Goliath. Naturally, I didn't know it was Father's face. I didn't expect to see him there. I wasn't even looking at him when he said, "Well?" His eyes looked

so fierce I thought it was Goliath. I threw the book in the air, screamed at the same time, and like David I fired my sling-shot. I swung the extension cord and hit Father right between the eyes with a sixty-watt bulb.

It made a very loud explosion. Father shouted, grabbed for me, held on to the bedclothes, and pulled them on top of himself as he fell to the floor.

Ella was first on the scene. She heard the explosion and rushed in. She began dancing round in the doorway hysterically.

"He's shot him! He's shot him! Father's shot William dead!"

Mother came racing down the hall. She turned the bedroom light on and saw me cringing against the wall on the far side of the bed. Father was still trying to fight his way out of the blankets. The next few minutes were quite painful. Especially when Mother uncovered Father and he began to crawl across the floor towards me. Father accused me of deliberately trying to blind him.

"I thought you were Goliath," I said.

His eyes looked like the cyclops'. Mother cooled him down, and she and Ella helped him to pick the glass fragments out of his hair and eyebrows.

"I just wanted to learn what was in the Bible," I told Mother, trying to line her up on my side.

"Then go and ask Father Hogan," Father shouted. "That's what I pay my pew-rent for. Let him earn the money."

"Someday I'm going to go all over the world and tell people about God. How can I do that if I don't study?"

"Study during the daytime, dear," Mother suggested. "It'll build up your health and it'll keep the light bill down."

Father told Mother that he was prepared right then to pay for my going around the world if I'd start in the morning.

Then he made me promise solemnly on my word of honour, cross my heart, and hope to lose my new football if I didn't, that I would never, as long as I wished to remain a son of his, eat his food, and live beneath his roof, turn on the electric light to read in bed again, ever, ever: I accepted his terms.

Ella was disappointed. "I thought he'd shot him," she said.

Father made me promise twice more before he left. Then to show his faith in me he dismantled the extension cord to the attic and went downstairs and took the fuse out of the fuse-box. He also put a padlock on it.

The light in my room was on the same fuse as the one in the kitchen, so when company came over the next night to play cards and eat sandwiches, Father had to go down and take the padlock off. Only he'd lost the key. So he borrowed a hack-saw from Saphead Phillips's father and went down and sawed the padlock off.

The noise was quite grating and unpleasant. That's what everybody said. I didn't know. I was busy keeping my promise to Father not to turn on the electric light to read in bed again, ever. I couldn't hear the sawing, because I'd gone to bed to read about my "shiny man". I was under the covers reading by the light of Father's flash-light.

CHAPTER 6

COME ALL YE BANDITS!

WE MOVED TO Crosby, Minnesota, a few years later. Grandfather didn't want us to go. He said Crosby was so small you had to stand the celery on end to keep it inside the city limits.

By Christmas-time we were all pretty lonesome. Father said it was altogether too expensive to think of taking a family of six all the way back to Grandfather's. Mother agreed with everything he said, but kept right on packing our suit-cases. Father finally put his foot down, but he put it down on the platform of the Northern Pacific Railway on the way to Grandfather's.

Grandfather took me shopping the very day we arrived. It had been snowing for two days, and I knew it was going to be a wonderful white Christmas. We went down town in the one-horse sleigh, with Beauty breathing steam out of her nostrils like two geysers. Grandfather was as plump as a Macintosh apple, and his cheeks were almost as red. His face was full of happy wrinkles that bent every which way when he laughed. Uncle Cliff said that Grandfather was an airplane motor built into a bicycle. I always had the feeling that Grandfather got up while it was still dark and prodded the sun up with a pitchfork. He loved to sing at the top of his voice as he drove the horse and buggy or sleigh over the sidewalk alongside the kitchen door so that I could unload the groceries through the window without getting out. If the Ladies' Aid was meeting he sang particularly loudly. He liked to shock them.

Grandfather was just one side of seventy, but if you asked him which side, he'd tell you it was none of your business. "Besides," he told me confidentially, "by getting up before the sun, enjoying every moment of the day, working hard until night, and then going to bed when everybody else runs out of oats I've really lived not seventy years, but a hundred and forty. So that's how old I am."

Grandfather's heart had been bad ever since he was twenty. Whenever he ladled on an extra thick helping of rich gravy Grandma would say, "Remember what the doctor told you about your heart, Mel."

Grandfather would scoff and defiantly take another spoonful. "Doctors! I've buried three already, and I'll get this new young squirt, too."

If anyone frowned at him while he was helping himself to another pork chop he'd chuckle and say, "No use scowling. I eat what I like. If I'm going, I'm going, but I'm not going hungry."

Grandfather turned to me and said, "Son, don't have anything to do with doctors unless you're unconscious. All they ever think of is cut, cut, cut."

"Yes, Grandfather."

"I've still got everything the good Lord gave me, but there hasn't been one of them that didn't try to get it away from me with a knife."

"Eat your dinner, Mel," Grandma urged. She had been operated on four times, and gloried in it.

"Don't change the subject, Bess," Grandfather said. "You've already had more knives in you than a silverware drawer, and every blasted thing they took out was as good as new."

"That's enough!"

"Doctors!" Grandfather muttered quietly under his

breath. "You're not born more than a week when they've got out their knives to cut off the end of your——"

"Mell!"

"It's a fact. And if I'd been able to talk they'd never have gotten it."

Sometimes Grandfather would play cribbage with me. He cheated. He said it was because I was such a good player he had to even it up. Sometimes he would take out his picture album and show me the race-horses in it. This was the part I liked best about going to Grandfather's. He had just purchased two new racers, a sleek, black pacer named Tropical and a big sorrel trotter, Dakar.

"That Dakar could have made Dan Patch travel," he told me.

Grandfather raced his own horses in the Minnesota Fairs each year. I used to go with him. The most exciting year of all was when he won the gold medal with Dakar. "Not to mention the money," he told me. The track officials told Grandfather every year that he was too old to drive a sulky in the races. They suggested that he let his son Clifford race the colt. Uncle Cliff was thirty-five. Grandfather said, "No young punk of a kid is going to race my horses. They need an experienced hand."

The stewards gave in reluctantly, but warned Grandfather that it was the last year he could race, for his own good; he was too old. When Grandfather drove Dakar past the stands towards the starting-gate the crowd let out a wonderful roar. Some of them laughed. "How do you like that?" they said. "Rip Van Winkle is back again this year!"

Grandfather looked wonderful in his green-and-white silks. You'd never know he had had to leave his crutches against the fence and be helped into the sulky. He had Dakar in wonderful condition, but a few days before the races he stopped currying and preening Dakar and never

took care of his appearance at all. Dakar looked very seedy. The worse he looked, the louder Grandfather laughed.

"Poor old Sam Clark," he said. "This miserable-looking sorrel is going to wave his tail in Sam's face all afternoon."

Someone in the crowd yelled at Grandfather as he went past the stands. "Where did you get that oats-burner, Mel? He looks like he's already run the race!" Grandfather waved back cheerfully.

Dakar won the first heat by a nose from Sam Clark's Whirlwind.

"I held him in," Grandfather told me. "Sam was feeling me out. He knows he could have won if he'd tried, but what he doesn't know is that I wasn't trying. When he takes the next heat he'll be counting the money already." Grandfather went off into one of his asthmatic gales of laughter, and kissed Dakar on the nose.

Grandfather told me that if I wanted to watch a seventy-year-old possum at work to keep my eye on him during the second heat. I did. Grandfather started out in front of the field. Joe Casey's Meteor came up alongside. Mayor Fletcher's horse Little Lady was third, with Sam Clark's Whirlwind beginning to make a move on the outside. Whirlwind came up alongside of Dakar at the half-way post, and it looked for all the world as though Grandfather was coaxing every last ounce out of the sorrel, but Sam Clark went by the post to win by a neck.

He gave Grandfather a big, patronizing grin as he came by him after turning around at the bend. "I let you have the first one, Wagner, out of the kindness of my heart for your white hair, but from now on you'd better crawl back into the woodwork at that barn of yours and get what you can for that nag at Elmer's butcher shop."

Grandfather looked just angry enough to make him have

poor judgement. "Sam," he said, "you wouldn't just like to bet your little team of blacks on the next heat, would you?"

"Done," said Sam, "and anything else you can name."

"How about that new buggy with the gold trim?"

"Fine."

"And those fifty stacks of hay out in the Cedar Lake pasture."

"Suits me. Against whatever someone we both trust says they're worth in cash."

Grandfather shook his head. "We couldn't find someone we'd both trust, Sam. I'll take your word for it."

One of the officials overheard the conversation. "You *are* getting old, Mel," he said.

Grandfather gave me a big wink as he went by me on the way up to the gate for the third and final heat. There were only two horses now: Dakar and Whirlwind. Whirlwind got away first and increased his lead. I began to worry. I hoped Grandfather wouldn't try to show off too much and misjudge the distance. As Sam Clark increased his lead, he turned and waved at Grandfather with an insulting grin.

They were coming into the head of the stretch when Grandfather let out that wonderful yell of his: "Go!"

Dakar went. His ears flattened back and something wonderful happened, he came up and passed Whirlwind as if Whirlwind were the rifle-barrel and Dakar the bullet going out of it. Dakar won easily. He was three lengths out in front as he passed the judges' stand. Grandfather turned in the sulky and shook his fist up at the stewards.

"How do you like that, you middle-aged experts?"

Dakar got a beautiful wreath of flowers. Grandfather got a gold medal, first prize-money, and a talking to from the officials. They said he couldn't race again.

Grandfather showed me the medal. "May be the last one

I ever get," he said. "But it's the one I'm most proud of, and I'll never let go of it."

When Grandfather drove off the track the crowd gave him a thundering ovation. We unhitched and went over to the ice-cream stand and had two big strawberry sundaes on Sam Clark.

My whole life with Grandfather was full of exciting memories. Some good and a lot bad. If you spent more than a week with him you usually had a wonderful time, broke a bone or two, suffered constant stomach aches, and wondered if he really was as old as everybody said. The day we went Christmas shopping he made me feel as though going up town with me was the most exciting thing he'd done in years.

"Look at those snowflakes, boy," he told me. "Smell that winter air. Get all of it you can."

Then Grandfather inhaled with such vigour that the tips of his white moustache would bend up against his nose. When he'd had enough air he'd whack me on the back boisterously, thus relieving me of all I had stored up.

"Your old grandfather's sure glad you're here with him for Christmas. Let's make the most of it!"

Then he tickled Beauty under the tail with the buggy whip and she took off like a jumping frog, throwing me into the back of the buggy. We sang two-part harmony to "pie in the sky" until Grandfather became upset. It was the signs in the shop windows. He didn't like the signs that said: Xmas.

"X marks the spot where they've taken Christ out of Christmas," he grumbled. He didn't like the prices either. He claimed that the more mellow and tender the public became, the higher the prices went. He didn't like the Christmas carols blaring out from the phonographs. "They should change the words of the carol to 'Come all ye

bandits’,” he said. “I’m as religious-minded as the next fellow, but I don’t like to be clubbed over the head on the street with the little town of Bethlehem at twice the price I paid last month.”

What the world needed, Grandfather said, was fifty weeks of real Christmas spirit and two weeks of the other. “Look at the sickly smile on Mayor Fletcher’s face,” he said. “On the second of January his heart will be as cold as the District Attorney’s eyes.”

“Why is that?” I asked him. “Why are people good for only such a short time. Couldn’t they be nice all year?”

The Christmas carols faded into the distance as Beauty turned into the soft, unmarked snow of Maple Street. Grandfather gave me a hug.

“That’s the way people are, son,” he explained. “When their hearts are turned to the material things of this world they’re dark. There’s no light in their faces. But when they turn towards God and forget the things of the earth they become bright and shiny inside. At Christmas-time they’ve turned more towards God and His Messenger Christ than at any other time during the year, so there’s a new spirit in the world, and it’s a nice place to live in for a while.”

I looked up at Grandfather admiringly. “You should have been a priest or a minister.”

Grandfather put a finger over my lips. He chuckled.

“Careful,” he warned. “We only talk about God. Keep the churches out of it.”

CHAPTER 7

ICE-SKATING IN THE KITCHEN

WE STAYED AT Grandfather's for five extra days because of the snowstorm. It didn't stop for a week. Grandfather said it was worse than the blizzard of '88. In the middle of the snowstorm Mother suddenly informed us that she'd forgotten to shut off the water before we left home. Father laughed strangely. There was something in the tone of his voice that made me and my three sisters stop our discussion about how funny Santa Claus had looked coming into the living-room on crutches just like Grandfather's.

"I asked you at the railway station if you'd turned the water off," Father said softly. "You said you thought you had."

"I did think so then," Mother answered nonchalantly. "Now I don't think so."

We arrived home after dark. The wind was still blowing snow along the street. We had to walk nine blocks from the railway station, and Father was feeling rather cross.

I hid my hand inside my coat collar and walked off the sidewalk into a snowbank. "Frank," Mother called. "William's fallen into a snowdrift."

Father never turned back. He called over his shoulder, "I hope they find the body in the spring."

We were all pretty tired and on edge when we opened the front door. Our kitchen floor was one step down from the living-room. At least it always had been. Now, however, it was up level with the living-room. Mother's second think had been right: she hadn't shut off the water. The

pipes had burst and had flooded the kitchen, and the water had frozen solid up to the level of the door.

None of us knew that our kitchen was a municipal skating-rink as we entered. It was too dark to see. Mother up-ended first. She skidded under the kitchen-table. Father had just snapped the light on when he began to slip. He ran several steps in one place before going head first into the stove; he smacked his head on the iron leg. My three sisters were all screaming in different keys. Marie and Frances floated off in the same direction as Mother and joined her under the table, where they looked like three Eskimos peeking out of an igloo. Ella grabbed the kitchen curtains and pulled them down with her as she began to spin to the middle of the floor. I was the last one in. I was carrying a box with the glass jars of peach preserves that Grandmother had given us.

"Where is everybody?" I asked as I stepped down into the kitchen. Only there was no "down". I found out immediately where everybody was. The box of jars went into the air first, but we came down together. When we landed we had plenty of peach preserves but no glass jars. I went sailing by Mother, my sisters, and Father, until I bumped into the far wall.

No one was injured seriously, but everyone was indignant. Mother burst into tears. She had scrubbed the floor on her hands and knees the day we left. "My floor!" she wept, "my beautiful floor!"

"For heaven's sake," Father called from under the stove, "turn off the water-works or you'll flood the place all over again."

We gathered up the broken glass and began to sweep the floor, making a lovely sandwich-spread of peaches all over the ice. Father went out to the woodshed to get the axe to chop the ice away. He left the back door open. Poor

Mother, who came back from the living-room too quickly, started to skid along the ice, heading right for the open door. She cried out for help, but no one could move rapidly enough to aid her. She had a brave little smile on her face and her fingers seemed to be twitching a nervous good-bye as she glided over the ice firmly and inevitably out of the house and into the night.

“We should at least have said goodbye,” I told Ella.

Ella reached the door first. We heard Mother sob as she landed. Ella exclaimed happily, “Mother’s made a beautiful angel in the snow!”

I was the first one to put on skates and practise a few whirls on our kitchen rink. Marie joined me and, with our dog Sport as a bloodhound, we played Uncle Tom’s Cabin with Liza crossing the ice.

Father put a stop to it by threatening us with the blade of the axe. Mother wanted him to chop out around the stove first so that she could start supper. He wanted to chop out his best shoes, which he’d left by the kitchen-table. As I went upstairs to bed I noticed that the new linoleum had not been put down. It was still rolled up against the wall in the living-room. I had the big hollow cardboard tube in which it had come; I kept it in my room and used it for my experiments in summoning spirits. I’d been using it to frighten Ella. One day I took off the warm-air ventilator which connected our two rooms. I placed the long tube under my bed and pushed it through the opening until it was under Ella’s bed. Then when she would say her prayers I would talk to her in an eerie, far-off voice. She never knew where the voices were coming from.

That very night I crawled under the bed and waited for Ella to go into her room. When she kneeled down to say her prayers I called softly through the long tube in a high sing-song voice:

"Ella Sears! Ella Sears! Can you hear me?"

She could. She stopped dead in the middle of her prayers. There was a long silence. Ella started to pray again, uncertainly, weaker.

"Ella Sears!"

She stopped.

"Can you hear me?"

Her voice was a timid squeak. "Yeess."

"I'm watching you! My eyeballs are looking through the ceiling. From heaven. Are you a good girl?"

She sounded as though she were starting to cry. "I—I don't know."

"Otherwise I'm coming down to get you."

That was too much for Ella. If anyone was coming she didn't want to be there. She straightened up, shot out of the room and rushed down the stairs. Father and Mother were still arguing about where to chop the ice when Ella zoomed out on to the kitchen floor, shrieking:

"God hollered down the wall! God hollered down the wall!"

She ran into Mother, and both of them started sliding towards the wall. "Do something!" Mother cried to Father. They bumped into him and carried him along. They slid into the wall, and Father put out the palms of his hands to stop them. Mother was hanging on to Father, and Ella was hanging on to Mother, and all three of them were running as fast as they could without moving. It sounded as though they were churning butter. Marie, Frances, and I all raced to the warm-air ventilator and peered down into the kitchen. We saw the crash coming, and began to giggle out loud. Father rammed into one of the legs of the kitchen-table, Mother into the other. The table legs snapped off, and the table-top came down and hit them both on the head. The giggling stopped. In the quiet, Father said, "The first one

that laughs doesn't sit down for a week." Guess who it was.

A few days later, having nothing to do, I tried another experiment with my spirit-summoning tube. I was confined to quarters for something I couldn't even remember, and Ella was reading in her room. I'd counted all the cracks in the ceiling, made believe I was a bird and chased a fly all over the room, and now I stared through the window at a chicken-hawk. He floated smoother than the top of a dry dandelion when you blow on it, and I remember thinking to myself, "Boy, if I could float like that I wouldn't fool around with any old chickens. I'd just hawk me right out of town and down to Grandfather's barn."

I heard Ella giggling at her book in the next room. Why should she be so happy, I asked myself, and set about remedying this injustice right away. I crawled under the bed, put my head up the long tube, and called to her.

"Ella Sears!" I intoned mournfully. Her giggling stopped. "The end has come," I warned her. "This is St. Paul coming for you." Ella didn't answer, so I added a nice touch: "Ella Gertrude Helen Sears! Your time is up! Prepare for the journey!"

Then Ella Sears answered me with a deep man's voice.

"Ella Sears is not here. This is her father, St. Peter."

Father! Now I *really* wished I were that chicken-hawk. Quickly I hollered up the tube, "I'll never appear to you again, Ella Sears. I'm going back to heaven—farewell!"

"Oh, no, you don't!" Father called out. "You appear in here at the double before I come in there and get you by the wings."

I sighed, crawled out of the tube, and slowly went in to appear at the judgement seat before St. Peter.

CHAPTER 8

UNCLE DUFFY AND HIS WONDERFUL WHISKERS

I LEARNED A LOT about God and people the summer Uncle Duffy came home from the War. Uncle Duffy had served overseas with a Canadian regiment, and Father warned us all about him before his arrival.

“You must be very patient with my younger brother,” he told Mother. “He was gassed and shell-shocked in France.”

I think we would have been patient with Uncle Duffy if we had ever got to know him, but he spent most of his time in McMurtry’s pub. He would take his hat, bow gallantly to Mother, and say, “I’m going down town for some shell-shock medicine.”

Father tried his best to help Uncle Duffy. Many a time he went into McMurtry’s after him and stayed right with him until Duffy was able to come home or neither of them was.

Uncle Duffy was very nervous. He jumped into Father’s arms the night I first fired off my cap-pistol. Once when Marie accidentally blew up a paper bag and broke it Uncle Duffy abandoned the house in his stockinged feet shouting, “Here they come!” He took shelter in the cornfield by the house.

It was Uncle Duffy’s friend Whiskers who frightened Mother most of all. Whiskers would take a sudden dislike to Uncle Duffy and pursue him through the entire house. Uncle Duffy would burst through the front door, his eyes like two sliced melon-halves. He would hide behind Mother, Father, then the coal stove. He would point his

finger at the door and whisper in a panic-stricken voice, "Whiskers is after me. I've got to hide from Whiskers! He's got the bayonet!" In one bound Uncle Duffy would leap into the clothes closet, slamming the door and shaking Grandmother Wagner's picture down off the wall.

Whiskers wasn't a real person. No one ever saw him except Uncle Duffy, although Ella claimed she did one night. She said Whiskers was sitting in the apple tree outside her bedroom window making faces at her. But Ella was always seeing things, ever since I had told her about my dream of the shining man. Once Ella said she saw the ghost of Arthur Conan Doyle walking along the roof of the Northern Pacific railway station. That was the night she had her mouth washed out with soap by Father.

Father said that Uncle Duffy went to McMurtry's to get away from Whiskers. Mother said that Whiskers usually got after Duffy when he came back from McMurtry's.

I liked Whiskers. He made things exciting. All of us took him for granted. We talked about him as though he were a member of the family. Once when one of the ladies at an Altar Society meeting asked Mother who this Whiskers was that we all talked about, Mother told her, "Oh, he's a friend of Duffy's."

I first met Uncle Duffy in the summer of the big forest-fire. It was on the day that Father Hogan and the members of the Altar Society were meeting at our house to discuss the opening of the new school. Ella and I and a lot of our friends were changing over from the Benjamin Franklin School, and we weren't at all sure we were going to like it. Mother was serving tea and cookies in the parlour, when Ella ran wildly through the house screaming.

"I've had a vision! I've had a vision!"

Mrs. McCallister became so nervous she stirred her tea with her eye-glasses.

"A vision!" Ella shrieked. "I talked with an angel. Drive them out, the angel told me. All of them. Into the sea!"

Ella cackled joyfully and shot out of the front door. Father Hogan choked on his piece of cake and his face was the colour of Grandfather's the night he swallowed the chicken-bone. Everyone was upset but Mother. She knew that Ella was given to having visions and talking with angels. Nothing ever came of it.

"She gets it from William," Mother told the guests. "He's very interested in God and things, isn't he, Father Hogan?" Father Hogan rolled his eyes out of sight at the memory of our encounters.

"William says that some day he's going to go all around the world telling people about God. Right now, he's only telling Ella. She dramatizes it. More cake, Mrs. Wilcox?"

All Mrs. Wilcox wanted was to go home. However, for once, Ella was perfectly innocent. She was merely playing the role of Joan of Arc. Ella had interrupted a perfectly good game of "cowboys and Indians" prattling of the book she was reading about the Maid of Orleans. None of us fellows cared for the story until she came to the part where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake.

"Now you're talking," Sam Lewis said.

Mike Raffodil agreed, "Hot diggety!"

