Tangible Evidence

Young Kipling Wiley silently inserted the key, and turned the knob with the greatest of caution. As he closed the door behind him, it gave only the merest hint of a squeak. Kipling mentally congratulated himself on the mouse-like quiet of his entrance, and then started across the floor on tip-toe.

“No use, Kip. The jig’s up.” Mr. Wiley’s deep voice came from the far end of the room.

Kipling stopped short and let his shoulders sag. Now he was in for it. Maybe a half-hour of tongue lashing, maybe an hour, if luck was against him. Bad luck had surely been dogging his footsteps. First he had had that blow-out which had made him late for Lucia just when he was taking her to a formal dance. This, in turn, caused both Lucia and him to have words several times while at the dance and finally ended by their climbing into his speedy roadster and driving toward home. But he stopped the car and would not continue until an understanding was reached. That’s why they had been late. The argument with Lucia ended by her stating that her unjeweled hand showed he had no more claim to her than anyone else. He nodded his head and sighed inwardly. These women!

He stretched his long body in the chair by the fireplace, his anatomy practically resting on the back of his neck. Glancing warily at his father, who sat silent and immobile, staring into the glowing embers of the fireplace, Kipling wished that the old boy would get going as long as a lecture was inevitable. After all, a guy needs some sleep!

But Mr. Wiley was in no hurry. He rose from the chair, threw fresh fuel on the fire, and stood watching the flames leap high as the greedy red-hot embers began to consume it. His stocky figure, inclined to corpulence, was silhouetted clearly against the flames, and Kipling eyed it with no small amount of trepidation. He didn’t like this unnatural silence.

Finally his father turned and lifted black, shaggy eyebrows. “Well, Kip,” he said, and extended a thin gold watch for inspection, “It’s three o’clock. What have you to say for yourself? And remember, before you explain, that your mother and I had your word of honor that you would positively be in at one-thirty. Of course, we had only your word for it, which evidently means nothing.”

Kipling swallowed hard. “Lord, Dad,” he said, “I honestly meant to, but—” Oh, what was the use! You couldn’t explain to Dad that Lucia was the only thing in life worth while. You couldn’t tell him that half the guys on the campus were making a play for her. Not that Lucia was fickle, but the competition was sure stiff. Oh, let Dad rave, you couldn’t make him understand really important things in life.

One thing he didn’t have to contend with was mother. She only made matters worse as she hovered uncertainly on the threshold and offered timidly, “Kippy, dear, why don’t you do as your father asks? He means it for your own good, and he does so many nice things for you.”

“Well, young man,” Mr. Wiley said mildly enough, “I see the time has come to take drastic measures. The next time you use your key at three o’clock in the morning, you’ll find it’s no use. The door will be barred on the inside.”

“Aw, dad—” Kipling began, but the flood gates were down, and the expected harangue, delivered in a wrathful, apoplectic manner, went booming through the long, high-ceil-
inged room, off to a start that promised unexpected dramatic action before it should decline and peter out. No use to say anything. The only thing left was to let the mind wander off to find its own means of escape. Just nod or shake your head when dad shouted, "Now, that's so, isn't it?" or "I'm not mistaken, am I?" For although Dad roared, threatened, and looked at times really dangerous, Kip knew that he was as confined by conventions and a gentle upbringing as the flames behind him were confined by the brick and iron solidity of the fireplace.

Suddenly, a subtle, clinging fragrance struck Kip's nostrils. Lucia! Some of that dope he had smelled on her new red formal. He leaned his sleek dark head toward the right shoulder of his tuxedo. Then he discovered that it was not Lucia's perfume, but that the odor came from a large bowl of American Beauty roses standing on the table at his elbow. It made him see Lucia almost as if she were standing there before him. What a lucky guy he was! He ought to learn to keep his mouth shut, and be grateful that she showed her preference by choosing him as an escort to the past few dances.

Kip put out a fore-finger and touched the nearest gorgeous bloom beside him; then he jerked his hand back, startled into full consciousness for a moment. His father had banged a great, tensely gripped fist down upon the table and had shouted, "PAY ATTENTION!"

"Yes, sir," Kip answered meekly, and looked at the slopped water and the two roses standing up-ended outside of the bowl. Those flowers were swell. He'd get his birthday check tomorrow and blow five bucks of it for some of the blooms. Perhaps Dad would feel a little ashamed of himself by tomorrow, and write a check for fifty dollars instead of the usual twenty-five. Then he could get a nifty engagement ring. Wow! Would that put him "in there pitching"; that is, if he could persuade her to wear such a ring. Well, he'd switch price tags, and she'd never know the difference. Yes, sir, a big bouquet of roses, and a diamond in a white velvet satin-lined box. Provided—

Again he was shocked from his reverie by more dramatic action on the part of his irate father. Mr. Wiley placed a check on the table.

"Pay to the order of—Kipling Wiley, Fifty Dollars—$50.00," Kip read. "You see," Mr. Wiley said, "I hadn't forgotten your birthday." He recovered the check and dropped it into the roaring fire. "Of course," he continued, "I could write another. It's only paper. But, believe me, Kipling Wiley, I won't! You not only blithely break every rule I set for you, but you insult me further by obviously paying no attention to anything I say regarding your ruthless disobedience."

"But look, Dad! Please—" Kip started, then was quiet. It was no use. The roses! He could manage them out of his allowance. But all hopes for the ring, the tangible evidence that Lucia was his, went chimney-ward with the hungry flames.

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**Indianapolis Times**  
MARGARET PARRISH

It is growing dark swiftly now. The slight mist that hovered around the Monument is getting heavier. Lights blink on to make the War Memorial Plaza a distant fairy land. (Only half of the lights went on. That is good. Otherwise it would look like a Power and Light Company advertisement.) The pigeons on the Circle are quieting down, and Christ Church is gray with shadows.

The line of cars honks its noisy way across four points of the compass. Shop girls throw hasty glances at the clock while they answer the demands of an elbowing last-minute crowd.

Six and seven o'clock—Maybe you