

Noah

Watching the rolling waters
Crawl with velvet hands across
The toyland towns of men,
He tipped the cup and grinned.

He belched and blew a jungle
To desert whereon oceans climbed
And splashed their sticky fingers;
He flung the cup and wondered.

For on a mountain stood a man
With tears upon his cheek and sorrow
On a face as old as His
That tipped the cup and grinned.

—Basil J. Raymond

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John

W. H. McAnallen

John and I were old friends. We had been friends for as long as I could remember. Just where we met is a hazy recollection. As well as I can recall, John had always been around. When we were small, we used to play together at every opportunity. I was more than willing to share my toys with John. Although he never asked for or acted desirous of any of them, he never refused to accept them. John and I would play together for hours. Whenever I was called to lunch, I would insist that John be permitted to eat with me. My mother was always very kind and would set a place for him beside mine. If the family was making a trip, I would beg permission to invite John to go with us. I did not enjoy a trip if he was not with me.

As John and I grew older, our friendship grew stronger. Whenever I had a disappointment or felt a little downhearted over a gift I had received, I told him. When sympathy was needed, John knew the right thing to say to me. He could make me laugh in a very short time. If we were playing and I fell, John was there to help me to my feet. Many were the

times I neglected to thank him. Many were the times I ignored him for another playmate. At all these times John was constant. He would leave me to myself or to the playmate only to return when I sought his company.

To describe John would be very difficult. He was a boy who grew as little boys do. His hair was not exactly blonde, nor was it black. His eyes were blue and, ever so often, had that far-away, dreamy look to be seen in the eyes of small boys. His smile was beautiful. I was most attracted by John's hands. They were clean, never dirty like mine. His fingers were long and slender. Occasionally, when I had a music lesson to practice, John would sit on the piano bench by my side and we would play a duet. I would ask him to play a piece alone, but he always refused. He would sit patiently and wait until my hour of practice was completed. He never urged me to stop before I had finished my time of practice.

The friendship between John and me continued to grow. By my twelfth birthday, we knew each other as well as two boys can know each other. It was at this time that I was first able to be of aid to John. He came to me in tears. He told me that his father and mother had been in an automobile accident and that they were in the hospital. We went immediately to tell my parents. They insisted that John stay at our home until his parents recovered. Unfortunately, John's parents died in a few days. The sorrow evidenced by John was unbearable. We tried to console him in every way possible. Not until my parents asked him to live with us permanently did John show any signs of overcoming his grief.

From the minute that my parents made arrangements for John to come into our home as a son and a brother, John became a different person. What had been mine became John's. Nothing that I had considered private and dear was neglected by his touch. When I complained to my parents, I was reminded that John and I were not only friends, but brothers. I was criticized for being selfish. My parents overlooked the change in John, attributing it to the shock to an adolescent of losing his natural parents.

From the beginning, my parents withheld all signs of affection for me in the presence of John. I was censured more severely and more quickly for an act of disobedience that we had done together. I was considered the ringleader of all our activities, good or bad. As a result, I stayed away from home and from my parents as often as I was able. I avoided John more and more. During the family dinner hour, I began to

feel that I was the intruder. John addressed my parents with the utmost respect. He would tell them of what he had done during the day and state his plans, awaiting their approval, for the evening. His smile, which I had once thought so beautiful, would enfold them, and I would receive the slightest of attentions.

Not until my graduation from high school did I express my desire to continue my study of music. I had found a solace in my practice at the piano. John's attitude of assurance had become such an obsession with me that I did not tell him of my hopes. When the moment arrived for the discussion of our future education, however, it was John who decided where we should attend college. The decision was that we should attend the same school or not attend at all. From that day, I knew I would never forgive John. I knew I would remember that he had ruined my life. I arose from my seat and walked toward my piano. I covered and locked the keyboard.

Although John and I were roommates at college, we rarely spoke. For three years we shared the same room. We would have spent four years in the same room except for another automobile accident. The telegram arrived while John was attending a class. I left immediately, without saying a word to anyone. This I felt would be the only time I would be able to be alone with my parents. I did not notify John of their death, nor of the time of their funeral. I knew that he would not be too interested in my whereabouts until he felt that they would be of benefit to him.

The day my parents were buried, I returned. I walked around the home that was now mine. Everything in it reminded me of them and of him. I went to my piano and opened it for the first time in three years. As I was playing, John entered the house. His laugh was soft and his eyes were cold. He knew what I was going to say. If I had not felt that he was prepared for my decision, I might have reconsidered. I simply pointed to the door.