Ella said she'd play the lovely and courageous heroine Joan of Arc if we wanted to make a play of it. We agreed, and with a yell we lit out after her. I pounded through the Altar Society meeting in hot pursuit, ignoring the ladies and Father Hogan.

"After the old witch!" I cried, as I galloped through the parlour. Mother halted me.

"What were you calling your sister?" she asked.

"She's a witch. We're going to set fire to her," I told

Mother cheerfully. "Burn her alive. See you later. Hi, Father."

I galloped around the sewing-machine mountains and sent my great chestnut colt thundering through the valley of the woodshed. I caught Joan of Arc hiding in the cornfield eating a jam sandwich. We tied her to the old pump in the backyard and set crumpled paper and kindling wood around her. Saphead Phillips, who was in charge of the British forces, went home and stole matches while his mother was out hanging clothes. Since Joan of Arc was my very own sister, I was given the privilege of lighting the fire. Which I did.

We agreed to turn Joan loose as soon as the flames got too warm for her, but just at that moment Mike Raffodil's big brother came riding through the alley on his new red motor cycle. We all ran after him to beg rides, abandoning Joan to her fate.

Father Hogan was the first one to the pump when Joan of Arc began screaming for her mother. Father Hogan pumped several dipperfuls of water and put out the fire. My two other sisters, Marie and Frances, were sent out immediately on an expedition to bring me back dead or alive.

Ella hadn't been touched by the flames, but when Mother told Father about the terrible mental anguish which Ella must have suffered, and how she might have been burned to death, Father sent me out to cut a switch. I couldn't find one the right size, so Father came out and helped me. He discarded my selection and broke off a young tree.

"I've learned my lesson," I told him on the way in to the house.

Father grunted. "Good! Now let me drive it home."

That's the very exact moment that Uncle Duffy arrived home from France, where he'd been stationed after the War. Naturally, I always had a soft spot in my heart for him.

Mother was getting resigned to living with Whiskers and

Uncle Duffy when the great Minnesota forest-fire came. It was the worst in history. Many people were burned to death. Several towns to the north and east of us were completely gutted. Day and night you could feel a tickling, smarting sensation in your throat when you breathed. There was a blue-grey haze everywhere, and at night the sky to the north-east was a dull, moving red. There was an excitement about every conversation. Neighbours who hadn't spoken to each other for years were now chummy, brought together by the fire. They would cast appraising eyes towards Duluth.

"Looks bad."

"Very."

Day after day we watched trucks go by laden with fire-fighting equipment and crowded with men. Other truck-loads came back carrying the exhausted, dirty, serious-faced fighters.

I was confined to my bedroom the evening the town marshal caught me leaving the village and heading for the front, pulling my coaster wagon. It was loaded with a shovel, two of Mother's best pillow-cases for beating out the flames, and a sack of apples. I lay on the floor of my room with my eyes glued to the warm-air ventilator, watching Mother and Father and Mr. and Mrs. McCallister playing cards. Mother lighted a holy candle. When Mr. McCallister leaned over and lit his cigarette from it, Mrs. McCallister cuffed him a good one on the neck. Mother said he was very callous.

"If that means am I scared to death, you're right," Mr. McCallister said. "The way it looks now, we might just as well bet the houses on the card-game. We won't have them long if this wind doesn't change."

A little while later, Mother bid "three no wind". Mr. McCallister said it was time to go home.

Things were better by morning. The wind had shifted. I felt the cool fresh air blowing through the other bedroom window about three o'clock. Conditions were so much better that Father and some of the other men decided to go to Fergus Falls to play their Sunday baseball game.

That evening the wind shifted back to the north-east again, stronger than ever. The sky towards Duluth was pulsating like the Northern Lights, only instead of being ice-cold blue, it was orange-hot and greedy-looking. Most of the available men were off fighting the fire. The women were gathered on each other's porches, in intimate groups, exchanging confidences that only a mutual misfortune could have extracted. All the kids in the neighbourhood were crawling over porch railings, darting in and out of hedges, and disregarding their mothers' frequent instructions to stay nearby "where Mother can keep an eye on you".

Saphead Phillips and I were trying to figure out how the fire could sneak into town, burn down all the schools, then slip away without doing any other damage. We gave up and began to choose sides for "duck on a rock".

Mrs. Phillips called out to Saphead. "James, please don't yell so loud. Mother can't hear herself think. And stop pushing your sister."

"Well, tell her to quit pushing me, then, or when we all have to go out into the middle of Serpent Lake to save our skins, she can stand and die like a dog on the shore."

His sister began to cry. His mother shouted, "Saphead Phillips!"

Saphead said, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten—here I come, ready or not, you shall be caught."

It was at this moment that Uncle Duffy made his historic appearance at the head of Maple Street. He was walking down the middle of it, but you would have thought that

he was on top of a hay-rack with the horses in full gallop. The neighbours nudged each other expectantly. Uncle Duffy was singing a war song in what Mother called his "nothing" baritone. I think it was the choice of song that soured everybody on him right then and there. At the top of his voice, he was bawling:

"Keep the home fires burning,
While your hearts are yearning,
Turn the dark clouds inside out
'Till the boys come home."

Uncle Duffy clutched the railing by the steps and came up hand-over-hand. Mother fled in shame. Mrs. Raffodil leaned over to Mrs. McCallister and whispered, "If that fire comes any closer, his breath will explode in his face."

"Evenin', Ladies," Uncle Duffy said graciously, sweeping his hat off his head with such an elegant flourish that it sailed right out of his hand and off the porch.

Mrs. Raffodil gave Mrs. McCallister a "don't-miss-this" elbow in the ribs. To Duffy she said, "And how is our dear friend Whiskers to-night?"

Uncle Duffy summoned all his dignity. He stuck his face right up under Mrs. Raffodil's big straw hat. "Mrs. Raffodil," he said, "I'll thank you to keep your long prying nose out of my friends."

At half-past one that morning we were all awakened by a loud pounding on the back door. I sat bolt upright in bed.

"Mrs. Sears! Mrs. Sears!"

It was Mr. McCallister's voice. I heard Mother's uncertain reply, "Yes?"

"Get up. They can't hold the fire. It'll sweep through the town before dawn. Everybody has to get out. Right away!"

I was into my shoes and trousers before Mr. McCallister was off the porch. Mother panicked. She began running round and round in a circle. I called my sisters and went to

pound upon Uncle Duffy's door. He wasn't there. Mother was out in the hall now, but still in her nightgown. She kept going round in a circle crying, "Hurry! Hurry!"

One look out of the bedroom window was enough to convince us that the fire was closing in on the town. The sky was no longer a red glow. It was pimento and you could see the movement of the distant flames. The air was stifling, and smoke was even in the rooms. Eyes smarted and everyone rubbed them.

"What did we ever do to deserve this?" Mother cried.

"Maybe we're wicked," Ella said happily, "and we're being punished." As she ran downstairs to the pantry to lay in a supply of foodstuff for travelling, she called up to Mother, "And don't look back at the town, or you'll be turned into a pillar of salt."

The plans for evacuating the town had been made some time before. Everyone had been instructed to put their most valuable possessions on the sidewalk in front of the house. Trucks and wagons would try to save as much as possible. I realized that night that in an emergency I could get along without everything except my skin. Mother had been trying for days to decide which pieces of furniture she would save if it became necessary. She had settled on only one thing, the new couch and chair she'd had from Montgomery Ward. She ordered us all into action. She and Marie took one end of the couch, Frances and I took the other. When we lifted it off the floor we saw Uncle Duffy lying on his back behind it, his eyes two eggs fried in fear.

"You fools!" he shouted. "Put it down. Can't you see that I'm hiding from Whiskers?"

Mother broke down. She sat on the couch and wept. I was going to scold Uncle Duffy, but I could see that he had pulled the end of the rug over himself. Mother became hysterical.

“I can’t stand any more,” she moaned. “Not another thing.” A loud knock on the door finished her completely. “It’s the fire,” she sobbed, “come to kill us all!”

It was Mr. McCallister. His face looked like the grate in our coal stove in the morning, dirty grey and with little fire left in it. His eyes were two red agates half-sunk in the ashes.

“You can stop worrying, Ethel,” he said. “The wind has shifted again, and it’s beginning to rain.”

“Thank God!”

Mother repeated it over and over.

CHAPTER 9

THE FAMOUS FIRE AND THE INFAMOUS FATHER

FATHER'S BUS ARRIVED from Fergus Falls about five minutes later, and all the baseball players piled out in front of our house. Father ran quickly up the steps. He was very worried.

"Hi, Jim," he said to Mr. McCallister. "Everything all right?"

Mr. McCallister didn't answer. He didn't think much of ball playing to begin with, and playing during forest fires—well! He gave my father a cold look, like Queen Victoria to a mouse. Mother just sat on the couch and sobbed. Ella was crying with her, though in a higher key, and the two of them were wrapped in each other's arms rocking to and fro.

"Stop worrying," Father said cheerfully. "It's all right. I'm back. Nothing happened to me."

Mother's sob became a wail. She walked over to Father, hauled off and gave him a terrific slap on the cheek. Then she burst into tears again. She called Father an unfeeling beast, a dirty old baseball, a shanty Irish beer-face, and wound up by hugging him half to death.

Father was very upset when he heard what a close call we'd had. He helped Uncle Duffy escape from Whiskers by taking him upstairs to bed. That very night Whiskers was given an ultimatum by Mother. Either Whiskers had to get out of the house forever, or she would.

Grandfather came to town the next day to see if we were all right. I told him all about the fire as we drove out

towards Iron Hub to see how close it had come. I told him all about Uncle Duffy and Whiskers. He didn't laugh once.

"You mustn't laugh at your Uncle Duffy," he told me. "You must love him. He can't find a place to fit himself into any more. He's not the same uncle who went away to war, and this isn't the same town he left. Everyone here is going on with business as usual. Your Uncle Duffy can't understand that. He thought he went away to do something wonderful in fighting the War, but He's found out that nobody really cares very much one way or the other. They just want to forget it as quickly as they can. He's trying to find some way not to think, and he's suffering."

"Why does God make people suffer? And kill each other? If He knows everything, Grandfather, why doesn't He stop it?"

"It's not God, son. It's the people. The shepherds of the world are more interested in the wool than in the lambs. God knows what's going to happen, but He doesn't make it happen. Carelessness, neglect, indifference—ignorance of His laws, that's what brings the disaster and the suffering."

"Why doesn't God make all people good, and then we wouldn't have any old war at all."

Grandfather sighed. "I guess God doesn't really make us do anything, son. Every man is born with a soul and free-will to choose what's right and wrong. 'Course it isn't all cut and dried. Free-will is something like your grandmother knitting a sweater. God gives you the needles and the yarn, you don't have any choice there. But you choose the pattern, the design, and the colour. You have the choice to make it as good or as poor as you wish."

I was still puzzled. "But golly, Grandfather, why do good people have to be hurt or burned or killed by a fire or a war? I don't like that."

Grandfather sat in the buggy looking at the burned-out woods and the ruins. He didn't say anything for a long time. Then he started the horses on their way back to town.

"This old world burns out faster than a match, son. A fellow named Shakespeare once said that life was like counting to 'one'. Another fellow named Addison said that folks prepare for this world as though it were never going to end, and for the next one as though it were never going to begin. If we were all a little busier trying to know what God wants instead of what we want, there wouldn't be so much trouble down here. And if they spent a little more time thinking about the inside part of them that lasts forever, and a little less about the outside part that rots, they'd be better off when they get born into the next world."

"You mean when they die?"

Grandfather chuckled. "Some folks say die. Not me. And remember that when the time comes for me to go. Just put me in a plain pine-box and put what's left of me in the ground. No fancy trimmings. The important part's gone. It escapes like perfume when you break the bottle. And nail the lid down right at the start. I don't want anybody staring at me when I can't stare back at them. I'm certainly not going to hang around any longer than I have to once I unload this old carcass."

Grandfather pulled me over and gave me a nice whisker-rub. "Do you understand what your old grandfather is talking about?"

"No," I told him, "but you're sure a pretty talker. When I grow up I'm going to find out all about everything, then I'm going all over the world and tell people so they won't hurt each other any more."

"I believe you will at that."

"Why is it, Grandfather, that it's so much fun to talk to you about God? Here I am a young boy and there you are

an old man. We both like it, but nobody else seems to want to."

"Maybe it's because I *am* old and you're young. You're close to God on one end, and I'm close to Him on the other. In between they don't care so much." As we drove the buggy into the yard he patted my hand. "Be good to your Uncle Duffy," he said.

I tried to, so did Mother, but Uncle Duffy became more unpredictable as the winter weather set in. He developed a new wrinkle. He started having nightmares. He thought he was back in France commanding his men. He'd sit up in bed and issue orders at the top of his voice. The first night he began shouting, Father and Mother thought he was calling to them instead of to his men.

"All right, you slobs!" he yelled. "Out of there! On the double!"

Both Father and Mother got up and began to dress before they realized what was happening. We all went in and saw Uncle Duffy standing up in bed commanding the battlefield. He looked very frightened and sick.

"What's wrong, Duffy?" father asked.

"Wrong?" he barked. "See for yourself, Lieutenant. They're putting down a box-barrage, and they're pouring lead from that machine-gun nest. Somebody's got to go up there and wipe it out."

I can't tell you how many machine-gun nests and snipers my father had to wipe out that winter. One night Uncle Duffy nearly lost his life taking a long-range gun-emplacment. That was the night that Mr. McCallister, whose bedroom was opposite Uncle Duffy's, threw up the window and hollered at him to shut up. Uncle Duffy moved into position by the window and peeked out at Mr. McCallister.

"You dirty spy," he whispered.

Then he fired at Mr. McCallister broadside with his left

shoe. Uncle Duffy was off his range. Mr. McCallister escaped unscathed, but Uncle Duffy wiped out the glass in the top window-pane. He also wiped out a six-year friendship between the Sears and the McCallisters.

Father caught Uncle Duffy before he fell through the window and carried him back to bed. He bumped Duffy's head against the bed-post as he laid him down, and Uncle Duffy woke up with a start. He was quite annoyed with Father.

"What in the name of heaven are you doing?" he grumbled. "Can't you let a man get a good night's rest?"

One night we heard Uncle Duffy get up and begin to dress. He paraded up and down across his bedroom for quite some time, forming his regiment. Apparently he was having some trouble with a few of the men, because he began to give them a tongue-lashing. Finally he cried out loudly, "All right, you filthy swine. March!"

Uncle Duffy led his men personally, out of his bedroom, along the upstairs hall, and past my bedroom door. I almost imagined I could see the men as he shouted his orders at them. I saw him as he went past. He seemed to be in a great hurry, but didn't know where to go. I wanted to be kind to him. I said, "Hello, Uncle Duffy."

His eyes were funny. He hollered at me, "Look out for the snipers. You're in enemy territory."

Uncle Duffy kept chanting all the while as he led the men down the stairs. "One, two! One, two! One, two! One, two!"

He marched his company off our front porch and out of our lives forever. I never saw him again.

After what my grandfather had told me about him, I learned to like Uncle Duffy quite a lot, in small doses. He drove a team of dapple-grey percherons for Mr. Middleton's freight line, when he hadn't been taking too much medicine.

Sometimes he would let me sit up on the seat with him and hold the reins. He always had the big grey's tail tied up in a fancy knot. The horses liked him, maybe that's why Grandfather understood him. I was the only one that Uncle Duffy talked to very much. He bought me my first pair of high, red-top boots the day after he led the attack on Mr. McCalister's window. I didn't care very much about high, red-top boots, but Uncle Duffy had always wanted a pair when he was small. Now that he was too old for them, he said, he hoped they'd make *me* very happy. Now and then Uncle Duffy's eyes would look far away and sad. Once I heard him say, "Louise." And a big tear rolled down his cheek. Oftentimes he would say, "God damn you world." He'd say it to himself sort of, as if I weren't even there.

The night that the telegram came, I knew before Father opened it that it was about Uncle Duffy.

"Where's Uncle Duffy now?" I asked.

"I haven't the least idea," Father answered.

"Is Whiskers still with him?" Ella wanted to know.

Mother looked up from her plate as though she were going to say something, but Father frowned at her. He closed the subject by patting me on the head.

"Eat your dinner," he said.

I don't know why I felt sad that night.

CHAPTER 10

SKYROCKET TO FAME, OR A BEST-SELLER AT TWELVE

SHORTLY AFTER THIS we moved from Minnesota to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Father got a job painting steel for a big iron-works company.

It was nearly five hundred miles away from Grandfather. We stayed with him for a week before saying goodbye. We both made believe that no one was going away. Grandfather let me clean out the stalls, grain the horses, drive the buggy, and even ride fat old Prince bare-back. When the time came for us to go to the railway station, Grandfather sent a message up that he was far too busy to come along with us, so I went down to the barn to say goodbye. We just sat there on the oats-box, saying nothing. Prince whinnied and kicked his stall. I heard Father honk the horn for me on Uncle Walter's model T Ford. Suddenly I gave Grandfather the biggest grizzly-bear hug there ever was. As he rubbed my cheek with his whiskers, he said, "That's a big city you're going to, son. Watch your step. It's not like the country. Don't forget the things I've been telling you. Don't be a porch-sitter when you get there. Get out and do things. Somewhere in this world there is something wonderful waiting for you. Keep looking. Don't forget your prayers and don't forget your grandfather."

Grandfather squeezed me again, and then he put something in my hand and closed my fingers over it. I looked. It was his first-place medal for winning both heats of the county Fair with Dakar, the big sorrel.

"I can't stand around here wasting my time," he said, and he went up into the stall by Beauty's head and began to curry her down. I patted all the horses once before going, but Grandfather never looked my way again. He kept talking to Beauty. "Whoa, girl. Whoa." I put a handful of oats in my pocket, and as I passed the watering-trough I gave the pump-handle a couple of jerks and drew up a few sloshes of water. I could hear Grandfather singing at the top of his voice.

"There'll be pie in the sky when we die,
When we die there'll be pie in the sky."

* * * * *

Milwaukee had lights downtown that went off and on. The kids in the school band all had the same colour uniforms, and it took you all day to walk from one end of the city to the other. Grandfather was right. It was different in the city. It was new and exciting and full of so many things that in a year I forgot nearly everything he'd told me. I hardly ever thought about my dream.

I started my writing career one summer before I graduated from grade-school. It all began in the barber's chair one Saturday morning. I was reading a poem in a magazine while Mr. Pinky cut my hair. Mr. Pinky was talking to the man who was getting a shave in the next chair. They were discussing the "good old days". As I listened to their words, I realized that I could write a much better poem than the one I'd read. I said to myself, "William Sears, the note you wrote to Miss Nelson last June to get out of school for the double-header with St. Paul was much finer—true, you were persecuted a bit for writing it, but it had feeling."

I began to visualize myself as a successful writer. Perhaps I could write a book that would influence the lives of

millions. It would save me making that trip all around the world telling people about God. God would probably like it better, too. And it would give me more time to go to the movies. Besides, if I became successful and had lots of money, more people would listen to me and believe what I said. It was the thing to do, all right.

I began to expand in the barber's chair. I said to Mr. Pinky with the same nonchalance I'd heard the man next to me use, "Mr. Pinky, let me have an egg-shampoo, too."

"You got nothin' left to shampoo," Mr. Pinky told me, rubbing my fresh crew-cut. "Besides, if you've got more than half a buck, time's have changed."

"All right," I snapped. "I won't argue. Gimme a shine."

"On your bare feet?"

"Forget it," I said, flipped him the fifty cents, and strolled down Wisconsin Avenue towards the public library. I could see the top of the Schroeder Hotel. Maybe a penthouse would do me.

That night I tiptoed into the kitchen, made myself six peanut-butter sandwiches and returned to my room with three sharpened pencils and my mother's good stationery. It was nearly three o'clock before I finished my masterpiece. I wrote it in longhand and signed my name, Billy Sears. The name had no dignity. So I signed it Bill Sears. Better, but not right. William Sears. Still weak. I gave it the full treatment: William Bernard Patrick Michael Terence Sears VII. It was nearly as long as the poem.

I called the poem *Reminiscences in a Barber's Shop*. It took me thirty minutes to find the word in the dictionary. Then I sneaked out to post the poem to Captain Billy's *Whiz Bang Magazine* at Robbinsdale, Minnesota.

I repeated the poem softly to myself as I walked to and from the mailbox.

Reminiscences in a Barber's Shop, by William Bernard Patrick
Michael Terence Sears the seventh:

Gone are the days we all held dear,
The bar, the sawdust, and five-cent beer.
Dimly remembered, how quickly he passes,
That white-aproned bar-keep, his bottles and glasses.

Gone are the doors that swung both ways,
Gone are the memories of free-lunch days.
How different the times of now from then—
A toast to the days when men were men!

It was great to be a writer! I remember wondering if beer tasted anything like strawberry soda and not caring particularly whether it did or not.

I started watching for the mail-man the very next day. It was a month later that a long envelope came marked *Whiz Bang*. There was something inside! It took me some time to find out what it was. I shook it first. Then I held it up to the sun against the window-pane. Carefully I tore open one small corner and tried to peek inside.

"Maybe there's something in there," I told Mother.

"There might be," she agreed patiently, never stopping her dusting. "And if we all live long enough, we may find out what."

Ella was practical. "Open it up," she advised, "and take out your old rejection-slip." She gave me a withering look of supreme disgust. "A toast to the days when men were men! Hummph!"

Mother chuckled. Marie and Frances stuck their heads together and sang in barber-shop harmony: "You're the flower of my heart, sweet Adeline."

Marie, the oldest, pointed at me dramatically and said, "Of course, he's seen those good old days. This isn't a young boy at all. He's a midget born at the same time as John L. Sullivan."

It was more than I could take. I went into my bedroom and put the envelope under my pillow. "I'll look at it later," I said. I threw myself on the bed and in one sweeping motion reached under the pillow and snatched it out again. "It's later." As I tore open the envelope, I breathed a short prayer.

"Don't let this be a rejection-slip. It's not that I want all the money for myself, but if I'm going all over the world to preach, I'm going to need clothes and a suit-case . . . and my sisters need things . . . not to mention the rent coming due."

I stopped because I had the letter open and I could see a cheque inside. It was the happiest-looking piece of paper you ever set your eyes on. I took one look at the figures and went flying out into the other room, waving the fruits of my genius triumphantly before my sister's eyes.

"How do you like these apples?" I shouted. "Seven hundred and fifty dollars!"

"What?" Mother cried. She snatched the cheque and took a look. The air went out of her. Patiently she explained. "When they put a period after the seven, it's seven dollars and fifty cents."

It was quite a come-down, but I hadn't really wanted the motor-boat, anyway. Now that I was a success, my sisters were really sticky. Ella said the cheque was skimpy, but strangely enough it was just the right amount to buy her that cute little navy-blue sweater at Gimbels; it was like sheer guidance, she said.

I said, "Horsefeathers!"

Mother said I should be completely free to do what I wanted with the money and not to worry about the rent coming due, they'd scrape it up somewhere, though heaven only knew where.

I stuck the cheque in my pocket. "No one gets any of it," I said firmly. "I'm going to use it on my career. I've

decided to give up school and write. Now, please, could I have a little quiet? I feel another poem coming on."

"Another seven-fifty one?," Ella asked me. Before she could insult me again, the phone rang. Ella grabbed it. It was Lois Murray, her friend. "I can't talk now, Lois," Ella told her. "We're all discussing my brother's future. It's hard for a family to know what to do about a genius. A genius," she repeated. "Certainly I'm talking about William. He's the only brother I've got. He's had a great magazine success. Fabulous. A cheque just came in the mail for him, and when he opened the letter he hollered right out loud: 'Seven hundred and fifty dollars!'"

Mother shook her head warningly at Ella. Ella stuck her tongue out at the telephone, where Lois was listening. "What, Lois? Just a minute, I'll ask him." Ella held her hand over the mouthpiece. To me she said, "Lois wants to know if you're coming to her party to-morrow?"

"I wasn't ever asked."

Mother diagnosed it. "I think your seven hundred and fifty dollars were just invited."

Ella said, "Lois? He's dreadfully sorry, but with writing and all, he's tied up every minute. The phone's been ringing like crazy since he had his big success."

Mother objected. "Ella! You stop that."

Ella soared to the heights. "Yes," she said, "they're after him to do a movie of his . . . his . . . thing he wrote. That's right. Hollywood. What? He'll have to have tutors, I suppose. We can't let school interfere." Ella added significantly, "By the way, Lois, what's your brother Wallace doing these days? Still stuck behind the counter jerking sodas at Green's Drug Store? Hmmm? What magazine will William's success be in? Well . . . we'll send you an autographed copy. I've got to go, Lois. I think I hear the photographers coming. 'Bye." Ella hung up.

"You ought to be ashamed," Mother told her.

"I don't care," Ella scoffed. "She makes me sick. All I ever hear is my brother Wallace this, my brother Wallace that. If he thinks I'm going to wait until the last minute for him to invite me to the party to-morrow, he's mistaken. It served her right." Then Ella turned on me, savagely. "William's the one who should be ashamed, not me. I don't see why he couldn't have sent his poem to the *Saturday Evening Post* and got seven hundred and fifty dollars. Captain Billy's *Whiz Bang!* I was never so degraded in all my life!" She flounced out of the room. I hollered after her, "Well, pardon me for living!" Mother consoled me. She said she was very proud.

"Even if it is in Captain Billy's *Zip Bang.*"

"*Whiz Bang!*"

I asked her if she wanted me to autograph several copies for her to send out to her friends. She said she thought not. She'd wait until next time.

CHAPTER 11

ORDEAL BY FATHER

BY SIX-THIRTY THAT night I'd made up my mind. My future was set. I'd withdraw from society and devote my life to the pen—well, to the pencil now, and maybe later I could earn enough to buy a pen. I knew there was something wonderful in the world somewhere just waiting for me to find it. When I did, I'd write about it with a flaming pen.

Father read my poem at the supper-table.

"Not bad," he said. "Not bad at all." Then he winked at me. "I don't suppose you've got a spare quarter on you so your old father could buy two sacks of Bull Durham tobacco."

"As a matter of fact," I said, "I haven't. My seven-fifty is all gone."

Everyone was horrified. Mother didn't believe it.

"But you've only had it for three hours, William," she said, "and you haven't left the house."

"Yes I did," I told her. "I went next door to Myers and rented their attic for a year for six dollars. Then I went down to Green's Drug Store and bought fifty cents worth of paper and pencils. I'm going to withdraw from society."

Father pushed his soup-plate away. He put his head in his hands. "Just withdraw from the table," he said.

Mother with her eye for figures said, "But that's only six-fifty. What about the other dollar?"

So I told her. "I bought bread and cheese for the attic."

"He wants to suffer," Ella explained. "So he can write better."

Father said, "William, I am going to finish this suddenly unpalatable soup, and if you are still at the table when I finish, you will then begin your suffering. Do I make myself clear?"

I spent every afternoon writing, even after school started. By the time graduation from grade-school came I'd written three notebooks full of poems. I was determined to write something deathless. In just two weeks I'd be graduating, and as an experienced author I felt I should have a new suit for the ceremony. I was as good as a freshman in High School already. Most of the fellows had their graduation suits and were bragging about them. So far, all I had was a pair of tan corduroy trousers and a brown sweater, and I had them on. This was a very lean financial period for the Sears family.

By this time Father had quit the iron-works and was working for himself as a painting contractor. Business was always good in summer and dreadful in winter. If you asked Father what he did for a living he'd tell you, "I'm a painter and paper-hanger." But if you asked Ella, she'd say, "My father is an interior decorator, if he likes the plans they submit to him." Business was so bad that Father liked anybody's plans, even if they were written on the back of an envelope. When he estimated the cost of an out-of-door paint job he'd look at it and say, "The front gable will pay for William's shoes, the back for Marie's dress, the north side for the coal bill and the butcher," and so on. Father could take a look at a house and tell you right off whether it was a gas-and-light job or a grocery bill for a month.

When Father was young he was going to be a great actor. He was going to sacrifice everything for it. Everybody had discouraged him, but he said he felt deep down inside that

it was the only thing in the world he really wanted to do. That's why he never tried to discourage me when I told him that some day, when I found out what my dream meant, I'd go all over the world telling people about it. It made Father nervous and he didn't like to talk about it, but he never said I was being foolish. He remembered his own burning desire. But he did once get very impatient with me.

"There are smart people everywhere," he said, "who do nothing but study and think about God. Why can't you be satisfied with what they tell you?"

"They didn't have my dream."

"You're not even old enough to pay full price at the movies yet," he said, "but you know better than wise men."

"There's something somewhere," I said stubbornly. "Grandfather knows there is, too."

"Then when you're old enough, we'll let you study to become a priest, and you can find it."

"I don't want to become a priest. I just want to be a person and find it."

Father gave up. "Let him go up and talk to Father Cline about it. I pay my pew-rent regularly. Let him earn the money."

Of course Father never got to be a famous actor. He met Mother instead. They both were going on the stage together at first, but then Marie came. Father still felt that the stage was calling him until Frances put in her appearance. By then Father said his nose was so close to the grindstone that he wouldn't have been able to read his "lines", if he'd had any. Ella's arrival made him throw in the sponge for good.

"All I can do now," he told Mother, "is learn to keep my head above water."

When I came, he learned to swim underwater.

In my opinion Father was still a great actor, even if most of his character roles were played around the house. I never saw anything finer at the old Davidson Theatre on Third Street than Father when I brought home my final report-card. I hadn't graduated with honours; I'd done it with luck, and a bit of mercy from Miss Nelson. I think it was because of my poems that she let me skin through. She said that some of them showed great promise. She asked me to represent the bottom-half of the class by reading two of my poems at the graduation exercises. I was really representing the very bottom, but I didn't tell Father that, though I think he knew when he looked at the report-card. I tried to soften him by showing him the two poems I'd written, but he refused to look at them. He was busy analysing the card.

I thought of making a play out of it with Father as the villain. The scene was our parlour. The characters, a cruel father and a tender son. At curtain-rise the son is just surrendering his report-card to the enemy.

Father took it from me with a look similar to Lincoln's when they brought him the news of the fall of Fredericksburg. Father trained one eye on the card and the other on me. It nailed me to the wall and kept me from edging towards the door and freedom. Father's patience was limitless as he examined the dismal tidings. As he picked his unhappy way from History, to English, to Science, to Mathematics, to Conduct, his face grew more and more sad. It fell like bread-dough running down the side of the pan. He looked at the card, then at me, then back at the card as though to say, "Surely this is all a hideous mistake and I've been brought some idiot's report in error." Then Father carefully replaced the card in its holder, hesitated as though he were calling upon the power of the Great Ether to sustain

him, then let out a long sigh which sounded just like the air going out of one of Uncle Cliff's tyres.

Starting at my feet, Father's eyes slowly began creeping up my body. I crossed my fingers and prayed that the phone would ring or that the gas-stove would explode before they met my own eyes head on. At last he looked me squarely in the eye. I asked myself, "How can I do this to my father?"

Father said, "How can you do this to me?"

I said to myself, "What has my father done to suffer like this?"

Father said, "What have I done to be made to suffer this way?"

I lowered my eyes, came back and left again because his eyes were still there. I mentally played leap-frog over Myers's back fence, over ours, ran through the second stanza of *The Star Spangled Banner*, and then took another look—still there.

Father said just one word. "Well?"

I knew I was a goner. If Father would only say, "Mathematics is a little low, isn't it, son?" I could say, "Yes, sir, but I'm getting better." "Good," he'd say, "then maybe next semester you can pull yourself up to D-minus." But when Father just said, "Well?" there was no possible answer. What *can* you answer to "Well?" This had been my undoing ever since I'd been old enough to cut the toes out of his bedroom slippers. Give me the good old-fashioned kind of father who says, "Is this miserable mark in geography yours?" "Yes, sir." Whack! Then it's over with. When they say, "Well?" you just stand there and suffer in misery.

Another of Father's very best scenes was when Mother forgot to pay the gas bill for three months, and the ten dollars that Father had planned to spend buying new paint-

brushes had to go to the gas company. Father took the ten-dollar bill out of his wallet and looked at the empty wallet as though it were a mortal wound from which he would bleed to death before our eyes.

“By all means pay the gas-bill,” he told Mother. “I may need the oven for my head any day now.”

My sisters used the gas-oven all the time to dry their hair. That’s why the bills were so high.

When Father would stumble over them as they kneeled on the kitchen floor with their heads in the oven doorway he would call to Mother, “Why don’t you wash your hair, too, Ethel? There’s still room for one more log on the heap.”

Then Father would go off muttering to himself, “Why did they ever pull me out of the river?” I found out that Father had never been in the river, it was just an expression he used. He used it, he said, when human flesh had been pushed to where it snapped like a dry-rot rubber band. Another favourite expression of Father’s was, “Why did I raise you?” There was no answer to this. The one he used most of all, for all emergencies great or small, was: “Oh, God! where will it all end?” No one ever knew.

Now that I had persuaded Father to accept my report-card without violence, my next problem was where to get a suit for graduation. I certainly couldn’t read my two poems standing in front of everybody in my old corduroy pants and sweater. I knew that I would have to earn it quickly with my pen. I sent fifty of my poems off to Captain Billy’s *Whiz Bang*. They were the same ones *Saturday Evening Post* had returned, not to mention *Colliers*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Country Gentleman*, and one or two other dozen. A letter came back. There was something inside. My poems! The letter said I hadn’t quite hit the bull’s-eye. Father said I hadn’t even loaded my gun. The letter was nice, though in a

discouraging way. It said I needed more seasoning. That's what the letter said. My sister Ella said that what the letter really said was, "Are you kidding?"

My desperation led to a very dreadful and painful event.

CHAPTER 12

SAM, YOU MADE THE PANTS TOO SHORT

JUST FIVE DAYS before graduation I sold another poem, but I only got a dollar for it. I sold it to my sister Marie. I called it, *Pay the Boy the Money*, and I read it to her one morning just before Father came down to breakfast.

Who stayed out and had such fun
That they didn't get home till half-past one?
Who saw them sneaking into the house
And recognized their bright blue blouse?
And who'll spill the story right to Father
Unless they're paid cash for all their bother?

Marie said it was blackmail, but I got the dollar; ten cents every week for ten weeks. To make things worse, Mr. Myers threw me out of my attic two months early. He said I'd rented it to write in, but hadn't said anything about indoor baseball. He refunded me a quarter and broke my lease. I went down to Green's Drug Store and had two chocolate sodas to get over the blow. Lois Murray's brother Wallace made them for me.

"When're you going out to Hollywood to shoot 'the bar, the sawdust, and five cent beer'?" he asked. "Ha!"

I decided to spend my last nickel somewhere else.

Three days before graduation I decided that things were bad enough for me to start praying for a suit. I didn't like just to ask God to give me a new suit because Grandfather had always said, "That's not praying, that's begging. You can't go around with a tin-cup asking the Lord to load it up for you. You've got to do something for it." I decided to

pray about it and to work around the house being useful. Maybe the Lord would be willing to work a little deal with me.

Everything had reached a new low when Father called me in for a personal talk. I didn't like these sessions because I never knew whether Father was going to give me a "straight from the shoulder", a "father to son", a "one equal to another", or a "man-to-man". But Father surprised me; this was good news.

"You've worked hard around the house this week," he said. "What's more, you've tried earnestly to be a writer. You've studied it, read about it, and you've written. Your school-work hasn't been brilliant, but you've tried." Then he handed me his good tan suit. "You're not quite as big as I am yet," he said, "but you're big enough to wear my good suit for graduation."

I was nearly as tall as Father, and if the trousers were pulled up high by suspenders, it wouldn't be too bad. I'd rattle around inside the coat a bit, but at least it was a suit.

"Gee, Father," I said. "Thanks."

"Take it over to the tailor's right away and have it cleaned and pressed. It's my best suit, so try not to get any spots on it. And keep off the fences."

I was at the tailor's in five minutes, and I asked him to clean it and press it. I don't know how I happened to say the next thing. Something came over me. An echo seemed to come out of nowhere, and in my own voice it said, "And while I'm here, take it in a little. Tighten the waist, take in the coat, and shorten the cuffs and sleeves."

It wasn't until I was nearly home that I snapped out of it and realized what I'd done. My head told me to hurry back and cancel the instructions. My heart said, "Betty Miller will think you're slicker if your pants aren't dragging on the floor."

I told Ella about the “evil spirit” that had seized me. We both agreed that it would be better to be seized by “evil spirits” than by Father, although it looked as though my chances of being seized by both were pretty good.

Needless to say, I graduated in Father’s suit. I didn’t even mind Wallace Murray wise-cracking about it in front of Betty Miller.

“Hey, Sears! Isn’t that your old man’s suit?”

“Used to be,” I told him, “but I grew into it. No use wearing those kids clothes if you’re a man.” Betty Miller gave me real big eyes, so I tightened up the shoulders with my muscles. It didn’t show, but I felt it inside, and said, “Pity I’m growing out of it so soon.”

The day of judgement arrived the next Sunday morning at nine o’clock when I was playing “one old cat” with four guys in the empty lot across from Hickey’s and I heard another voice that seemed to come out of nowhere. It was so loud that if I’d been way down by Juneau Park I’d have heard it. It said:

“William!”

He was standing on our front porch in his tan suit. Well, not in it exactly. Ella said later that Father looked like Friar Tuck in Rumpelstiltskin’s pyjamas.

“You called me, Father?” I asked, clomping up the porch steps and hoping it was the hot weather that made his face so red and the veins stick out.

“Do you notice anything?” he whispered softly.

“Gee whiz! Did you leave your suit out in the rain or where it was damp or anything?”

Father gave me his finger. He pointed to my bedroom.

“Up!” he said.

CHAPTER 13

THREE PRIZE-WINNING PLAYS, BUT NOT A CENT FOR CIGARETTES

I GRADUATED FROM HIGH school a few years later, in my own suit. I went to the University of Wisconsin long enough to become a freshman cheer-leader and earn a white-and-cardinal sweater which helped me hitch-hike home at weekends to Milwaukee. I had won a gold basketball as a forward in high school, and I expected to be a sensational college star, but the coach, Doc Meanwell, and eight guys over six feet seven cooled off my ardour. I waited on table and washed dishes for my meals and stoked a furnace for my room. I ushered at the Capitol Theatre for spending money. It was a hard life of self-sacrifice, but I think I can honestly say that I never enjoyed anything less. In no time at all I was back in Milwaukee.

The "great depression" had begun. Everyone in the family was out of work; we had no income, no cash reserve, and no food. So I hurried home from university to help the family starve.

I wore out a pair of my father's shoes looking for work before I landed a job with an oil company, using the typing and shorthand I'd learned in high school. The company went bankrupt three weeks after I joined it (through no fault of mine). Things went from bad to worse, but in 1933, that was a short trip.

One night in bed, I totalled up my personal balance sheet to see if I could discover the reason for all this suffering which was being visited upon me. I drew a line down the

middle of the sheet of paper and listed the ugly facts, as follows:

Bad Things Done

1. Borrowed compass from boy in seat next to me in school Assembly when I was a senior. Before could return it, he discovered missing. Threatened to have me shot at dawn.
2. During first and worst year of depression, borrowed \$5.00 from Ass't. Principal at high school, Mr. Wise. Paid for taking out father's two abscessed teeth. 75¢ left over; squandered foolishly. Still unpaid.
3. Floated loan of \$7.50 from buddy, Lee Godfrey. Or was it three-fifty. Or maybe half a buck? Think I spent it on a girl. Or was it on myself?

Good Things Done

There must be something.

I began to read the Bible again. But for a very different reason. I couldn't afford a Frank Merriwell story, or a Sherlock Holmes novel. In fact, I would have preferred the green-sheet of the *Milwaukee Journal*, but we couldn't afford even the pennies. But we did have a Bible.

I took quite a fancy to Jonah. He began to feel like a brother. I wasn't even sure that I wanted to find out what my dream meant any longer. Jonah kept hearing the voice of God telling him to "Go to Nineveh!" I kept thinking of the dream that urged me to keep on searching for something wonderful and beautiful. I began to offer the same excuses that Jonah gave. I guess every man has his own Nineveh and his own reasons for not going where he should go.

"This is my busiest season."

"I will later, just you wait. I'm making my plans now."

"Why not send Jonathan? He's very saintly looking and much holier than I am and has long hair, and people will listen to him."

“As soon as I make a lot of money and am rich I’ll go and take the town by storm. You’ll see.”

We were now at the bottom of the Depression. I knew, because Washington had been telling us so for three years. We were always hearing on the radio about some financier or business-man who had thrown himself to death from the fifteenth floor of some building. Father said he’d do it himself, only he was so weak from hunger that he couldn’t climb up high enough to do himself any damage.

For more than two years I never had more than twenty-five cents in cash in my pocket. I never saw a movie, never rode in a street-car or bus, never ate an ice-cream cone or drank a soda.

For Thanksgiving-Day dinner, 1932, we had three wienies, two slices of dried rye bread, and a gingerbread cake that Mother had made. Father, Ella, and I had made the rounds of all our neighbours borrowing ingredients. The cake fell in the middle because none of us could really believe it was in the oven and we kept looking to see if it was still there, and nudging each other in glee. Father said philosophically that if the whole country could sink into a Depression, there was no reason why the cake shouldn’t.

“Besides,” he said, “it makes such a wonderful place for the whipped cream.”

Mother began to laugh. The whipped cream did it. Father had just milked the last two drops out of a tin of condensed milk, and I had to water the tin for my tea. Father sharpened the big carving-knife, and with great ceremony made breast, wings, and drumstick out of the first wienie. Father held the drumstick aloft.

“We must caution François, the chef, that if he doesn’t baste the turkey more carefully we’ll throw him into the moat. What do you say, Queen Ethel?”

Mother said, “Pass the piece of wienie.”

Father was hurt. "You have no soul, woman. That is the breast of a ring-necked pheasant, shot this very twilight just as the sun went down behind the preserve outside our castle."

In the preserve outside the Sears's one-roomed castle there were two garbage cans, empty; a coaster wagon with the right rear wheel off; an old Chevvy body with no tyres and no motor; one roller-skate; and a broken-down easy-chair with all the springs showing.

When the meal was over Father smacked his lips cheerfully and said, "Now let's all commit suicide."

I wrote to Grandfather and said I hoped things were all right with him in the country. My letter must have sounded sad, for in a few days I received an answer which made it plain that he didn't like the tone of my letter. I could picture him clearly, sitting on the oats-box, working on Beauty's harness while I stuffed the hay down into the mangers. I could hear his voice coming up from the letter in front of me.

"It doesn't matter what's *on* the table, son, but who's *at* the table. Nobody loves the William Sears that has a job and money and fine clothes. Nobody. Neither your mother nor father nor friends—not even your old grandfather. They love the qualities you possess. The kindness, the gentleness, the justice, the courage, the generosity—this is what they love. And as these things grow in you, their love for you becomes greater. And if you lose these qualities their love begins to wither and die. Anybody can be happy when everything is going fine, but it takes nobility to be happy when things are difficult.

"Quit worrying about the Depression. Write about it. It'll make a lot better poem than 'the bar, the sawdust, and five cent beer'." By the way, Wallace Murray is still in Green's Drug Store. He's in charge of the fountain now.

"If you still don't get what I'm driving at, take two half-dollars and put them one over each eye. What can you see?

Nothing. That's what silver does to the inner sight, too, if you become too fond of it.

"That was a joke about taking half-dollars, son. Try nickels. Things are pretty pinched here, too. However, your grandmother is now raising her own vegetables. She's turned out to have a green thumb. Sometimes it tastes like she's cooked the thumb in the vegetables. But we have all we need.

"I've sold Tropical and Dakar and the team of greys. There's just three of us left here at the barn now . . . Beauty, Prince, and your old Grandfather."

I was able to sum up Grandfather's letter in two words: "Shut up."

I took his advice, I wrote about the Depression. Instead of a poem, I wrote my first play. I finished it in one night, and before dawn I had used up our last fifteen sheets of writing-paper, seven broken-open brown-paper bags, and the inside of twelve envelopes. It was one-act. I called it, *Dad Cashes In*. It was about our own one-room house.

The next night after dinner (sic), I read it to the family. They all liked it, but each one felt that I hadn't handled his or her particular part quite rightly, each member of the family thinking that his or her part needed softening and lengthening. That night I re-wrote the entire play and hardened and shortened; then I sent it away to a professor at the university.

A few days later I received a letter and a package. The letter said that the professor had entered my play in a play-writing contest and that I had won the first prize, which was in the package: it was a plaque with a gold scroll.

Father hung the plaque on the wall. "It's a fine thing, son," he said. "What a pity you can't eat it."

Six weeks later I received another letter asking if it would be possible for me to enter the play in a production contest

at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. My friend Eddie Mandick owned an automobile, so we offered him the part of the detective if he'd drive us to Madison the night of the contest. Father played the father, Mother the mother, my sister the sister, her boy-friend the boy-friend, our landlord the landlord, and I played the son.

The play won the contest, and Father won the outstanding acting award for his characterization of the Irish father. He said later that it wasn't hard, as he had been playing an Irish father for over forty-five years.

A Mr. George from the Dramatic Publishing Company in Chicago had seen the play. He offered me one hundred dollars for it.

So it was no longer necessary for me to look for work. I was a writer. Eddie Mandick brought me a few reams of newsprint from the circulation department of the *Journal*, and I was in business. I never entered the family arguments any more. I would merely raise my arm in an Olympian gesture for silence, point significantly at my writing-pad, and shake my head. "Please . . ." This was to be the first of three prize-winning plays.

Father was quite upset when he heard that my new play was about Grandfather.

"The first thing you know," he told Mother, "he'll want Grandpa Wagner to play Grandpa Wagner, and Grandma Wagner to play Grandma Wagner, and they're too old for the trip. Where's my hat?"

Father kissed Mother on the cheek and turned to me in the doorway: "If anybody asks for me, tell them they'll find me behind the cigar store scrounging around the dirty alleys like the common beachcomber I am. I found four empty soda-water bottles there last Friday, and if I can do it again we may have cup cakes for dessert. Dear God! where will it all end?"

CHAPTER 14

RADIO WRITER, OR DO YOU WANT THE SCRIPT GOOD OR DO YOU WANT IT ON THURSDAY?

IN THE NEXT few years I wrote and published nine one-act plays. I was married and had two sons, William Bernard Patrick Michael Terence the eighth and Michael Thomas. My wife, Kathleen, was a very lovely, gentle, and courageous girl. She became seriously ill following Michael's birth, and both she and the boy were in hospital for many long months.

That was the beginning of a bleak period during which I wrote a play called *The Black Harvest*. It reflected my mood, as well as that of many of my fellow countrymen in those days, when it was a grim task to keep from feeling sorry for oneself.

A talented musician friend who never had the opportunity to fulfil his promise said, "The dice rolled craps for this generation." Born on the eve of the First World War, primary-schooled during the War and the depression that followed, high-schooled during the roaring 'twenties, launched into careers with the market crash and the great Depression, and established just in time to give up everything for a part in the Second World War, they did not feel themselves the envy of history. They felt rather like the horse in a race which I broadcast one summer. A chestnut colt named Left Bank, running over ten furlongs, was left at the post, hit on the head by a shoe cast by another runner, pocketed on the bend, stumbled in the stretch, his

jockey lost his whip, and the saddle slipped. It took a good horse to finish at all in the circumstances.

When I finally landed the job which I thought would make it financially possible for me to bring the family together again, Kathleen died and Michael was placed in a sanatorium. According to the doctors, he would have to stay there for several years.

I wrote each day for twelve to eighteen hours, but still I couldn't keep from thinking. One of my plays, *Gillis Is Dead*, won a big award but very little cash. Another was selected to be placed in *The Yearbook of Best Plays*. I sent a copy of it to Grandfather. A telegram came back immediately. I thought, "How proud the old man must be of me." In fact, at that moment, I was pretty proud of me.

The telegram read: "Look out! You may drop the torch."

Grandfather was right. Only his tense was wrong; I *had* dropped the torch. I was lost in the valley of darkness along with everyone else. I was being pushed farther and farther away from my dream each day, and more and more into a world that cared very little about the things of the spirit. When I was not writing I would sit on the sands at Bradford Beach and watch the whitecaps race in and prostrate themselves.

If only they would deposit a little wisdom at my feet. Frequently I would close my eyes and try to recall the wonder of my dream. I hungered for the sound of that melodious voice which had spoken to me so long ago.

I was playing pinochle one night at a friend's house, when the telephone rang. A young man named Godfrey at Radio Station WOMT in Manitowoc was offering me a job. He was a radio announcer. Now I, too, thanks to his kindness, was going to be the same. How are the mighty fallen!

The night before I left for Manitowoc I took a warm bath, scrubbed myself immaculate, put on clean pyjamas, and crawled in between white sheets hoping that I might dream my dream once more. I awakened from a dreamless slumber just in time to catch my train. I sat in the North-Western passenger coach as it roared along the shores of Lake Michigan, burrowed under Prospect Avenue, and wriggled its way through Whitefish Bay, thinking, my dream is gone forever. The clicking of the wheels seemed to say: "Kiss it goodbye! Kiss it goodbye! Kiss it goodbye!"

I began my radio career at WOMT the very next day. My first greeting from the Chief Announcer was a bit of advice: "Radio announcers are a dime a dozen. You may last a week. Keep your vowels open and you'll be all right."

WOMT is now a fine, modern, successful station, but in those early days it was a struggling child. The studios were over a butcher's shop, and the transmitter was upstairs behind the Mikado Theatre a few doors away.

On the days when they smoked sausage in the butcher's shop downstairs the smoke would seep up through the floor and cling to your shoes. Gradually it sneaked its way up your leg. If you worked until noon you were flavoured to your knees. If you worked until night you were aromatic to the waist. I broadcast the news every hour on the hour from early morning until midnight, so I smelled like a butt of braunschweiger from head to toe. When I walked home, dogs would come out of doorways to sniff hopefully at my shoes.

The announcers always identified their clothes by the fragrance of the particular sausage which had been smoked during the last time they had worn them. Before a big function, such as the Aluminium Workers Picnic, you would be asked, "What are you going to wear, Bill? Your big baloney, or your summer sausage gabardine?"

One night when I was interviewing the mayor he looked across the microphone disapprovingly, sniffed the air, and said, "You belong between two slabs of pumpernickel."

In a period of a few years, I worked at WOMT in Manitowoc, WHBL in Sheboygan, WKBB in Dubuque, KUTA, KSL and KDYL in Salt Lake City, KFBK in Sacramento, KPO in San Francisco, WPEN and WCAU in Philadelphia, and finally WCAU-Television and CBS-Television.

In one of my daily assignments *To-day at the Legislature*, I learned at first hand what Socrates had meant when he said, "Oh, men of Athens! If I had followed politics, I would have died long before this, and been of no value to you or to myself." I could still hear my Civics Teacher at West High clicking his teeth. "Politics is the degenerate son of an illustrious father, Statesmanship."

One year there was a savage political campaign for the election of a new Water Commissioner, the incumbent being accused of putting oil in the supply. No one would drink from the studio bubbler for a week. If one of the announcers accidentally took a sip he would stagger dramatically across the floor, sink to his knees, stiffen out on the carpet, and moan loudly, "Send for the Water Commissioner!"

One morning the sports commentator came to me and said, "You want to be a sports announcer?"

"Sure."

"You start to-night. I'm going to open up a saloon. I can make more in one month selling 'schnaps' than I can make here in a year." He was right, too, except that it only took him a week.

Thus, on sheer talent, I found myself that night broadcasting my first baseball game. It was the championship bout in the American Legion tournament, our home team

against a club from a Polish town in Northern Wisconsin. Their lead-off batter was named Borczykowski, but the rest of the names were difficult. I asked their manager to send someone up to help me pronounce the names correctly. However, my "spotter" was hit by a foul ball just as he sat down beside me, and they carried him away and left me with Borczykowski.

In the entertainment business I have always been told that "the show must go on", although no one has ever told me why. The game was already starting, so having to use *some* names for their line-up, I put in all my relatives. I started my brother-in-law Johnnie Kriofske at third. He fitted. My uncle Cliff Wagner played centre-field, my cousin Art Sears was at second, my uncle Duffy in right, and so on. Unfortunately, my eighty-five-year-old grandfather pitched a two-hit shut-out!

The manager of the radio station was nice about it though. He didn't put me through the mill at all. Simply, with a good-natured laugh, he said, "You're fired!"

A month later I was in hospital with yellow jaundice, my eyes like two egg-yokes. Grandfather kept my spirits up by writing me an amusing letter. He was quite pleased to learn that he had pitched a winning game. "No wonder I've been feeling tired," he said.

Grandfather knew a lot about being sick. He'd broken his left hip twice and his right hip once. He'd been kicked by horses in the stomach, the shoulder, the shins, the knee, and the head. He'd had lumbar, pleural, and bronchial pneumonia. Grandma said that she looked forward to Grandfather's pneumonia as she did to spring and the first robin.

The old man was always using up left-over medicine, no matter to whom it belonged. He said it had cost good money, and it was a shame to waste it. It never harmed him,

except once when he slept for thirty-seven hours. He said he needed the rest, anyway. I thought he had finally learned his lesson when he took the cat's worm-pills by mistake, and vomited for three days.

"For heaven's sake, Grandfather," I said, "didn't that cure you?"

He said, "I didn't have worms."

Father always said that if Grandfather hadn't been sick all his life no one would have been able to put up with him; his illnesses were a protection for society.

His letter helped me to get over jaundice in a hurry. I was a little disappointed that he hadn't mentioned my dream. No one in the family ever talked about it any more. Even Mother dismissed it. She said perhaps she'd been wrong, and I hadn't been as young as they'd thought when I'd first had the dream. Father was no longer nervous when I talked with him, because I never mentioned God any more. Mostly I asked for two dollars until pay-day. I think it pleased him that the things he had always thought unnatural in me had vanished.

"Thank the Lord, he's outgrown it," I heard him tell Mother one day.

Somehow, to me, it seemed a pity. I had lost an inward glow that had warmed my most difficult and wintry years, and I no longer felt like one of the Knights of the Round Table in search of the Holy Grail. I was an average, unhappy, unfulfilled human being like everyone else; get up, go to work, go to bed, die.

One morning as I watched the sun make a merry red canvas of the sky over Lake Michigan I said to myself, "Either there is a God or there isn't. If there isn't, then all of this doesn't matter; we're just worms who come up and live a few hours in the sun and perish. But if there *is* a God and we *have* souls, all our accent is wrong."

I explained it all patiently one day to Larry Jannis over a game of billiards. He thought about it a moment and then said, "Are you feeling all right?"

I elaborated.

"Look, Larry. It's like this. There's mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, but they're all unconscious. They don't know or worry about the purpose of life. We men know and think and are conscious. We can't be happy just living for the body day to day, we have to use our minds. Also we live by different laws and have a different set of values than the unconscious creatures. Things like humility, forbearance, sacrifice for others, forgiveness, and gentleness are supposed to be higher than animal qualities, but life doesn't let you develop them. You get nowhere with them in the twentieth century. But what have we got left that endures if we haven't got these things? See what I mean?"

"It's your shot," he said. "See if you can get the eight-ball in the side pocket."

I missed, and wondered if my thinking had missed, too. But if I was right, then as human beings we had the wrong slant on life. Having now reached the stage in evolution in which we could apprehend spiritual values, we should now be developing the spiritual side of our nature. Instead, we were still clinging to physical values, more animal than human.

I didn't object to all the wonders of inventive man, only to the emphasis. We were spending millions for liquor while thousands were hungry for milk. Endless cars sped off assembly lines while thousands didn't have a home to live in. We were a profit-making society instead of a welfare-producing society. Why? When we should be both.

It wasn't enough to get up, go to work, go to bed, die. And I was tired of chasing the horizon, for the faster I

hurried towards it, the quicker it fled from me. I was certain that somehow, somewhere, I was passing up something which was a lot more important than anything I was racing so hard to catch.

That's when I met Marguerite.

CHAPTER 15

LOVE FLIES IN AND OUT OF THE WINDOW

JOE MULLIGAN FIRST called my attention to her. Joe was our Broadcasting House expert in these matters. Some men have a green thumb; Joe had a green complexion. He spent every night singing in the *Silver Slipper* night-club. His voice was better than Uncle Duffy's, but not much. He got no pay for his singing, but he could have all the drinks he wanted. Of course, there wasn't time enough in one night for what Joe wanted, but he tried.

His landlady had locked him out of his room, so he was sleeping on the studio floor with his clothes hung carelessly over the various standing microphones. This embroiled him in a feud with the cleaning lady, who objected to working around him with her vacuum cleaner. One morning during my *Dawn Patrol* programme they had a vicious battle. Mulligan accused her evil machine of sucking up his only pair of good black socks, the ones without a single hole in them. She complained to the Manager, and Mulligan was ordered not to sleep on the studio floor again. I felt sorry for him after that, as I could see how uncomfortable he was on the piano.

Mulligan was a strange mixture of courage and fear. He had great courage with the fair sex, and great fear that poverty would remove that pleasure from him. I was always astounded that Joe had enough strength left to admire the girls. He was a good announcer, but he would have been a better pharmacist.

Hypo Joe, we called him. He was a hypochondriac's hypochondriac. His fountain-pen set included a thermometer. He took his pulse every hour on the hour, and had more spells than the wicked witch of the West. Mulligan had pills, mouth-washes, astringents, bandages, salves, oils, and elixirs for every emergency. He had a special remedy for every imaginary ailment. The Chief Engineer saw to it that Mulligan had plenty of ailments. He would read to Joe from the medical journal, calling his attention to obscure items and rare diseases. By nightfall, Joe would come down with all the symptoms.

During the day, he kept the studio so clean that you could eat off the floor. However, once the sun went down and he reached the *Silver Slipper*, Mulligan became as relaxed and sloppy as wet seaweed. He was a daytime Jekyll and a night-time Hyde.

As soon as he sobered up in the morning he would air out the seat-cushion, open all the windows, rinse out the mouthpiece of the telephone with an antiseptic, and wash his hands every time he finished opening the mail. The Chief Engineer said that if Lady Macbeth had known Mulligan, she would never have spoken the lines, "Will these hands ne'er be clean?"

The only thing that could make Mulligan forget his health and his miseries during the day was a beautiful girl. If she was only attractive he would prefer to spray his throat; but if she was really gorgeous he seemed to undergo a miraculous cure. He would quote Shelley and Keats and the odds on himself for taking her out to lunch that very day.

Therefore I was not without interest on the morning he suddenly overcame an acute attack of Chief-Engineer-induced yellow fever, and said to me, "Did you see that vision of loveliness that just walked into Studio A?"

I looked. I saw a young lady who was exactly the kind of girl you'd like to take somewhere to make your girl jealous. Ripe-wheat hair, robin's-egg blue eyes, perfect teeth, a head-turning figure, and a smile that completely took away all your noble ideas about not becoming interested. You felt as though someone had just turned on all the lights on a Christmas tree.

There were five of us watching her through the big studio window during the interview. When she finished we all turned expectantly to Mulligan. We looked to him as our expert in these matters, and we awaited his description and classification.

He took out his white-gold cigarette-case (which the Collection Agency had inquired about the day before), saw it was empty, borrowed one from me and filled his case while he was about it, then made it clear to us just how much sheer poetry this explanation would require.

"There are some girls," he said dreamily "with whom you become infatuated. There are some with whom you become great pals." He encircled himself in a cloud of my smoke. "There are still others whom you cherish, adore, and marry. This one," he said, "is all three."

Mulligan then knocked his ashes off on my shoes and asked for my opinion. It was meant to be sarcasm. Mulligan claimed that my approach to women was about as fresh and modern as "23-skidoo!"

Drawing upon long-unused and hidden resources, I said, "Her eyes are stolen from the skies above; her lips are cherries that the bluebirds love."

Mulligan was a good loser. He walked over and raised my hand above my head. "The champ!" he declared. Then he added, "However, she's wearing a big diamond engagement ring on her left hand, so the odds I can give you fellows on taking her to lunch to-day are three to one

instead of the usual even-money. Not to mention the five dollars I'll need to borrow from Bill for the check."

"Five dollars!" I cried, wounded. "Where are you taking her, Chicago?"

"We mustn't forget the wine must we?" he explained patiently. "And I think a cherry brandy liqueur to finish."

I looked in my wallet. "All I've got is five dollars."

He extracted it neatly.

"No price is too high to pay to see a craftsman at work."

Just then she came out of the studio, and somehow the room was brighter. Mulligan moved right in like a convoy destroyer picking up its charge.

"Baby," he said, taking her arm, "you and I are now going to drift into a world of new wonders."

Suddenly the two robin's-eggs turned eagle-eye cold.

"We are drifting to the elevator," she said, "but only one of us is going down."

I whispered to the Chief Engineer, "I'll give you seven to one against."

Mulligan, however, didn't even feel the arctic blast. He waved his hand to me and said, airily, "Bill, take my next two broadcasts. This divinity and I are going to lunch within the gates of paradise." He manoeuvred her skilfully to the elevator. "Before we descend to the lobby," he assured her, "I shall have given you countless reasons why your life has just begun this day."

I gave Mulligan credit for one thing, he was a gutsy little beggar. He seemed to have won his point, for she smiled up at him sweetly.

"Would you mind if I suggested something which I think would be much more fun?"

He bowed, and gave us his mission-accomplished wink. "You name it, Lovelilocks, and it's yours."

"You take *his* programmes," she said, pointing at me, "and we'll send you a nice cable from Honolulu."

As the elevator doors closed, I could see the wounded look in Mulligan's eyes, a look which plainly said, "She's taking beer when she could have sherry." I knew that she had only used me to unload Mulligan, but if I'd had time to get my five dollars back, I might have asked her to lunch at that. I apologized for Joe.

"His carburettor has a rich mixture," I said, "but he has a good streak in him. If you care to sink a shaft."

She laughed. "Are you very hungry?"

"To tell you the truth," I admitted, "I am, but I couldn't buy you the toothpick on a pickled herring hors-d'œuvre."

"We can make it dutch-treat."

There was a little Mulligan in me, too, so I grinned, "Hi, Dutch."

It was the most wonderful lunch I ever ate. I have no recollection of the food, but her voice was Pablo Casal's cello.

Her name was Marguerite. She liked Louis Armstrong's trumpet, the Green Bay Packers, and the medium meat sauce at Chili John's.

Fortunately, Louis Armstrong was playing a one-night stand the following Saturday, and I was handling the broadcast. She agreed to go with me. I explained that I hadn't danced for years, and that perhaps we had better prepare for Saturday by dining and dancing for the next three nights.

I watched her eyes make up her mind: North Atlantic, Bay of Naples, robin's-egg! With a sigh of relief, I finished my coffee.

The boys were waiting for me when I returned to the studio. Mulligan had prepared them for a tale of disaster.

"Well?" he asked.

I smiled.

“Wipe that sappy grin off your face,” Joe said, “and tell us what happened.”

I began with the voice I always used when I introduced the old sugar-stick, Guy Lombardo: “There are some girls with whom you become infatuated. There are some——”

“Never mind that,” Mulligan interrupted. “How did you pay for the lunch?”

“She paid for it,” I told them, knocking my cigarette ash off on Mulligan’s shoes. I reclaimed my five dollars and went off to do my sportscast humming, *Just a Gigolo*.

I called for Marguerite on Saturday night and I noticed at once that she had taken off her diamond engagement ring. While we were dancing after the broadcast I thought how appropriate were these enchanting words which Satchmo’s trumpet was singing:

Margie! I’m always thinking of you, Margie.

For three days and three nights it had been true.

I’ll tell the world I love you.

Don’t forget your promise to me.

I have bought a home, a ring, and everything—

Whoa! Lothario, I warned myself. You are the father of a three-year-old son and a five-year-old son. It’s all right to build castles in the air, but don’t start living in them.

During the last waltz she said, “There’s something I want to tell you. It may surprise you.”

Surprise me! Wait until I broke the news about my family circle. I knew that nothing she could tell me could top that.

She smiled up at me. “Are you interested in religion?”

I nearly dropped her. She *had* surprised me.

“Not at the moment,” I told her honestly.

“You will be when you hear about it,” she said cheerfully.

I doubted it.

“I knew the moment you looked through the studio

window at me that there was something important between us. I've wanted to tell you ever since. Let's go for a drive and talk about it."

We drove down to the beach. Someone had arranged a perfect stage-setting: full moon, soft sands, and gentle breakers. We left the car-radio playing. It was Hal Kemp at the Drake Hotel, and Skinny Innis was tremolo-ing his way through *Night and Day*. I picked up Marguerite's hand and said casually, "What happened to your diamond ring?"

"Oh, that!" she said with a light laugh. And that's all she ever said about it—even to this day.

I often wondered who the poor devil was, and if he were sticking pins in a cloth doll that looked like me. I decided that I wasn't being fair, and that she might want to put the ring back when she knew, so I said bluntly, "I've got two sons."

I waited for the lava to come down from Vesuvius. There was no eruption, but it was noticeably cooler.

"But no wife," I added quickly.

"Boys are nice," she said. "I've always wanted five."

I wondered if her five included my two. It was a pleasant thought. Gradually I relaxed and told her all about Grandfather, Minnesota, and my dream. She became quite excited.

"How strange!" she said. "That's just about the time he was in Minneapolis."

"Who?"

"'Abdu'l-Bahá."

"Who?"

"The son of Bahá'u'lláh."

"Oh!" I said, completely mystified, "that explains it, there's nothing like a frank answer to make everything crystal clear."

"Sorry," she said, laughing. "Bahá'u'lláh was the founder of the Bahá'í Faith."

"Name sounds oriental."

She smiled. "Of course. How do you think the name Jesus Christ sounded to the Romans? Like John Smith?"

Just five minutes ago I had been gracefully leading up to the subject of love and matrimony; now, suddenly, I found myself in the middle of the New Testament. I said to myself, "Go slowly. This Delilah may give you a haircut."

I cut off the discussion by pulling her up from the sand.

"I'd better get home," I said abruptly. "I've got an early broadcast."

"Of course." Her eyes were still friendly, but hurt.

Neither of us spoke as the car skimmed along Lakeshore Drive. How could I explain, without hurting her feelings that the one subject I never cared to discuss these days was religion. I had discussed it eagerly and enthusiastically with everyone for years, only to get an increasingly chilly reception, and I had finally decided it would be wise to accept the truce under which Grandfather and I were permitted to be reunited so long ago: "You can discuss God, but keep the churches out of it."

I had patiently investigated every religion, sect, and cult and belief I could find in both the East and the West. Originally, I had hoped to discover something somewhere which would lead me to that wonderful figure in my dream, or at least explain the meaning of it. I searched in vain, and with diminishing interest, until at last I was "up to here" with religion. I gave up.

For three years I had not mentioned my dream to anyone. To-night was the first time, and I had spoken of it to Marguerite only because I wanted her to know all about me before I asked her to marry me.

The night was reflecting my mood. The moon withdrew and took cover behind dark clouds. Soon it began to rain. I turned on the wipers. They swished monotonously back

and forth, and each time they did, I was mentally saying, "Damn!"

I lit a cigarette. Without reason there flashed into my mind Grandfather's words the day he had brought a doctor to see me for the first time. I had insisted on playing with Jimmy Middleton even if he did have mumps. Grandfather said, "No." I sneaked in the Middleton's back door and was ordered out of the house. I put a ladder against the house and crawled up into Jimmy's bedroom. We played three games of checkers. He lost, but he got even with me later. My cheeks soon blew out like the mainsail on a galleon. When Grandfather brought the doctor into my room, he said, "I'd like you to meet my pig-headed grandson."

Was I being pig-headed now? I couldn't help it. I pulled the car up in front of Marguerite's driveway.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"It doesn't matter. You keep the car until morning."

"No, thanks," I said stiffly. "I like to walk in the rain."

"I'll get you a raincoat."

"Don't bother."

"Wait here," she insisted. "Please." She ran quickly up the steps. She came back without a raincoat, but she put a book in my hands. "Read this," she told me. "I think you'll find something in it which will surprise you very much."

In spite of my coolness, she was behaving as though nothing had happened. Her eyes were warm and bright with some inner happiness. She looked so tempting that I forgot my mood and leaned forward to kiss her.

"Not to-night," she said. "I'm too excited about your reading the book." Then she leaned over and kissed me anyway and ran back up the stairs.

That undeserved kiss warmed me all the way home, but it didn't keep me dry. My state of detachment can best be

judged by my words when I realized that I was soaking wet. I stopped suddenly in the doorway and said, "Great Scott! What have I done with the raincoat she gave me?"

I tossed the book on the bed and got into my pyjamas. I made a dill-pickle-and-french-bread sandwich and a cup of strong black coffee. As I crawled into bed the book fell on to the floor. I had forgotten about it. I picked it up and began to thumb through it.

It was a record of the public talks given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his visit to America from the Holy Land before the First World War.

Inside the fly-leaf there was a tribute to Bahá'u'lláh by Leo Tolstoy, who had written: "The whole world is seeking the solution to its problems. There is a prisoner in 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh, who has the key."

"All right," I said to myself sceptically, "let's see."

I began to read. It was about two o'clock when I found out why Marguerite had become so excited when I mentioned my boyhood dream. I felt a stab-like thrill myself as I turned one of the pages and saw the date: September 20, 1912.

It was the very day and year of my first dream!

'Abdu'l-Bahá had spoken in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on that day. He had been speaking only a short distance away from the little town in which I had lived and dreamed. I read the words of his talk very carefully. There was something vaguely familiar about them. He warned mankind to investigate the truth for themselves, and not to follow in the footsteps of those who accepted all things blindly.

I closed my eyes, and I could see our old living-room with the green velvet drapes, the faded wallpaper, and the thread-bare sofa. Father put down his morning paper, picked me up, and put me astraddle his toe. I was a cock-horse and he was going to ride me to Banbury Cross.

"The man came last night," I told him.

Father laughed. "Who came?"

"The man."

"What man?"

"In my dream."

I got off before Banbury Cross. Father was upset. "Ethel!" he called. "He's at it again."

Mother hurried in. "What's wrong?"

Father was already putting on his coat. "He's seen that man in a light in his dream again."

Mother picked me up tenderly and kissed me. "Of course, he has." She hugged me to her. "We all have nasty bad dreams."

"It was a good dream," I told her.

"What did the man look like?"

"I don't know."

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'Don't follow in their footsteps'."

Mother put me down. Father turned in the doorway.

"Thank God I work in an underground mine and don't have to come back up until it's dark."

The next morning Father was shaving when I came into the bathroom.

"What's my name?" I asked him.

We had often played this game before. "Your name," he said, "is William Bernard Patrick Michael Terence Sears."

"Then why did he call me Peter?"

"Who?"

"The man."

"What man?"

"The man who came in my dream."

Father cut his chin with the razor. "Ethel!"

Mother appeared from nowhere. She was very patient with me.

“Are you sure he called you Peter, dear?”

I nodded. “He said, ‘Fish, like Peter.’ ”

Father went to work that morning with his face half-shaved. He told Mother to take me to a doctor before he came home.

I put Marguerite’s book down, got up, and made another cup of coffee. Then I began to read once more. Later that same day, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had spoken in St. Paul, just across the river. He called upon mankind to be like the “fisherman Peter” in their unwavering faith, and to fish energetically for the souls of men.

Be like Peter!

I put the book down. Suddenly, I was very wide awake.

CHAPTER 16

VIRTUOUS MISERS, GENEROUS BACK-BITERS, AND FRIENDLY THIEVES!

I TRIED CALLING MARGUERITE first thing in the morning, but there was no answer. I knew she listened each day to my early morning record session, so I tried to pass along a message to her through the music.

I played:

1. *Margie.*
2. *Everybody Loves My Marguerite.*
3. *Marguerita, My Marguerita.*
4. *Forgive Me.*
5. *I'm Sorry I Made You Cry.*

I hadn't made her cry, I'd made her laugh, but I knew she'd recognize the apology if she were listening. About ten o'clock I received a telegram:

ALL IS FORGIVEN. HOPE YOU ENJOY THE BOOK. LOVE. M.

I called her at once. No answer. I drove over at noon. I wanted to get another book and to apologize in person. Her room-mate answered the door when I knocked at the apartment.

"Marguerite's not here," she said.

"Where is she?"

"She drove to the Bahá'í school."

"Where is the school?"

"Which one?"

"For heaven's sake, how many are there?"

"There's one in Maine, one in Michigan, one in Colorado, and one in California."

"Which one did she go to?"

"I don't know."

I could tell that she *did* know, but had specific instructions to let me dangle. I deserved it, so I didn't press the point. She invited me in for a cup of tea, and told me that Marguerite would be back in a month. Our half-hour together was an eye-opener. A month ago I had been the Master of Ceremonies at a University banquet for a group of scientists following the first underwater explosion of the atomic bomb in the Bikini Atoll. Someone had answered my query about relativity.

"See that very bald-headed doctor at the end of the table?"

"Yes."

"You'd say he had very few hairs, wouldn't you?"

"Very few indeed."

"But if you found five of those hairs in this soup you'd say, 'There's a helluva lot of hair in this soup.' Right? That's relativity."

Twenty-four hours ago I had not heard of the Bahá'í Faith. Now I discovered that there were Bahá'ís in every country and every island of the sea and schools all over the place.

Marguerite's room-mate handed me a book. There was a very amused expression on her face. "Marguerite left this for you. She said you'd be calling for it."

The little devil!

"How do you know I'm the right one?" I asked.

Her room-mate smiled. "Well, you're not quite as tall, nor quite as dark, nor quite as handsome—but you're the one all right."

When she opened the door to let me out she said, "Is it

the book or the robin's-egg blue eyes you're really interested in?"

I blushed. She laughed. "The 'eyes' have it."

I told her honestly. "It was one hundred per cent robin's-egg to begin, but now it's about fifty-fifty."

I finished the book that night. I discussed it with Mulligan the next day at lunch. He said:

"Please! Not while I'm eating."

I didn't receive much encouragement from any of my friends.

"I thought you said you were 'up to here' with religion?"

"Not with religion," I explained, "but with what's been done to religion."

"Write me a nice report, but don't hurry. I came out for the golf, not the gospel. Hand me my nine iron."

I handed him a seven, and he overshot. Served him right.

One of my closest personal friends ("for your own good, Bill") told me confidentially, "Forget it. You've got a good job and a couple of nice kids. What more do you want? Why get mixed up in this? What's there in it for you, Bill? It just doesn't make sense."

I decided to go to the horse's mouth. I invited a well-known figure in the church to dinner. Over cigars, I asked him to tell me frankly what he knew about the Bahá'í Faith. It was pretty clear to me that what he knew about it you could put in an envelope and mail to Singapore for two cents, but the atmosphere became as chilled as the wine. He not only belittled it, but looked upon me with supreme pity, as though he wondered who had moved all the things out of my attic.

Suddenly I was a little boy again, hopping along barefooted in the dirty road, making "dinosaur" tracks to Grandfather's barn. I decided to fly up on pay-day and talk it over with the old man.

I walked into the barn and sat down on the oats-box. Grandfather was just feeding fat old Prince. He saw me all right, but didn't say anything. It was as though I'd never left home. Finally, he looked around.

"Don't sit there like a cigar-store Indian," he said, "there's horses to be fed."

I scooped up a measure of grain and took it into Beauty's stall. She knew me, and let me rub her nose. After we had fed, watered, and bedded-down the horses we went back to sit on the oats-box. We sat silently for some time while Grandfather bored a new hole in Beauty's halter.

"Get it off your chest," he said.

I told him the whole story. When I finished with the part about the cold reception I'd had from my friend in the church he began to chuckle.

"Never ask Nimrod about Abraham," he said, "nor Pharaoh about Moses, nor the Pharisees about Christ, nor the Cubs about the White Sox."

Grandfather was quite interested in Bahá'u'lláh. He wanted to know more about him. I told him what little I knew: that the Bahá'í Faith began in Persia in 1844 and that Bahá'u'lláh apparently was an Oriental.

Grandfather lowered his glasses and looked up at me strangely.

"Do I detect a slightly superior angle to that western nose of yours?" he asked. "What do you think Christ was, an American Indian?"

Grandfather and Marguerite had a lot in common.

"Persia is a Muslim country," I said. "I think that's why everybody shied off when I talked with them. They thought it must be a sect of Islám."

"I'm trembling all over with fear," Grandfather replied, trying the buckle in the new hole in the halter. While he was fitting the halter on Beauty, he let me have it straight.

"Buddha was an Indian prince, but for centuries his faith was said to be a sect of Hinduism because he grew up in a Hindu country. Christ was a Jew, and for centuries people still thought of his faith as a sect of Judaism." He came back to the oats-box. "Did you know that the first fifteen bishops of the Christian Church were circumcised Jews?"

"You read too much," I told him.

"It keeps me from thinking a name is strange just because it's new to me," he said.

He was quite an infuriating old gentleman at times, but he had a salutary effect. He loved to go about pricking open what he called other people's "balloons of smugness".

"There was a fellow named Tacitus," Grandfather said; "quite a historian, they tell me. He highly approved of the Emperor Nero for stamping out that sect of the Jews called the cult of the Nazarene. No doubt Rome would have welcomed a religious leader named Marcus, or Lucius or Caius—but Jesus of Nazareth? Oriental nonsense!"

"Do you mean that you think Bahá'u'lláh might be the truth?"

"How would I know?" Grandfather snorted. "I'd want to know a lot more about it. But I'll tell you one thing, I wouldn't give up on it just because my friends said it wasn't the truth." He began to chuckle again, and I knew a story was coming. "Had a friend once," he began, "down in Iowa. He wanted to start a newspaper. Trouble was, everybody read *The Tribune*. Had for years. He decided to go ahead anyway. He called his paper *The Truth*. On the day his paper came out he instructed all his newsboys very carefully. When anyone asked for the evening paper, the newsboys were to say: 'What do you want? *The Truth* or *The Tribune*?' Only way a fellow could find out which was the truth was to read. I suggest you do the same."

"No matter how unpopular?"

"What do you want? *The Truth* or *The Tribune*?"

"I'm in show business."

Grandfather grunted. "The light that we see to-night from the Northern Star left there twenty-six million light years ago. How long have you been in show business?"

"Okay," I told him. "Get off my back."

He was really steamed up. "The world was built by the unpopular. Schubert received about six hundred dollars for his life's work because they said he wrote 'tinkling little tunes'. Harvey was driven from medicine by those who objected to his saying there was a pump in the body that drove the blood through pipes. Pasteur was nearly run out of France for daring to claim there were little 'beasties' under his microscope that made people ill. Edison was called addle-pated for claiming he could imprison light in a bottle. Lincoln was shot in Ford's theatre for saying no nation could exist half slave and half free. Giordano Bruno was burned——"

"All right!" I shouted. "I get your point."

The horses became restless. Beauty pawed at the floor and neighed loudly. Grandfather got up and started for the house.

"I'll leave you to talk it over with Beauty," he said. "Maybe she can teach you a little horse-sense."

After he'd gone, I got up and patted Beauty on the rump.

"A self-educated grandfather is a frightening thing, Beauty," I told her. She pawed the floor again. "When his glasses aren't staring down into the oats-box, they're buried several centuries deep in Plutarch."

Beauty agreed. Or maybe it was the mention of the oats-box. Anyway, she neighed again, so I broke the rules and slipped her an extra measure of grain.

After dinner Grandfather brought out the cards and the

cribbage board. I could see he had something on his mind that he wanted to say before we started playing.

"Get it off your chest," I told him.

"Didn't mean to sound so pompous in the barn," he said. "But the truth is, son, I've sort of been hanging on to that dream of yours myself. Seems like it's partly mine. Getting old, I guess, and want something to keep me young. My circulation is slower than political justice." He opened and closed his right hand. "I haven't had any real blood in that arm since the Taft Administration."

He leaned over and gave me a whisker-rub.

"Trouble with your old grandfather," he said, "is that he's watching all the other birds fly South and he wants to go along, but he can't. Hasn't got the wings for it. I'm like an old rooster sitting on a fence watching the others flying overhead. I try to join them, but no matter how hard I flap my wings, I just fall to the ground. So I try to make up in sound for what I lack in flight. Cut the cards."

Three hours later he said, "Fifteen two, fifteen four, fifteen six, a run of eight is fourteen, and his nibs is fifteen, and that puts me out."

I sighed. "For a man who has such high-sounding ideals, you certainly can cheat a sweet game of cribbage."

He laughed. "No use being a fanatic," he said. "We're all strange mixtures of good and bad, son. Generous back-biters, virtuous misers, friendly thieves."

"And slippery philosophers," I added.

He changed the subject. "Remember that pretty little girl next door that you had the crush on? Margie Kelly?"

I nodded.

"She was asking about you last week."

"What's she like now?"

"Got a heart of gold, but it's hidden in a mountain of flesh. She's bigger than Beauty's back-end and as ugly

as a new-born calf, but I understand she's a wonderful cook."

"I've got other interests now."

"So I gather," he said, and went limping off to bed. He was humming quietly to himself: "*Margie! I'm always thinking of you, Margie.*"

News gets around fast.

CHAPTER 17

A DOZEN RED ROSE-BUDS VERSUS ALL VESTED INTEREST

A MONTH PASSED, AND Marguerite still hadn't called me. My heart told me she was back even before my spies did. Each of us knew the other was waiting for a call. This is what is known in romantic circles as "the cold war". It is a sinful waste of moonlight and dance music, but it must be waged according to the rules. Both sit by the telephone waiting for the first sign of surrender. Each will go as far as picking up the telephone and starting to dial, but will then suddenly hang up before the connection is made. It is an effective technique if deployed wisely, but if carried to extremes it leads to reading in the Sunday papers about the engagement of your girl to someone else.

I honestly wanted to hear more about the Báha'í Faith as well as to be with Marguerite. I felt perhaps she wanted to be with me, but didn't want me to think she was forcing her interest in the Báha'í Faith upon me. I was thinking it over one day at lunch, when she walked into Luigi's with a young man who was as tall, and as dark, and as handsome as ever her room-mate could wish.

I hated to see her pining away like this among strangers, and I was about to get up and join them when I noticed that Marguerite had on the diamond engagement ring again. So this was the joker. Even across the floor that grey suit he had on looked like two hundred and fifty dollars, and the diamond ring looked like the headlight on the Santa Fé Chief. I could see it wasn't going to be easy, but I also

could hear the call to battle. My Irish ancestors who had turned back the invaders (or had they surrendered to them?) called to me from the ancient peat-bogs.

Marguerite looked across the room, and her eyes met mine. They stayed there for a moment and then moved on, as though my face was a port-hole and she was looking through it towards Biscayne Bay. I could almost hear Mulligan's voice whispering, "Twenty to one against."

Now you can either wage a romantic war with money or with imagination. It is preferable to have both, but as I was only a "bunch-of-daffodils" man at that time, I had to use strategy. I sent Marguerite a beautiful red rose-bud each morning for eleven days. The total cost was less than a dozen roses, but the total effect was an orchid-field. With each rose I sent a one-word message. At the end of the eleven days, the message made sense: "I—WILL—MEET—YOU—FOR—LUNCH—NEXT—FRIDAY—AFTERNOON—AT—LUIGI'S."

I borrowed Mulligan's slacks, Bertram's sports-jacket, Len Lewis's silk tie from Carson-Pirie-Scott, but wore my own shoes and incidentals.

Mulligan suggested that I should walk in half-an-hour late and make an entrance, but I was afraid she might not come at all, so I waited in the kitchen. Luigi kept an eye on the table-for-two in the corner. He came into the kitchen, picked up a tray of shrimp cocktails, and gave me a smile which looked as though someone had put the rocker from a rocking-chair in his mouth sideways.

"She's here!" he whispered.

I slipped into the chair across from Marguerite, and handed her a red rose.

"That makes a dozen," I said.

She laid it beside her plate. "I've missed you."

"I saw you suffering here two weeks ago at lunch."

She gave me the Christmas-tree smile. "I saw you, too."

I noticed that she wasn't wearing the diamond.

"Aren't you going to wear out that ring from the friction of putting it on and taking it off?"

"I returned it that day at lunch. That's why he was in town."

While we ate, she told me she hadn't called because she wanted to be free of all other obligations before we met again and took up where we left off. She reached across the table and held my hand.

"I deliberately ignored you that day because I didn't think it was fair to put you on display in front of him."

What meaning the angels can give to words. "Display" had always been quite ordinary to me—as in show-window. Now it was suddenly invested with all the tender loveliness of the french-horn solo in Tchaikowsky's Fifth. I lit my cigarette after dropping it twice and said nonchalantly to Luigi, "Bring me the veal scallopini."

"You just ate it," he said.

That afternoon I engaged a Western Union special messenger, and paid him a dollar extra to deliver a personal message. He was to sing: *Margie! I'm always thinking of you, Margie*: signed: Bill.

When I got home from work there was a package in my mail-box. It was a book called *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*. I started reading after dinner, and didn't finish it until I heard the milkman bringing my coffee cream in the top of the bottle.

I was just going to work when the Western Union messenger I'd sent over to Marguerite came up the walk. He stopped in front of me.

"Sears?"

"Yes."

He began to sing in what history will have to call a "fourth tenor", way up high and rotten.

"Oh, Johnnie! Oh, Johnnie!
How you can love.
Oh, Johnnie! Oh, Johnnie!
Heavens above . . ."

And so on to the awesome end. My landlady threw open her window and looked out. She didn't say anything, but I could tell that she was just about to ask the messenger, "Is he hurting you?"

"What's the idea?" I asked.

"Signed: Marguerite," he said. "Sign here."

I phoned her from work. "What's the idea of the singing telegram?" I asked.

"I just wanted to reply in kind."

She hung up on me.

I found out later that my messenger didn't know the tune or the words to *Margie*, so he had sung: *Every Little Breeze Seems to Whisper Louise*. I muttered to myself as I went back to the sports-desk, "It is not in our underlings, but in ourselves that we are stars."

I had Friday off, so I called Marguerite. Her room-mate answered.

"Can I talk to Marguerite?"

"Sure," she said, "but it'll cost you five dollars."

"Why?"

"She's in Maine giving a course at the summer school."

"That'll only cost me two dollars," I told her.

"Not if I know you two."

"When is she coming back?"

"In a month."

"She didn't say she was leaving when we talked yesterday morning."

"She was packing then, right after the musical serenade

with her orange juice. You shouldn't get your telegrams mixed up, not-quite-tall-enough, not-quite-dark-enough, not-quite-handsome-enough."

"It was a mistake."

"You're telling me! 'Bye, Louise!"

The course of true love never did run smooth, unless it was on ice. I waited the month out and, on the first night Marguerite came back to town, invited her to dinner at Luigi's. She floated in wearing an aquamarine-and-gold Chinese silk dress and matching coat. She looked like everything priceless from the Ming Dynasty. I introduced her to the freckle-faced kid at our table.

"This is Red Phillips," I told her.

Red stood up and sang: *Margie*.

"He's tone-deaf," I told her, "and it's taken me three days to teach him."

Red apologized. "I'm sorry, ma'am, but I didn't know *Margie*, so I sang *Louise*. If somebody'd only tell a guy something——"

"That's all right," she said.

"Beat it," I told Red. "I'd give you a buck if you hadn't squeezed so much out of me already."

Marguerite gave him three. One for each of us, and one for promising to give up singing as a career.

I pinned a corsage on her shoulder. It cost me more than the dinner. Afterwards we drove up to Observation Peak. There is one spot looking out over the lake which the young lovers call "The Point of No Return". It is generally understood that if you take your girl to that particular spot you are playing for keeps. We both knew it.

It was one of those nights when you look at the sky, the stars, and the moon, and say, "It's a lie!" The moon was low, round, orange, fat, and happy. Even so, it took me two hours to come to the point. Mostly we talked in quiet

sighs. I was like the moon. The longer I waited, the smaller and paler I became. I know now that she knew exactly what was coming. Every woman has a built-in radar that can detect the slightest shadow of interest, and screen out the undesirables. She looked tantalizingly lovely, but seemed as remote as Mars, which shone its red face through the windshield. Every time I was about ready to launch the ship she'd begin talking lightly of shoes, skirts, sweaters, gloves, gowns, hats, and handbags. Suddenly I threw my prepared speech out the window and snapped off the radio.

"I'm going to say something that may shock you," I said.

Marguerite looked up at me with a tender smile. "Yes, dear," she said. The years have taught me that this smile means: "You-poor-thing-I-thought-you'd-never-catch-up-with-me."

"I've been offered a job in Salt Lake City. I don't want to go away and leave you here in this wilderness of wolves, so as soon as I can save up enough money to pay for a wedding-ring, I'm going to ask you to marry me. Of course, I'll buy you an engagement ring, too. Later on. Maybe not as big as tall-dark-and-handsome's lighthouse, but something nice, just the same." I sat back and filled my pipe and lighted it. "By the way," I added, as I struck the match, "I happen to love you very much."

There was a long silence. It was very humbling. Towards the end, it was appalling. Then Marguerite took something out of her purse and slipped it on to her finger. It was a simple but lovely ring.

"I bought one myself," she said, "last week in Boston."

She lit a cigarette, then added casually, "By the way, I happen to love you very much, too."

We wound up laughing and loving all at the same time,

which has been pretty much the pattern of our lives. It makes an intoxicating mixture.

* * * * *

The very night we returned home from our honeymoon I had a vivid dream. I awakened with a start to see Marguerite standing over me.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Who were you talking to in your sleep?"

I told her. "It was that same wonderful figure that came to me when I was a little boy in Minnesota. I'll never forget him."

Marguerite sat down on the bed beside me.

"I was seated on a rock," I said. "Winter seemed suddenly to come upon all the countryside. I looked up the hill to my left, and this beautiful luminous figure was rushing down the hill towards me. He was on skis. His white beard was blowing in the breeze. He swept up to me, showered me with a cloud of snow as he did a stem-christie, and whirled to a stop. Then he beckoned me with his finger.

" 'Come with me,' he said.

"Then I was on skis, too, and we were racing down the mountainside together. We shot across a ravine, out on to a wide ledge and stood looking down into the valley below. In an instant winter was gone and the air was warm and filled with the perfume of roses. In the valley below a city twinkled in the twilight. It was a city of magic flickering lights. Far off to the right, I could see the moon reflected in a big silver lake.

"My wonderful companion pointed down towards the city. He smiled at me and said, 'This is the city.' Then he vanished and I woke up and saw you staring at me."

“Where was the city?” Marguerite asked. “Did you recognize it?”

“No. I’d never seen it before. But I will recognize it if I ever see it again.”

One thing I *did* know: wherever the city was, I would search until I found it. I felt certain that in that city I would discover the meaning to my dream, and something wonderful would happen to me. I felt a warm glow inside.

“Your face is shining like a two-hundred-watt lamp,” Marguerite said to me.

“A.C. or D.C.?” I asked.

“I can’t tell,” she said, “until I make contact.”

She kissed a very happy man.

CHAPTER 18

“OOOOOOOOOH! SHOPPING”, OR HOW TO BECOME A MILLIONAIRE

“THE THING I MISS most of all since marrying you,” Marguerite told me one morning at breakfast, “is shopping.”

“I thought you were going to say eating,” I said, passing the last of the cinnamon buns.

When we were married Marguerite said she knew that I was the old-fashioned type of husband who didn’t like to use his wife’s money. She added that she did hope, however, that I wouldn’t be archaic about it. I told her stiffly that I would try not to be.

“I don’t have too much,” she said, “but it might prevent a sheriff’s sale.”

I thanked her for trying so gallantly to be happy on my salary.

“I’m not trying to be happy,” she told me. “I’m trying not to be miserable.”

I laughed. That’s when she introduced me to “Ooooooh! shopping”. A good “Ooooooh!” shopper goes downtown after the stores are closed. The lights are still on in all the windows, and you can look at all the lovely things and shout, “Ooooooh!”, but fortunately you can’t get inside to buy them. Marguerite would see a “darling” blouse and cry out, “Ooooooooh!”, but it cost me nothing. She never complained as long as we went “Ooooooh! shopping” regularly.

One day we shopped during business hours. “I want to buy some presents to take to the boys,” I told her. “I’d

like to leave them a few gifts before we say goodbye and go west."

"Goodbye?"

"Yes, I'd like to visit Michael at the hospital, and also make sure that Billy's all right."

"They're coming with us," Marguerite said.

"For good?"

She nodded.

"Look," I explained, "the doctors won't release Michael from hospital, and Billy's a big handful."

Marguerite was determined. "We're going as a family. I've just become the mother of two sons, and no one is going to get them away that easily. You've been separated too long already."

I hugged her. "You're very nice," I said.

She looked at me strangely. "What did you expect? The wicked stepmother?"

"No," I answered honestly, "but I didn't expect Cinderella either. After all, this is a romantic journey."

"They're very little," she said. "Please? They will hardly take any room at all."

When we arrived in Milwaukee I could tell that Marguerite was nervous. She was worried for fear the boys might not like her. Billy at five-and-a-half had ripe-olive eyes and a head of hair that was dark brown and as short as the nap on the rug.

I hadn't been able to visit him very often when he was little. When his mother died he went to live with my parents. When my mother died he went with his grandfather to live at my sister Ella's. Father and Billy were great pals. I was a stranger to him. The first time I came home after an absence of nearly a year he shook hands with me very properly.

"This is your father," he was told.

“How do you do, sir,” he said.

I wept that night. I promised myself I’d come home often, even if I had to borrow the money to do it. We were much better friends by now. As we went up the steps of the apartment, Marguerite squeezed my hand.

“Pray for me,” she said.

Billy hugged me happily, looked over all the presents we had brought, then he whispered to me.

“Who’s the pretty lady?”

I told him. “This is your new mother.”

He looked at Marguerite very carefully, with new interest. Then he smiled and said, “All right.”

All three of us drove out to the hospital in Wauwatosa to visit Michael. He was nearly four. He had long, wavy, blond hair and Wedgewood-blue eyes. After much consultation the doctors still refused to permit him to leave the hospital.

“He can’t get the care he needs at home,” they said firmly.

Marguerite was equally determined he would not stay. “He can’t get the love he needs here in hospital,” she insisted. It was quite a battle. I tried to discourage her, but she was adamant. Finally, she picked up her purse, got up, and started out.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“To rent an apartment,” she told me grimly. “Billy and I are going to stay here with Michael, and you’re going to Salt Lake City alone.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“I’m not going to leave him here by himself while his parents are two thousand miles away. He doesn’t need medicine as much as he needs a home and a feeling of security.” She hesitated in the doorway. “They’re only the doctors,” she said. “You’re the father. If you say he leaves the hospital, they can’t stop you.”

I looked at the doctors, then at Marguerite, then at Billy, who was holding on to her hand for dear life. I sighed.

"He goes," I said.

I signed the necessary legal papers absolving the doctors from any responsibility, while the head doctor clucked disapprovingly through his teeth, convinced that I had consigned my son to certain death.

Michael became acquainted with Marguerite in the car. I told him who she was.

"I never had a mother," he said cheerfully, blowing the auto horn. He looked Marguerite over very carefully before blowing it a second time.

Marguerite hugged him tightly. "Yes, you did," she said. "You had a wonderful mother. You were just too little to remember. I'll try to be half as nice."

Michael seemed partly satisfied. He said, "Some of the children in the hospital had fat ones. Mothers."

Marguerite laughed. "Disappointed?"

"No," he said uncertainly. He pointed. "Your hair is just like mine." Marguerite nodded. "Your eyes are blue, too. Like mine." He seemed pleased. Suddenly he stuck his tongue out at her. Marguerite stuck hers out at him. Michael turned to me and whispered confidentially in my ear, "I think she'll be pretty good."

Then a much more important subject claimed his attention. He shouted excitedly, "Look! A cow! A cow that's not in a book! It's a really cow!"

I don't believe I have ever in my life so thoroughly admired a Holstein cow as much as that lazy creature grazing along the County Loop Road in Wauwatosa.

The four of us drove to Minnesota in Marguerite's V-8 Ford. She decided that all of us should see Grandfather on our way to Salt Lake City.

"We'll go through Minnesota, South Dakota, Montana,

and Wyoming,” she told the boys. “And you can see Old Faithful geyser in Yellowstone Park.”

“I’d rather see Grandfather,” Billy said.

Michael disagreed. “I’d rather see the geyser.”

We had to pull them apart.

Billy and Michael ran wild for two weeks in Minnesota. Grandfather took them everywhere. Marguerite and the old gentleman hit it off like two old cronies.

“What do you see in this grandson of mine?” he asked Marguerite, ignoring me.

“Quite a bit of you,” she said.

They went everywhere together in the horse-and-buggy. He let her handle the reins, and he even promised her that she could saddle and ride Beauty, his pride and joy.

Before we left Minnesota I had a long talk with Grandfather. We sat on the same old oats-box. He gave me a whisker-rub, too, only this time I had to bend down for it.

“Your letters have been getting farther apart and shorter,” he told me.

I apologized.

“No complaints,” he said. “Only I notice you’ve begun to write in a big scrawl so it will cover the page quicker. Don’t write unless you’ve got something to say, son. There’s no duty between you and me, just love. And you can’t manufacture that artificially.”

“You know how it is,” I told him. “I’ve been wrapped up in my work.”

“It can do that,” he said. “I haven’t heard very much mention about God in your letters lately. You and He used to be pretty good friends.”

“They don’t talk much about Him in radio,” I explained.

“Suppose not.”

“But I’m still searching for the answer to my dream.”

“*Our* dream,” he reminded me. “I’ve got squatter’s rights

there, I was the first God-talker who gave you a sympathetic ear." He was, too. He gave me a playful dig in the ribs. "Don't quit."

"Sometimes the whole thing seems impossible, then just when I'm about ready to give up, something happens and the dream comes closer."

Grandfather became quite upset. "Impossible!" he snorted.

Grandfather's hair seemed much whiter than the last time I'd seen him. Sometimes he seemed very remote, as though he wasn't really living inside his house at all. He seemed to sense what I was thinking.

"Yeah," he said, looking around, "the old barn's pretty well shot. Roof leaks and the wind blows snow and rain right through the windows. May have to get out any day now. Can't expect anything to last forever, I guess."

"You will," I told him confidently.

"Hope not," he said. "Been waiting for them to come and get me for a long time. Must be a hell of a mix-up up there somewhere in the records. Everybody I knew went long ago, and most of their sons. Why, I'm older than the Town Hall."

"You make me feel young, Grandfather," I said.

"Sure, but you always were a worrier. Alongside of you I feel like a nursing child." His hand reached out and took mine. It felt so small and wrinkled. "We haven't talked much about it, son, but both of us know that this is the last time we're going to be sitting on this oats-box together."

He was holding my hand very tightly. Marguerite came in slapping her riding-whip against her boots. She smiled at the two of us.

"I've heard a lot about that famous oats-box," she said.

Grandfather helped her put the saddle on Beauty. As she

led the sleek mare out of the barn, he said, “You won’t need that whip on Beauty.”

She tossed it to him. “You may need it on Bill.”

She swung lightly up into the saddle. The boys stood watching her with big eyes. To them, their mother had just become the first lady sheriff of the great West. She promised to come back and take each of them for a ride. She waved to us, and rode off.

Grandfather watched her with laughing eyes. When he looked over at me again, he said, “I used to worry a little about you, but I don’t think I do any more. I think we’ve taken on a new partner.”

“Want to see something?” I asked.

He nodded. I opened my wallet and took out the first-place medal which he’d won driving Dakar in the harness races at the Fair. I had polished it until it was shiny and bright. He was very pleased. A flood of memories encircled us both as we looked at it. Then he handed it back to me.

“Stay out in front, son,” he told me. “Don’t let the world get you into a pocket.”

CHAPTER 19

THE ANIMAL LADY STRIKES AGAIN!

IT WAS SPRING of the year as we drove through Emigrant Gap into the Great Salt Valley. We had a half-tank of low-grade gasoline, two unwashed sons, two dachshunds, a cocker spaniel, three dollars and seventeen cents in cash, and no spare tyre.

The roses were coming in everywhere: *Paul's Scarlet*, *Etoile de Holland*, *Lady Baltimore*, *Sutter's Gold*, and a profusion of the wild variety. The jagged teeth-like hoods of the Wasatch Mountains still hung heavy with winter's snow, and in the blue-haze of late afternoon it looked as though a white hand had seized the peaks from above and was about to uproot them.

Marguerite smiled at me happily.

"There's a nice little house waiting for us right at the foot of those wonderful mountains," she said.

I would have answered her, but Michael was pointing excitedly at the scenery, and I was trying to keep his sandwich out of my eye.

Three days later Marguerite went apartment hunting. She was looking, she said, for a small, modest, cozy, comfy little furnished apartment for three men, three dogs, and herself. She was back in an hour.

"Any luck?"

She shook her head. "I only looked at one place. It breathed on me as I went past."

"As bad as that, huh?"

"It was heavenly," she sighed. "But it wasn't for rent, it was for sale."

“So?”

“So I stopped looking. When I saw that little place I knew we’d found our dream house.”

“Good,” I replied. “Now all we have to do is find Merlin the Magician, and pull the price of the down-payment out of his long black cloak.”

Marguerite called the real-estate man and told him to hold the house, and that we’d be in for it in five days. Like ordering a hat. From that moment on, the house belonged to her. No other possibility ever crossed her mind. She began drawing diagrams of where we’d put the new furniture. Finally, we had twelve hours to go to the deadline and exactly ninety cents to put down on the house.

“Don’t worry,” she laughed. “I’ve got one of those feelings. Something is going to happen.”

It did. At eleven o’clock the next morning, just one hour before “too late”, Marguerite received a letter from her mother saying that an insurance policy had matured and that she might as well have the money. Marguerite was already dressed and waiting for whatever was going to happen, although she certainly didn’t know the letter was coming.

She still gets those feelings off and on. The boys and I have learned to hide in the cellar and not to answer the phone or the door-bell when she’s “on target” with a hunch.

“It isn’t exactly a hunch,” she explained, “it’s a fact, but it just hasn’t happened yet.”

She had so much faith and assurance that when you were with her you felt like a two-hundred-watt lamp being lighted from a nearby power-plant. Before the money came, she showed me her diagrams for the different rooms of furniture.

“I visualized four army cots, a camp stove, and fifty tins of beans,” I told her.

"That's silly. If we can get the money for the down-payment on the house, we can certainly find enough for the furniture."

How can you dispute such logic?

"Don't you think a record-player would go nicely here by the studio couch?" she asked.

I had exactly enough cash to purchase the label for one Bing Crosby record, but I was getting into the spirit of the thing. I looked at the diagram carefully. "Is it an automatic?" Naturally, I didn't want to get stuck with a manual.

A week later the money came. I can't remember where it came from, I was still stunned from the house, but it paid for the down-payment, the furniture, with enough left over for Marguerite to buy the boys each a new outfit. That was in addition to their insurance policies, of course.

"Their what?" I asked.

Marguerite explained it this way: "I was little and Mother insured me, now I'm grown up and the money bought us the house. So I'm insuring the two boys so that when they don't expect it, we can send them the money, too."

"Would you replay that last ten seconds," I asked.

"Never mind," she said. "I'll take care of it."

Within a year, Michael was completely cured. Marguerite always made certain that there was enough milk and fruit for Michael even when the rest of us were down to eating baked-beans in seven ingenious and varied forms.

One day I came home and Michael rushed out to meet me. "Your wife bit me," he said. When he liked us, we were Mother and Dad, but when he was upset with us, we were "your wife" and "your husband".

"Why did she bite you?" I asked.

"Because I bit her first."

"That seems a fair exchange of bites."

Michael thought it over. "Guess it is," he admitted.

He never bit anyone again. Except the time he took a nip at the dachshund's tail. When the dog bit him back he accepted the process as a law of nature and gave up.

That year we had the most wonderful Christmas of our lives. I said to Marguerite, "I thought perhaps you wouldn't have any interest in Christmas, being a Bahá'í."

She protested gently. She picked up a book from her work-desk, opened it, and began to read. The boys, the dogs, the cats, and I all gathered around.

"When He (Christ) came into the world," she began, "He shed the splendour of His glory upon all created things. He (Jesus) it was Who purified the World. Blessed is the man who, with a face beaming with light, hath turned towards Him."

She set the book down. "Those are the words of Bahá'u'l-láh about Christ. That's the love I hope to teach your sons to have for Him."

I held her so tightly. "They're your sons, now, too," I said, "and in some ways, a lot more than they are mine."

Grandfather remembered all of us that first Christmas in Salt Lake City. He sent a big package and a fat letter, and he gave us all the news.

"Old Prince finally went to sleep one night in his stall and never woke up," he wrote. "Mrs. Casey is pretty sick, too. I may light a candle."

Grandfather sent me Old Prince's Scotch-plaid blanket, and he gave Marguerite Prince's bridle, which he had hand-tooled himself.

"Much better to have a bridle and no horse," he wrote her, "than to have a horse and no bridle. You may want to use it on my grandson if he gives you trouble."

He sent the boys each a five-dollar bill.

It was a very gay Christmas. Marguerite bought me a fat little red dachshund.

"You *shouldn't have*," I told her.

I meant it, but she said that it made it less lonesome around the house for the other two dachshunds, the cocker spaniel, and the three cats. The names of the menagerie in order of age were: Spook, Lady Windermere, Someone, Cuckoo Berry, Nocturne, and Hey You. The new dachshund puppy was named Chloe, as we were always looking for her through the black of night. I rechristened her Screwdriver because of the uncanny way in which she could use her long, narrow nose to open all doors.

We called Marguerite the "Animal Lady". Whenever she went for a walk round the yard all the animals would be strung out behind her like a long line of freight cars. They followed her everywhere.

The Saturday before Christmas we were listening to the Metropolitan Opera's broadcast of *Faust*, when through the open back door came a stray black cat. It was scrawny, dirty, and impudent. Marguerite welcomed it like an innkeeper who hasn't had a guest for months. She picked it up, stroked it, fed it, and said, "We'll call it Mephistopheles because it made such a dramatic entrance in the middle of *Faust*!"

I spoke from greater experience. "Let's make believe that it came during last week's opera and call it *Lucia di Lammermoor*. I think it would be more appropriate."

I was outvoted three to one for Mephistopheles. My suggestion turned out to be prophetic, however. In two months Mephistopheles was a sextette, and as I said to Marguerite, "You can't tell me that's not from Lucia."

We gave three of the kittens away. The others were called Hart, Schaeffner, and Marx because they were born in my grey suit-coat about which Marguerite had always said, "Someday I just won't pick that coat up after you."

On Christmas Eve we all went for a drive through the

magnificent mountain canyons. Salt Lake City is one of the most charming cities in America. It is nestled in a valley between the Wasatch and Okirrih mountains, along the Jordan River. The Wasatch are high, jagged, pine-clad, and snow-capped. The Okirrihs are fat, round, and gentle. The Great Salt Lake lies like a giant mirror off to the north-west.

Seven mountain streams flow into the city. Throughout the summer both State and Main Street have fresh canyon water running along the gutters.

During Christmas week Salt Lake City is even more beautiful; it is often called the "Christmas City". Almost every shop, apartment building, and personal residence has a fabulous outdoor electrical display in the yard or atop the roof depicting some Christmas story, legend, or fairy-tale.

We inspected them all and, on our last tour, we drove high up into City Creek Canyon. On the way back we made a sweeping turn among the dark-green trees and came suddenly upon Lookout Point. I stopped the car and we all got out for a view of the city.

Something urged me on ahead of the others. It was as though a hand was pushing me on the shoulders. A premonition of what I was to see began to grow on me. I stepped to the ledge, and there lying below me was the magic city I had seen so clearly in my dream. This was the very ledge I had stood upon with that wondrous and venerable figure. Below me the carbon-arc lights of the city twinkled merrily, and off to the right I could see the same moon reflected in the great lake. I was lost in the wonder of that sweet dream.

"Daddy looks funny," I heard Michael say.

I turned to Marguerite. She knew something important had happened. I smiled at her. I pointed to the city below and quoted the words of the figure in my dream.

"This is the city."

Marguerite asked me many questions about my dream that night. I described once again the feeling of inner joy it had brought. I pictured also the one who had stood on the ledge with me in the dream and made me the promise that some day I would see this city. Marguerite went downstairs. Soon she came back with a framed photograph. She handed it to me.

I looked into those same haunting, tender eyes. I saw the white beard, soft as silk, the flowing white robes, the smile of eternal kindness. I was deeply moved.

"This," I said to her, "is the man."

She said, "That is 'Abdu'l-Bahá."

CHAPTER 20

THE MYSTERIOUS "GUESSED-ROOM" AND THE HAUNTING STRAINS OF A VIOLIN

I LAY AWAKE FOR several hours, disturbed. I knew I could no longer ignore what was happening to me. I closed my eyes, and I could see my father's face peering at me under the bedclothes on that night when he had caught me reading the Bible by flashlight.

"Some day," I had told him, "I'm going to find out all about God—something nobody knows. Then I'm going all over the world and tell people about my discovery."

Had the day come? I had to know.

The very next Sunday I gathered up an armful of Bahá'í books, arranged the pillows on the sofa in the den, and settled down for a full, peaceful day of research. I hung a hand-printed sign on the door: "MILITARY ZONE—ANYONE WHO KNOCKS WILL BE PROSECUTED!"

It was the first Sunday in months that we didn't have company. Our guest-room always seemed to be full of transients. We called it the "guessed" room; each day when I came home from work I guessed who was in it. We bought a large loose-leaf binder for a visitors book, and I would open it each evening and say to Marguerite, "Whom do we have registered to-day?"

Marguerite loved to have people around, and she had more friends than Santa Claus. I remember coming down to breakfast one day and greeting our guest cheerfully.

"Good morning, Mrs. Cleighton."

She smiled. "I'm not Mrs. Cleighton. She left an hour ago. I'm Mrs. Lewis. I just arrived."

However, on this particular Sunday I had the house all to myself. I selected a book at random and began to read:

“A Bahá’í must be hospitable. His home must be open to the faces of friends and strangers alike. He must welcome each guest with cheerfulness and kindness so that each visitor will feel that this home is his home. It should be a haven of rest and peace.”

I chuckled approvingly. No wonder Marguerite kept the hinges on the doors warm with the coming and going of her friends.

I leaned back on the pillows and closed my eyes so that I could meditate on those pleasant words on this lazy Sunday.

Crash!

The window behind me fell over my shoulders in a cascade of glass, and there landed in my lap a round, hard, horsehide covering known as a baseball. Soon a small, startled face appeared in the window opening. It had two fried eggs for eyes (dark brown yokes) and a Salt Lake Bees baseball cap sitting at a rakish angle on its head.

Billy said, “Anything come in here?”

I pointed to the glass in my lap.

“Besides that I mean,” he said.

I showed him the baseball, got up, opened a desk drawer, put the baseball inside, and locked the drawer. Billy sighed. He turned in the window and called out:

“I think the game is over, fellers. My father’s resting.”

I brushed the glass splinters from my trousers, cutting two fingers and a thumb. After first-aid I went for a long walk in the cool air, and came back a gentler man. The house was deathly silent. Marguerite apparently had issued an ultimatum to the boys that I was not to be disturbed. I went up to the bedroom to lie down. On the bed-table there was a glass of milk, a stack of Graham crackers, and a bag

of freshly roasted peanuts. There was also the new murder mystery by Agatha Christie. It was sitting on top of a book which was bound with a special leather cover. I opened that one first. It was called: *The Bahá'í Proofs*.

I glanced at the first page and read the words: "Let him who hath an eye to see, see; and him who hath an ear to hear, hear."

I closed it quickly.

I picked up the murder mystery. Inside the title page of the mystery there was a note from Marguerite. It said: "Coward!" With a chuckle I put the mystery down and picked up the *Book of Proofs* again. Michael stuck his blond head inside the door.

"Your wife wants to see you," he said.

Oh, oh! Trouble! On the way downstairs I looked closely at Michael. "What's that on your nose?" I asked.

"Blood."

"Orange blood?"

Marguerite was waiting for me in the den. As I walked into the room, Billy's expression said, "You're looking at an innocent boy."

Someone had smeared great orange smudges on the landscape I had been painting. Michael didn't say anything, but his orange nose was quite eloquent. In a sudden torrent of words he broke his silence. He explained that he'd heard me say it was a picture of California, and Mother always said that California was filled with orange trees—so!

I took him into the living-room for a man-to-man talk. He looked so sad and tiny seated in the big easy-chair. He sat with his head in his hands filled with obvious remorse. I could hear him softly berating himself for what he had done. How could I punish him further? I couldn't hear the words of his self-denouncement, but the sound was both

pitiful and mournful. I leaned closer to catch the words. Very softly and very rhythmically, he was whispering, "Smoke cools! Smoke cools! Smoke cools!"

I went back to my bedroom to study. I tried another book at random and began to read.

"The most vital duty of every loyal follower of Bahá'u'lláh is to purify his personal character, correct his manners, improve his conduct, and to work for the betterment of the world and its people."

"I can't fight that," I thought.

Marguerite came in with some coffee and some egg sandwiches on a tray.

"Don't study too long," she said, "it's your day off."

"So far," I told her, "I've had a lucky string of seventeen whole minutes without an earthquake." I poured a cup of coffee and gave her a kiss. "That's in place of two lumps of sugar."

I tapped one of the books. "This is quite beautiful, really. I'm even getting used to the idea that the Bahá'í Faith is oriental."

Marguerite laughed. "I suppose you could call it oriental, if the Faith of Christ and that of Moses were oriental."

"Bahá'u'lláh came from Persia, didn't he?"

She nodded. Then added, "But where do you think Christ came from? Chicago?"

"You're getting more like Grandfather every day."

Marguerite knew she had aroused my curiosity. A strange feeling of excitement began to stir within me. I began to read with eager anticipation and was immersed in my book in earnest, when the piercing wail of a death-cry penetrated my consciousness.

It is very difficult for fathers to live in this world. I sighed patiently, and went out into the hall. Billy was standing

inside the door of his bedroom with his violin tucked under his chin, earnestly beginning to practise his third lesson.

I knew that Francis Bacon had had music played in his study while he worked, and that John Milton listened to the organ for inspiration, but have you ever sought out a deep significant truth while a small child bounced between the *A* and the *E* strings on a fiddle—after only three lessons?

I gave Billy the cold glassy-eye I had learned from my own father.

"I'm not disturbing you in here, am I, with my noisy thinking?"

"No, Daddy. You go right ahead. Mother says if I can't learn to be a baseball player like Joe DiMaggio, I should learn to play the violin like Jascha Heifetz."

"To-day?"

"It may take a couple of years," he admitted, quite honestly.

I could see Heifetz scurrying all through gangland looking for a trigger-man, and waving his cadenza finger towards Salt Lake City: "Rub out that kid! And split the bill between me, Menuhin, and Alfred Campoli."

Billy would scrape uncertainly, usually on the wrong string, and sing out the name of each note in a high screech that sounded like a First World War plane coming down in distress.

"A-Open! E-Open! A-Open! E-Open!"

Scrape, sing; bow, chant. The dogs became terrified whenever the battle began. The cats, perhaps with a natural instinctive knowledge concerning the material upon which Billy was bowing, lit out for the cellar. Spook crawled on his belly under the table and rolled over on his back with his paws up in the air. Chloe leaped on to the bed or sofa and burrowed under a pillow. Lady Windermere, the cocker, hurried to Billy's side and stood her ground. She leaned

against his leg and howled in unison with him, a piteous and mournful lament. A dog's equivalent of "A-Open! E-Open!"

Strangely enough, the instructor could smile cheerfully through an entire hour of this. Perhaps he was callused by years of hearing little men make A-Open sound like chalk squeaking on a school blackboard; or he may have witnessed the miracle of having one of his pupils graduate with honours into a flawless rendition of Wieniawski's Romanza Concerto #2 in D-Minor. Or, as Marguerite suggested, he may have been deaf.

I sighed. "All right," I told Billy. "You stay here. I'll go downstairs."

"Thank you, Daddy."

I went down and had it out with Marguerite.

"Bahá'u'lláh says to make your home a haven of rest and peace," I told her bluntly.

"Does he, dear?"

"He does. So how about it? Starting to-day?"

I took my pile of books and went out to the car. I got inside and locked all the doors, then drove into the garage.

CHAPTER 21

THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN AND HIS BLUE-EYED MISTRESS

YOU CAN SMELL trouble coming. Although I must say that Tuesday started out like any other normal day. I overslept, grabbed a cup of coffee going through the front door, dented a fender on the way to the Studios, got a parking ticket, and was given two special interviews to record for the late-afternoon sports show because the sports announcer had lost his voice.

Both interviews were with wrestlers, who had flown in from Los Angeles for the big match the following night. This was before the advent of Gorgeous George.

The secret of a good interview is to get the subject to talk and to keep your own mouth shut. I was prepared for the worst. So many wrestlers have a way of looking at you across the microphone as though at any moment they might snap you into an "Indian-death-lock".

The first wrestler was an Oxford man, and I don't mean the shoes. He had more degrees than a thermometer and was married to a princess of one of the South Pacific Islands. He had an accent that made Ray Noble sound like William Bendix. He could talk for two hours on the specific gravity of a black-eyed pea. In fact, all I said was, "Well, Bob, glad you dropped in. How's . . ."

"Grand!" he replied. "Never better."

"Do you think that . . ."

"Certainly!" he assured me. "I'll tie him in knots like the Laocoon."

"But," I went on, "do you think that . . ."

"Are you serious? I'll have him wailing like King Lear in five minutes." He chuckled. "The last time we met, I threw him right out of the ring. He caught his tights on the ring-post and landed among the gentlemen of the Press with less on than one of Botticelli's paintings of . . ."

"I know what you mean," I cut in. "But it seems to me . . ."

"You're absolutely right. On some occasions this chap is as difficult to pin down as the meaning of *Tertium Organum*, but I always wrestle him with my head."

"You're sure you don't talk him to death?"

Those were the last words I spoke until sign-off. I had to do everything but put a burlap sack over his head to cut off his comparison between his own muscles and the Ural Mountains. He also warned me about my second interview.

"This rascal is as strong as Rustum but as silent as Harpo Marx," he explained. "Sure you don't want me to stand by and handle the interview for you?"

I was sure. But I was wrong; he should have stayed. It took me three minutes even to draw out a greeting from the second wrestler. His speciality was to enter the ring with a black cape, a black sombrero, and a guitar, and sing *El Rancho Grande*. George was from Latvia, but he loved Mexico. He had a trained wildcat that sat on the ring-post in his corner and hissed at the referee. George could sing, but he couldn't talk. I asked him what he thought of his opponent, and after another three minutes, just when I was at the point of sending out to the water-cooler for a glass of water to prime him, he came through beautifully.

"Planty tough boy," he confided.

I nodded. "In fact, this match to-morrow night looks like a veritable battle of Armageddon (you can see where my mind was) wouldn't you say?"

Summoning all his resources, he said, "Huh?"

"I say, this chap you're wrestling. He's established quite an enviable record for himself both here and abroad."

"Where?"

"What's your opinion of him?" I repeated. This question seemed safe.

I cleaned my nails, wrote a note to the control-room to put two lumps of sugar in my coffee, and was picking the horse in the third race at Santa Anita, when he looked up at me, smiled, and ad-libbed at length.

"He's tough boy."

With that outburst, he began to size up the mike, looking for an opening for a "body-scissors".

"Will you make him knuckle under to-morrow, George?"

"He's planty tough."

I could see he was beginning to tire. "Who would you say was your most difficult opponent to date?"

That was easy for him. He said, "Texas."

I nodded. "Very good boy. Big, too. Got it all over North Carolina."

"Planty tough."

I said goodbye to George from behind the studio piano. I'd shaken hands with him when he came in, and my fingers still felt like fresh modelling clay.

On the way home, I thought to myself, "Radio's pretty wonderful at that. No wires, and the man's talking all the way from London."

Everyone was asleep when I got home, so I undressed quietly, turned out the light, and went to sleep. I was awakened some time later by a loud cracking noise. It sounded as though someone were ripping up the deck on a barge inside my semicircular canals. I reached up and turned on the bed-light.

Sitting on my bed-table, holding an unshelled peanut in

his hand, was a large white mouse. I mean large. His eyes were as red as a Utah University football jersey. We both leaped at the same time. He landed on the middle of the bed which I vacated, and I landed in the middle of Marguerite's.

She opened her eyes long enough to tell me that my two interviews had been very amusing. I didn't answer, I just pointed an accusing finger at the wine-eyed monster on my bed.

"Oh, him," she said with a happy smile. "That's Whitey, the darling white mouse I bought for Michael. He lives downstairs."

"Tell him to go home."

How the mouse found out that I always kept a bag of freshly roasted peanuts on my bed-table, I'll never know. Unless someone tipped him off. Marguerite was sweet about it. She definitely took my side and scolded Whitey severely, telling him to go right downstairs this minute and not to disturb Daddy.

I pointed out coldly, "I am not the rat's father."

From that moment on, I christened him "The Abominable Snowman". Billy stuck his head in through the door. He was holding a glass of milk in one hand, and rubbing his sleepy eyes with the other.

"How's Daddy doing?" he asked Marguerite.

She sighed. "He's planty tough boy."

In the short eternity during which I had known Marguerite she had already mothered the following pets: a ring-tailed monkey, two Russian wolfhounds (who were always swallowing fish-bones that I had to pull out with my bare fingers from six miles down their gullet), a small bear cub, two Siamese cats, a crow with a split tongue who could say only one word over and over, "Lovely! lovely!", two parakeets, a racoon, a chinchilla rabbit (mateless, naturally,

otherwise it would have been profitable), a baby skunk (that lasted just seven seconds trying to get through immigration at the front door), a stray Saint Bernard (whom she fed and permitted to sleep on my bed for three weeks while we searched for the owner, who turned out to be living across the street, where the dog went for lunch and dinner before checking in at our place for bed and breakfast), and eleven other assorted dogs and cats (most of whom were still with us), and now T.A.S., The Abominable Snowman. I felt just like the man in the story who had a houseful of smelly goats and when he was asked why he didn't open the windows, he said, "What? And lose all my pigeons?"

Marguerite was now wide awake. The white mouse took refuge on her shoulder and they both stared at me—two blue headlights and two red tail-lights.

Marguerite wanted to talk. I wanted to sleep. She kept nudging me with her elbow to keep me awake. Finally, she gave up. A moment later she was sound asleep, leaving me with wide-open melon eyes. I put out the light, and tried counting sheep. I sang all of the stanzas of the *Star Spangled Banner* to myself. Recited the Gettysburg Address backwards. No sleep. I finally gave up, put the light on, and started to read.

That was the beginning of the night from which I never recovered. Lying on the table beside me was the latest issue of my favourite magazine.

That struck me as very strange, as we had just agreed that we couldn't afford to subscribe to the magazine, but there it was beside me. As I turned the pages, I began to suspect a cunning hand behind this tender sacrifice.

The feature article was made up of newspaper headlines sent in from all over the United States. The editors of the magazine had asked the American newspaper editors to send

them what their paper would consider to be the most exciting and dramatic headline they could conceive. They were asked to turn their imaginations loose, and to send in a front page from their paper with a bold-type headline telling the story which they felt would be the most arresting to their readers if it were possible to print it.

There were some real thrillers which tickled me immensely. Such as:

“LOST CONTINENT OF ATLANTIS DISCOVERED AT LAST!”

“PEOPLE LAND FROM MARS!”

“SHAKESPEARE REALLY BACON!”

“ORIGINAL NOAH’S ARK SIGHTED!”

“KING SOLOMON’S MINES REOPENED!”

I spent quite a delightful twenty minutes until I read the headline which the majority of the newspaper editors chose as the most dramatic of all. This headline, they agreed, would cause the most electrifying shock of all among their readers if printed. It was told in two simple words:

“CHRIST RETURNS!”

Now I knew why Marguerite had bought the magazine. I quickly shut my mind to the thought and read some of the other headlines.

“HITLER ALIVE IN BUENOS AIRES!”

“CONAN DOYLE MAKES CONTACT WITH EARTH FROM SPIRIT WORLD!”

“EARTHQUAKE IN IRAQ REVEALS ORIGINAL GARDEN OF ADAM AND EVE!”

Inevitably I came back to the story which according to the nation-wide poll of editors would be the most thrilling and important news event which they could possibly offer

to their readers: "CHRIST RETURNS!" If they could honestly print this headline, they said, the world would stand on its ear.

I tried to picture what would happen in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, or Salt Lake City if Christ suddenly did appear on the streets.

What a commotion that headline would stir up. I chuckled to myself. Imagine America going out to pick up its morning milk and newspaper, and seeing the headline: "Jesus Here!"

But would any paper really print the headline? Or arrange press, radio, and television interviews? I doubted it. They ignored Him for over three hundred years the first time.

His story would probably be buried in a few lines lost among the advertisements, if it was considered worthy of any space at all: "Madman claims contact with God. The authorities acting for the protection of the village have committed an unknown agitator to the local asylum." That was much more likely.

I picked up the magazine again and read the article to the end. It pointed out that, ironically enough, some of the newspapers in the United States had already printed headlines about the return of Christ. That had been during the 1840s. At that time, in both the eastern United States, in Europe, and in the Middle East, there had been a strong feeling of expectation among certain groups that Christ would soon appear.

The article quoted a few of the news stories of that day. Some were written with tongue-in-cheek, some with profound sincerity, some in outright anger, some in jest:

"JESUS—EXPECTED ANY MOMENT!"

"CHRIST: COMING OR NOT?"

"PEOPLE SELL POSSESSIONS EXPECTING ADVENT!"

In the Congress of the United States in the 1870s debates arose concerning the possibility of this event being imminent.

Even the Shoshone Indians in Wyoming reported the soon-to-come-great-white Redeemer.

Now *I* was wide awake, and Marguerite was asleep.

“Marguerite?” I called softly. She didn’t answer. When I had come home I was sleepy and she wanted to talk. Now she was asleep and I wanted to talk. I felt just like the poor husband whose wife said to him, just as he reached up to pull out the light, “Bill, dear, remind me to tell you in the morning what I did to-day with our life-savings.”

Now it was impossible to sleep. I turned to the sports section of the magazine. Stuck between the pages I found a note from Marguerite, clipped to two theatre tickets.

“Don’t read too late. You have a date with a pretty blonde to-morrow night to see *Our Town* at Kingsbury Hall. By the way, the Bahá’í Faith began in the year 1844. Did you know that? And the *Book of Proofs* tells the story of what happened in 1844 and proves that Bahá’u’lláh is the return of Christ, no matter what you’re thinking right now.

“Don’t get upset. No one asked you to believe it—only to investigate it. It’s the greatest news story in the world. I didn’t say that. All those hard-boiled newspaper editors said it.

P.S. Have you finished the Proofs? Don’t wake me, I’m sleeping.”

I grinned to myself. What a lucky man I was. A beautiful wife, two fine trouble-making sons, three kittens on the foot of my bed, two cats meowing to get in from the roof, a cocker spaniel barking downstairs, one dachshund snoring under the bed and beating the floor and whimpering in a

nightmare, another dachshund chewing on a bone over the hollow spot on the hall floor, and The Abominable Snowman cracking peanuts by my ear, and on my bed-table a book of Bahá'í Proofs that might upset my whole life.

Was there any luckier guy in all the world, I asked myself? But I didn't answer.

CHAPTER 22

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE MISSING MILLENNIUM

THE NEXT MORNING at breakfast I said to Marguerite, "I read your magazine article last night."

"It wasn't *my* article," she said. "I just bought the magazine."

"I know why you bought it," I told her.

She was wearing a sea-green and white Mexican flared skirt with a white blouse, and sea-green matching shoes. She looked so sweet and innocent with those robin's-egg blue eyes that I hardly noticed The Abominable Snowman sitting on her shoulder.

I gave them both my father's "glassy eye". I said pointedly, "Two's company, three's a crowd."

Marguerite put the mouse in his house and said, "Go and play with your nice cheese; Daddy wants to talk about the magazine article."

I didn't want to talk about it. I wanted to think about it. So I said, "Ham and eggs and hold the conversation."

While I was eating, Michael brought in the morning mail. There was a postcard from Grandfather. All it said was: "Did everybody die?"

I wrote to him before going to work and told him what had been happening to me during the past few months. I promised to give him all the details as soon as I could. Three days later a telegram arrived.

SOONER

GRANDFATHER

Marguerite and I didn't discuss the magazine article for several days. I could tell she was wondering about it, because she was so extra thoughtful and considerate. I had my favourite dishes for three dinners in a row.

"I wish you wouldn't be so exceedingly kind and tolerant," I told her.

"All right," she said. "I'll get tickets to-night for *Rigoletto*."

"No need to go to the other extreme."

Marguerite drove me to work that morning—she and The Abominable Snowman, who suddenly appeared from under her coat collar. He stared at me accusingly. I said, "Don't be impatient. Give me until next month."

"It has nothing to do with me," Marguerite explained casually. "It's between you and God."

"I have to be honest."

"Of course you do," she agreed cheerfully. "After all, you had the dream, I didn't."

She kissed me lightly and said, "Have a nice day."

I got out. She rolled down the window for another kiss. It made up for the other one. I said patiently, "I have to be sure that Bahá'u'lláh is the one I'm looking for."

She nodded. "That's why you have a head and a heart. If, after reading the *Book of Proofs*, you're still not convinced that Bahá'u'lláh is the Promised One for this day, then you *must* refuse to believe in Him."

"I haven't read the *Book of Proofs* yet, and you know it," I told her, peevishly.

I heard her merry laugh as she rolled up the window and drove away. I had a hunch it was going to be one of those days. It was.

I was sick of words by the time I drove away from the station that night. Even so, I stopped at the library to pick up some books on astronomy. I was trying to track down a

hunch I had about a strange star and comet that had appeared at the time of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh just like the star that appeared at the time of the coming of Christ.

I was feeling very dispirited. I ate little for dinner, and as soon as we were finished I carried my armload of books into the living-room and dumped them on the sofa. Half-heartedly I began to thumb my way through them.

Marguerite brought me a second cup of coffee.

"Don't stay up too late," she said. Then she kissed me on top of the head. "Good luck."

Billy came in with the cream. "How's Daddy doing, Mother?" he asked Marguerite.

She smiled. "He's tough boy," she told him.

Billy agreed. "Planty tough."

Late that night I experienced one of those wonderful moments such as comes to a painter when his canvas suddenly begins to take shape under his brush, or to an archaeologist when a hill collapses, disclosing a hitherto undiscovered cave. It was the culmination of a long period of both study and prayer, and the result was satisfying to both my mind and my heart.

I have written the detailed story of this discovery and the steps that led up to it in another book which I have called *Thief in the Night!* The title is taken from Christ's quotation about the hour of His return when, catching mankind unprepared and uninterested, "He shall come like a thief in the night".

Originally I called the book *The Case of the Missing Millennium*, for it turned out to be one of the most absorbing and exciting mysteries imaginable—a real thriller. No one had been able to solve it for over a hundred years, when suddenly, in a few months, the answer had fallen right into my lap.

I wrote *Thief* so that those close friends with whom I had

worked so long and intimately in radio and television would understand why, at what they considered to be the height of a successful career in show-business, I turned my back on a television future and began to wander the world over.

"Whatever happened to Bill Sears?" is a question they still ask in Philadelphia, a friend wrote to me recently. The usual answer is, "Don't you know? Poor devil. He flipped his lid. Became a religious fanatic. Last I heard, he was somewhere in Tibet."

I have never been closer to Tibet than Karachi. The chances are that when the question was asked I was in Mycenae on holiday, taking pictures of the spot from where, legend has it, Agamemnon departed to help rescue Helen of Troy on behalf of his brother.

However, it *is* perfectly true that I did follow the footsteps of Bahá'u'lláh through many lands, making a personal investigation to support my theory that I had found the solution to one of the most intriguing unsolved mysteries of our age.

So that my friends would look upon me with a more sin-covering eye I set down the full record of the tantalizing story which captured first my attention, and finally my heart and allegiance.

I soon discovered that I was not alone in my search for the answer to this riddle of a century. Professor Edward Granville Browne of Pembroke College, Cambridge University, had broken the ground long before me. He wrote enthusiastically of the rise of this Faith.

"I feel it my duty, as well as pleasure, to bring the matter to the notice of my countrymen." He spoke of his eagerness to obtain as accurate an account as possible. "In my eyes," he said, "the whole (story) seems one of the most interesting and important events that have occurred since the rise of Christianity."

His contemporary, Professor Benjamin Jowett of Balliol College, Oxford, was even more emphatic. He said, "It is the greatest thing to come to the earth since the days of Jesus, the Christ. It is too great for the present to understand it, but the future will understand it."

It was exactly two forty-five a.m. when I found the story I had been searching for about the stars. It was like a key which opened the door to everything. I let out a spontaneous yell that would have shamed Geronimo.

Everyone in the family knew how much it meant to me to find that startling account. I'd talked about it at table for a long time. When they heard my shout they all rose from their beds like magic. When I looked up from the books I was surrounded by a ring of startled faces: Marguerite, Billy, Michael, Spook, Lady Windermere, Chloe, Cuckoo Berry, Lucia, and Hart-Schaeffner-and-Marx.

"Listen to this!" I cried joyfully. And then I told them the amazing story of the stars and comets that had heralded the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh. Even Marguerite was enthralled. I, myself, felt just like a man who had brought in the world's biggest gusher. Was this the end of my long search? Had I found the meaning of my dream at last? I had to know.

I threw the books into the air, swept Marguerite into my arms, and began to waltz around the room with her. She was half laughing and half crying. Billy, who felt that he had to fiddle on every gay occasion, ran and brought his violin. The boys didn't know quite what was happening, but they, too, were caught up in the excitement. To the tune of "A-Open, E-Open" and my humming of *Casey Will Waltz With a Strawberry Blonde*, and Lady Windermere's plaintiff howling, joy was unrestrained. Michael even brought The Abominable Snowman downstairs so that the entire family might enjoy this moment of complete abandon.

"You win," I told Marguerite. "I'm going into the den, and I'm going to read the *Book of Proofs*."

"Don't hurry," she said. "It's such a happy moment."

"I want to hurry," I said. "I've been waiting all my life for this moment."

She hugged me very tightly.

"No matter what happens when you come out of that room," she told me, "it will make no difference between us. I love you very much."

I went into the den and closed the door. I read steadily for over three hours. Then I put the book down. I got down on my knees and prayed until dawn. What went on during those hours is between God and myself.

When I came out, the family was still in the living-room: Michael asleep on the sofa with Spook draped across his chest like a blanket: Billy in the big chair clutching his violin and surrounded by three dogs and two cats. Marguerite was wide awake. She was sitting on the big leather hassock from Khartoum. I could tell that she had been praying too.

When she heard the door open she looked up quickly. She must have seen something in my face. She smiled, and came towards me. I took her in my arms.

I said, "I am a Bahá'í."

"I know," she told me. "I've always known."

I sent the *Book of Proofs*, along with all the other material I had collected, to Grandfather. I didn't hear from him for several weeks. Finally, I telegraphed.

HOW ABOUT IT?

BILL

I got the following reply:

THINKING

GRANDFATHER

I waited another three weeks, then sent another wire.

WELL?

BILL

At last he replied.

ACTS TWELVE TWENTY-TWO

GRANDFATHER

I looked up the reference as soon as I came home from work. It was very brief:

And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a God and not a man.

CHAPTER 23

TELEVISION, OR COAST-TO-COAST WITH A CROW

MARGUERITE WAS A little upset because I was taking only one small trunk of clothes but six trunks full of books.

"I like to read," I told her.

"You won't have *time* to read in Africa," she said.

"I noticed you packed your cerulean-blue formal."

"I may have to dress for dinner some night."

"Dress for it!" I laughed. "You may have to climb a tree for it!"

In just a few short days Michael, Billy, Marguerite, and myself would be sailing for Cape Town aboard the *African Sun*. For me it was to be the first leg of a journey that would carry me over 250,000 miles through Africa, Europe, North and South America, Asia, Australia, and the islands of the Pacific, the equivalent of ten times around the world.

I had just kissed goodbye to a television job which offered me as a starter \$50,000 a year. Still my heart was as light as the top of a dry dandelion. I spun Marguerite around and kissed her soundly.

"Tell me, Princess," I asked her, "is this really happening to that small boy from Minnesota, or am I mad?"

Billy said, "I know the answer to that."

"You keep out of this."

Judged by the standards of the world, I had not done too badly in my profession. I had come to Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, to work for WPEN, the *Evening Bulletin*

Station. I handled the University of Pennsylvania basketball games and the Villanova University football games. I was the American Master-of-Ceremonies for the BBC programme *Inter-National Quiz*, and we had just been given an Award. No cash, but a lovely Award. Now I know how my father had felt when I'd won the plaque for my first play. It was a sweet thing, but you can't eat an Award.

When the Philadelphia *Bulletin* purchased WCAU Radio and Television, I moved from Walnut to Chestnut Street and became a Sportscaster on TV.

I floated around the country broadcasting the professional football games for the Philadelphia Eagles, and put in a season doing the Penn games on TV.

Suddenly I was making more money than my creditors could ask for. So we moved to Downingtown near Westchester. We bought a farm. Rather, we bought a house on a lot of land. I thought it was Cape Cod style. Marguerite insisted that it was Colonial. But I think Billy was right. He called it "early American Indian". It had more holes in it than a clarinet, and on a windy day you could hear the house play *Where! Oh, where has my little dog gone?* But that was all right. Marguerite still had a houseful of dogs, and no one ever knew where they were: Fafnir, Socrates, Tristram and Isolde, Lazy Moon, and Krause. All dachshunds except Fafnir. He was a boxer. He looked more like a wrestler.

A few months later I was given the job of Master-of-Ceremonies for the *Miss America* pageant semi-finals. We had to pick a Miss Greater-Philadelphia. Ed Sullivan came down from New York to be one of the judges. The assignment brought me a rise in pay, so we decided to move to a new apartment. Billy was quite thrilled. He said he wasn't superstitious, but he didn't like to sleep thirteen

in a bed. With the dogs and cats, his count was just about right.

The first year I was in television for WCAU, the magazine *TV-Guide* gave me an "Oscar" for the most outstanding sports show.

It was a sports show with laughs. The dyed-in-the-wool sports fans would have shot me dead on the street at sight, but those who liked a laugh with their dinner tuned in each night to watch. It was at that time that I dreamed up the idea of using a unicorn (a hand puppet) to help me keep my baseball records straight. Before I got started with the idea, Paul Ritts suggested a chipmunk, and said he thought he could make one. He did, and it was superb. Paul could speak in more voices than the Vienna Boys choir, so he became Albert, the chipmunk. He suggested half a dozen other fine ideas for the show too. Paul was not a Bahá'í, but I think Albert the chipmunk was. I'll tell you why.

Albert became the central character in a half-hour comedy drama which Paul and I wrote for CBS. It was called *In The Park*. I played a kindly old man who sat on the Central Park bench and who, because of his purity of heart, could talk to the animals.

Paul carved and fashioned a crow named Calvin, a giraffe named Sir Geoffrey, and an ostrich named Magnolia Blossom. Mary Holliday, Paul's wife, became the voice of Magnolia. She sang like a nightingale and looked like a bird of paradise.

Paul had a remarkable gift both for writing and for acting, and it's not easy to be a chipmunk, a giraffe, a crow, and a first-class director. We soon won the hearts of America each Sunday at twelve noon. During the summer months, our programme would open by showing the walking feet of a worker sweeping the sidewalk in Central Park with a big broom. As the leaves were swept aside, the titles of

the programme were uncovered, written in chalk upon the sidewalk:

IN THE PARK
WITH BILL SEARS
AND THE ANIMAL FRIENDS OF
PAUL RITTS AND MARY HOLLIDAY

In the winter the same feet in galoshes shovelled the snow off, revealing the credits.

I mention this programme in some detail as it was directly responsible for resetting my compass to the true north. It was a “three laughs and a tear” programme.

I put on my own make-up each Sunday, except for the first programme. That day we had a theatre expert in to make me look about seventy-five. I sat patiently in the chair while he whitened my hair and moustache and wrinkled up an otherwise perfectly good but average face. When he was finished I stood up and looked in the mirror. It was a most unnerving experience. I was looking into an exact replica of the face of my grandfather! All I needed was the oats-box and a little boy to talk to, and I’d be in the grandfathering business. I found the little boy in Albert the chipmunk.

On the second year of our programme we wrote a special Christmas Day script. It was about a star on Albert’s Christmas tree which wouldn’t light up. Gus, the grey squirrel, who lived in a tree down in the Park, had “measles”, so none of the animals would go to visit him for Christmas. In fact, they decided to keep all his presents for themselves. Calvin, the crow, said he *would* like to give Gus something for Christmas—the “measles”—but Gus had already had them. Sir Geoffrey, the giraffe, humbly admitted that Gus had a good streak in him—“if you cared to blast”. Magnolia was going to give Gus a pen, but she’d just learned to her

disgust, she said, that he was illiterate. Albert had bought a pair of boxing-gloves for Gus, but said he'd found someone more worthy of the gift that very morning when he'd been washing up and had looked in the mirror.

Albert came up and sat on my shoulder. "You're not mad at me, are you?" he asked.

"No, just disappointed."

He put his nose against mine and looked at me intently. "You've got real brown eyes."

"Thanks for the scoop," I said, echoing the words of my own father so many years ago in Minnesota.

Albert, the chipmunk, darted down into his hole in the big tree and came up with a mug of shaving-soap, a brush, and a razor to shave me for Christmas. He talked as he worked.

"Why is it that you human beings are so nice here in the park at Christmas time, for about two weeks, and so miserable the rest of the year? Most of the people who come in here during the year have a face like wet seaweed, but at Christmas—honeysuckles! How do you account for that?"

"People are like the moon," I told him. "The moon has no light of its own. Gets it all from the sun. When the moon is turned towards the earth it's the dark of the moon. It gives no light. But when the moon turns away from the earth and faces the sun, it gradually becomes beautiful. First it's a silver sliver; then it's a quarter moon, a half, three-quarters; until finally when it turns its back entirely on the earth and faces directly to the sun, it becomes a big round shining full moon. And that's the time it sheds the most light on this dark world."

"You're sure a pretty talker," Albert said, and I could hear myself speaking to Grandfather as he forked hay down into Beauty's manger.

"That's the way it is with people too, Albert," I explained.

“When their hearts are turned toward the material things of this world, they’re dark. There’s no light in their faces or in their hearts. But when they turn away from the earthly things towards God they become bright and shiny inside. At Christmas time for a fleeting few days they’ve forgotten the things of the world and have turned to His Holiness Christ, so there’s a new spirit in the world and it’s a very nice place to live in for a while.”

The animals all got the idea. Calvin dropped marshmallows through Gus’s chimney pretending he was trying to bomb him instead of doing something nice, but I understood. Sir Geoffrey brought Gus a load of wood for his fireplace. “I still dislike him,” he said, “but I can dislike him when he’s warm as well as when he’s cold.” Magnolia asked me to turn my head, and with a little cry of pain she pulled a feather out of her tail. With lowered eyes she said, “It’s a quill pen.” I told her, “It’s the nicest gift of all—a bit of yourself.” Albert came up wearing the boxing-gloves. “You’re a nice old geezer, Bill, and I know what you meant by the story, and *who* you meant, too; so I’m going to give the boxing-gloves to Gus, after all. But I’m going to keep them on my hands until I get there in case I want to give him a good swat on the chin first.”

As Albert walked off, the Christmas music increased in intensity and the cameras slowly moved in on the Christmas tree with its unlighted star. Gradually it began to glow inside and eventually became a shining brilliant star.

Ed Sullivan was watching the programme in his hospital room in New York. He called us after the broadcast and said it had been a very heart-warming Christmas story. He asked us if we could appear on his *Toast of the Town* Variety Show the following Sunday. We were delighted, since his full hour was recognized in the business as the “top” variety show on television.

People in television and sometimes in the show-business columns call Ed Sullivan the "Great Stone Face", among other things, but we found by working with him that he had a heart as tender as an Irish lullaby, and was one of the genuinely nice people in the business.

The programme made a big hit, and we received phone calls and telegrams from all over the country. Ed was kind enough to invite us to come back for a second appearance on St. Patrick's Day.

However, it was during that Christmas-week broadcast on *Toast of the Town* that Albert set my feet back on the path.

Albert looked at me with that intensely human cock of his head which Paul had perfected, and echoed words which Grandfather and I had spoken on the day of the great fire.

"It's a funny thing. Here we are: you an old man, me a young boy. And we're talking about God. And enjoying it. How do you account for that?"

I chuckled. "Maybe it's because you *are* a young boy and I *am* an old man. You're close to God on one end, and I'm close to Him on the other. In between, people seem to have forgotten."

I was back in the barn in the sleepy old-fashioned village of Aitkin, Minnesota. I was on the oats-box again, asking, asking, with Grandfather always answering. I nearly leaned over and gave Albert a whisker-rub.

When our guest-appearance ended with the lighting up of the star to the beautiful music of Ray Bloch and his orchestra, there was a brief interview with Ed Sullivan in front of the curtain.

He told the story of just seeing the programme from his hospital bed, and he assured everyone I was not as old as I looked. I mentioned on behalf of the family who might be watching in Milwaukee and in Minnesota that this was not

Grandfather Wagner they were looking at, nor had I suddenly turned this aged from the television industry. I hoped Grandfather was watching the programme and that the echo of his own voice had pleased him.

Marguerite and Billy and Michael drove me back along the New Jersey Turnpike to Philadelphia. I was very quiet. Albert's words had made me think. Had I turned my face fully to the sun? I received a telegram the next day from Grandfather. It was as though he had read my thoughts. It said simply: "Don't drop the torch!"

A few Sundays later we did a programme showing exactly how the old man had happened to come into the park in the first place, and why he started talking with the animals. I felt strange inside as we wrote the script. It was a startling but unintended parallel of my own life:

Old "Bill" according to the script had once been a young, energetic, junior advertising executive with a crew hair-cut and a brief-case and a regular seat on the commuting train from Stamford, Connecticut. He was, oh, so busy with such important things. Rush, rush, rush! Until one day he realized that he was missing far more than he was getting, so he threw his brief-case into the trash-basket, walked into the park, and sat down on the bench by Albert's tree.

Over and over in his mind he kept repeating a nursery rhyme he had chanted as a child:

"Where are you running so fast, old man?

What must you catch just as fast as you can?"

"I must catch the horizon! Can you help me, Oh, please!

For the faster I run, the faster it flees!"

"Bill" decided to step off the treadmill and to go back and do the things which as a young boy, deep in his heart, he had always wanted to do. He wanted to be a writer and to talk about the beautiful things of life. So he bought a ten-cent notebook, sat down on the bench, and wrote: *Bill Sears*,

My Life. He looked up and saw Albert the chipmunk staring at him.

“Good morning,” Albert said cheerily. “We’ve been expecting you.”

You know sometimes how someone hums or sings a tune and for hours or days you repeat it yourself and can’t get it out of your consciousness? I was having that trouble with the nursery rhyme. I went out to St. David’s and began a round of golf with Bill Hart, Alan Scott, and Gene Crane. I didn’t even hear the creative insults during the round, some of which, I was told later, were based upon pure classical myths. All I could hear was:

“Where are you running so fast, little man?”

Bill Sears, My Life.

“What must you catch just as fast as you can?”

Bill Sears, My Life.

CHAPTER 24

HO! HUM! SAME OLD ROUTINE: LONDON, PARIS, ROME, ATHENS, ISTANBUL, RANGOON, BANGKOK, SHANGHAI, HONOLULU, SANTIAGO, BUENOS AIRES, AND RIO, OR SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW

WHEN I HAD BEEN no higher than Mickey Mantle's bat I had promised God and myself that if I ever found out the truth about my dream I'd go all over the world and share the news of my discovery. I had never kept that promise.

I had written several radio and television scripts for the Bahá'í Faith; I'd been a member of its National Radio Committee; I'd even published an essay on my belief in Edward R. Murrow's compilation *This I Believe*; but of late I had been gradually sinking back into that formula of success: Get up, go to work, go to the bank, go to bed, die.

Marguerite knew I was very troubled. She suggested that we all go to the Intercontinental Conference of the Bahá'ís at Chicago.

It was also my first visit to the Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, Illinois. I could see at once why it had been called the "first new idea in architecture since the thirteenth century". It was a beautiful dream made into reality with stone. A committee on historical research had traced the ownership of the land on which the Temple stood back to an American Indian tribe whose chieftain was named Archangel.

I sat under the lofty dome and heard words of inspiration read from the holy Books of all Faiths. I recalled how 'Abdu'l-Bahá had stood on this barren plain during those

days when I was first having my dream and had dedicated the land and the Universal House of Worship which was to be built upon it, to the welfare of men of all religions, nations, and races. He had prophesied that when this Temple was dedicated, from that centre the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh would be carried to every corner of the planet.

Now we were present at the dedication, listening to the magnificent music of the choir glorifying the oneness of God, His Messengers, and all His creatures.

The next day in Chicago there began a great spiritual World Crusade, reminiscent of the crusade which sent Paul, Peter, Barnabas, Timothy, and the Apostles of Christ into the countries and villages of Europe.

There was a message to the Conference from the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, the World Head of the Bahá'í Faith. It was an inspiring call for pioneers to go to far-distant lands. Now I understood the full meaning of my dream. The time had come to "fish" like Peter, through the seven seas for the souls of men.

I had always known in my heart that it is not enough merely to believe, but perhaps I had hoped, as Jonah had, that someone else would go to Nineveh.

I had quoted the words of the Greek philosopher to Marguerite too many times to try to evade their meaning now: "Seek the truth. Decide in your own heart if it be true or false. If it be false, oppose it with all your might; but, if it be true, arise and serve it steadfastly to the end."

At lunch-time the Sears all began talking at once. Apparently everybody had the same idea, although their destinations were a bit far apart.

Michael said, "How about China?"

"Hawaii, I think," Billy suggested.

Almost in one breath, Marguerite and I said, "Africa."

Saying goodbye to Grandfather was not going to be easy.

I seemed to be connected to the old man by a giant rubber-band. The farther I drew away, the tighter the bond became. I felt that if I were to lift my feet off the ground I would snap right back to the oats-box.

Marguerite helped me to arrange a special broadcast with Grandfather before we left Philadelphia. I talked with him on my broadcast by long-distance telephone to Minnesota. I had been telling stories about him to my listeners for years, so they all felt that they knew him. It was his birthday; it was also a farewell. We both knew we would never talk to each other again, but we never let on.

I expected Grandfather to sound feeble and remote. He was now in his 'nineties. He came on the air as fresh and vigorous as Mel Allen during a Yankee rally.

"Do you think you'll ever amount to anything?" was the first thing he asked me.

"I'll make a try," I answered.

I sounded much older than he did. I had a lump in my throat the size of an orange.

"Happy birthday, Grandfather."

"I've had so many," he said, "I feel like I'm cheating. They still haven't moved me out of the leaky barn. It's not much fun living in it any more."

Out of the blue, he suddenly asked:

"Still got Dakar's first-place medal?"

"Right here," I told him, tapping my wallet.

"Don't settle for second. Stay out in front and don't let them pocket you over there in the jungles. And, son——"

"Yes?"

"Don't call me this late at night again. I'm an old man."

I could hear him laugh as he hung up. I could almost see him digging Uncle Cliff in the ribs and crowing, "I may out-live the country."

Slowly I replaced the telephone receiver.

"Goodbye, Grandfather," I said.

The old man received hundreds of birthday cards the next week from people from all over the country who felt they knew him. I'm sure it pleased him very much.

Grandfather made a journey, too. He went with Uncle Cliff all the way out to the West Coast. He missed the barn and the horses, so he got a little garden plot of land outside of town, and each day he would go hobbling along through town to his garden. When he couldn't move about he knitted socks and sweaters as gifts for the grandchildren. Everybody knew him, and when he, like old Prince, just went to sleep one night and didn't wake up, one of the newspaper columnists wrote a tribute to him, a stranger who had come to their city and in a few short months had conquered their hearts with the philosophy that: "There *are* no strangers. They're just friends I haven't met yet."

We sold our farm and all our possessions. Even up to the end, many of our friends thought it was only a publicity stunt.

"You're really going?" they'd say, surprised.

"You're giving up everything?"

Marguerite said it best. "We're giving up nothing. *Everything* is in the going."

"I never took you kids for religious bugs. It's taken you all your life, Bill, to get where you are now. Most guys would give their right arm for your job, and you're tossing it away like a used banana peel."

"You hardly have time to carry your money to the bank these days, Bill. You've got it made! Stick around."

"He feels that he's got to go to Nineveh," Marguerite explained.

"Where?"

"Nineveh."

"I thought you were going to Africa?"

"We are."

"You kids better buy yourselves an atlas. You may never even get to New York."

Our African journey brought us all days of unforgettable happiness, excitement, and laughter. I have told the story in another book called *Black Sunlight*. This story of a boy and his dream had ended at the foot of the rainbow.

* * * * *

Michael is now studying to be an architect; Billy wants to be a writer; Marguerite wants another dachshund. Oh, yes, she's still the Animal Lady. When she walks round the property in the mornings they still string out behind her. She still looks like the engine on a long New York Central freight train. We have chickens, chinchilla giganticus rabbits, and two peacocks. One peacock climbs to the top of every fence we put up, so he is called *Sir Edmund*. One won't even try. He is called *Lord Listless*. There are the two dachshunds Cyrano and Roxane, the two Ridgeback watchdogs *Big Finnegan* and *Scotland Yard* (I've always wanted a dog with that name so I could look up dramatically to Marguerite and say, "Call the Yard!"), a puppy which is part ridgeback and part bull-mastiff. It grows with alarming rapidity, as though someone were blowing it up like a balloon. When it was sent to us from a nearby farm Billy took one look and said:

"They've made a mistake and sent us the farm."

It's name is Sugar-bush. We also have cats named Figaro, Mr. Murphy, Kubla Khan, as well as a litter in my brown suit that are not named as yet. I suggest the sextette from Lucia, but Marguerite said, "Don't start that again."

We have no right to be so happy. It is a wonderful place to come home to. It is almost always filled with people.

The Bahá'í teachings say, "If you want a palace in paradise, make your home the gathering place for friends."

I am still trying to fulfil that hunger in my heart to share the news of this wonderful day with people everywhere in the world. I have travelled over a quarter of a million miles. I come home just long enough to earn enough money for another journey.

I write a little, broadcast a little, and travel a lot.

I went to Israel so that I could make a personal and detailed investigation of all the places visited there by Bahá'u'lláh.

Marguerite, Bill, Michael, and Cyrano drove me out to the airport to see me off. How many times we have said goodbye in the past five years, and in how many different parts of the world. Marguerite's life is given to spreading the Bahá'í Faith also, and frequently we drive, sail, or fly in opposite directions.

"I don't like goodbyes," she said wistfully as we parted one day at the London Airport.

"If there were no *goodbyes*," I told her, quoting an African proverb, "there would be no *hellos*."

She went on a journey through India, Burma, Thailand, and Malaya. She sent a cable home from Singapore.

"Miss you."

Bill answered her: "You certainly did. Dad's in Haifa, remember?"

I cabled one day from Stuttgart, Germany, to Tucson, Arizona. Marguerite's mother answered: "Marguerite is in Mexico." Marguerite cabled to Stuttgart upon her return, only to hear: "Bill is in Greece."

One afternoon I was sitting in the restaurant at Ciampino Airport in Rome waiting for flight SA 121 to Nairobi. I was enjoying a glass of Perrier water and Art Buchwald's column in the French edition of the *Herald Tribune*, when a shadow

crossed the table. I looked up. It was Marguerite as fresh and full of life as the day I had first seen her through that studio window.

"Going my way?" I asked.

She showed me her ticket. Flight SA 121 to Nairobi.

"What's new?"

She said, "Nothing. Same old thing: Mexico, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, London, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Rome, Istanbul, New Delhi."

Our laughter attracted considerable attention and disapproval. The loudspeaker called out our plane, and as we walked hand-in-hand across the runway towards the big DC7 I thought of many things: the time we had gone for days without food in Salt Lake City, until finally we scraped together enough for a big bowl of soup. We lighted candles on the table, and for a centre-piece I had carried in the dachshund, Spook, lying flat on his back on a serving tray. The boys broke into tears thinking we were going to eat him, jumped up in fear, and upset all our soup on to the floor.

The time I raced our Jeep station-wagon down the Schuylkill River Drive rushing to Hahnemann Hospital, holding Marguerite up with one arm, as she was gradually dying beside me. It was the night we lost our child.

The time we were down to our last three dollars with no resources in sight. Marguerite said, "We're going about this the wrong way. It's negative. I'm going out and spend the three dollars on a good dinner."

"It's not three dollars," I told her. "It's one pound, one and six."

"I'm getting a strange feeling," she said, "something is breathing over me."

"That's me," I said ungrammatically, "taking a last look at the three dollars."

She came back with the ingredients for a wonderful dinner, "so that we can celebrate," she said.

"Celebrate what?" I asked.

"The fact that we're going to have such a splendid dinner." She smiled. "And who knows, maybe something else."

She was right, of course. I came home the next day with a job.

Now, as the plane took off from Rome, bent away from Castel Gandolfo, and started climbing towards Naples, I said to Marguerite: "We've certainly followed Bahá'u'lláh's instructions in one thing."

"What, dear?"

"We've lived a full, rich life. We've extracted all the throbbing joy, wonder, awe, excitement, and beauty out of each minute. I've made more come-backs than a yoyo, and it's all been pretty special."

The plane came down from the Great Rift Valley and circled to land at Nairobi's new airport. I squeezed Marguerite's hand.

"Africa," I said.

"Happy?"

"To be back home?" I asked. "Of course. You can get weary of travelling. How about you?"

I looked in her lap. She had a Pan American flight schedule and two maps of South America and a strange light in those robin's-egg blue eyes.

We both began to laugh.

To myself I said, "I think God loves laughter. I know I do."