

EDITED
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The Pansy.

THE MAN
OF THE HOUSE.

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THE AVENUE.

"THE MAN OF THE HOUSE."

BY PANSY.

He had been brave up to this moment, but now he struggled with the tears. He thought about trying to jump out, but the horse was flying so fast, and the sleigh was by no means an easy one to get out of, and his crazy companion had clutched him closely with one hand, ever since he dropped his whip in the snow. There seemed nothing to do but sit still, and let those great tears that froze as fast as they fell, drop on his hands. If he had not been so awfully frightened, he would have known that he was suffering with the cold, and that there was another danger threatening him, that of freezing to death. But of this he did not even think. On they went, Reuben so absorbed in his fright and grief, that he did not at first realize that his drunken companion was growing less noisy, and was leaning his weight more heavily on him. Suddenly, however, he discovered it in a dangerous way; the reins dropped from the driver's hands, he fell heavily forward in the bottom of the sleigh, and was in a drunken sleep.

What would have given joy to Reuben's heart a little while before, now filled him with a new terror, for Spunk, trembling with pain and fright, feeling the reins fall loosely was seized with a horrible fear, that he was left to himself, and with a fresh snort, bounded on wilder than ever; he needed no whip now; without any doubt he was running away. For a few minutes Reuben gave himself up to uncontrolled terror, and cried aloud in his agony; no one to hear or heed. At least poor Reuben had never been taught much about the one who can hear, however far away we are from home and friends, and who is able and willing to help us. To be sure he knew about God; knew that he was the maker of all people and all things; knew that he took care of the great round earth as it whirled on its journey day after day, and year after year. He knew that one named Jesus Christ had come to this earth a long time ago, and been nailed to a cross, and that for his sake people who belonged to him were taken care of, and taken to heaven.

All this he would have told you he knew, if you had talked with him, and yet after all he knew it



very much as he did that there was a country named China, away on the other side of the globe. Neither China nor Jesus had much to do with him; at least he did not realize that the knowledge of the one was any more important to him than the knowledge of the other. Now, as his terror increased, something, he did not know what, — and long afterwards he could not tell whether it was a voice or not, that seemed to speak to him, — seemed to say, "Why don't you ask God to help you? Nobody else can; you are away out on a strange road, there is no house to be seen, it is quite dark, and this horse is running away."

Whatever it was, whether a voice, or a thought put into his heart, it stopped Reuben's wailing cry; he took his hands down from his face, and while the horse flew wildly on, he clasped the hands, half-frozen as they were, and said: "O God, save me, tell me what to do!"

Then he grasped the reins firmly in his half-frozen hands, and gave all his strength to the stopping of that flying horse. It was no easy task; Spunk had not the slightest notion of stopping; he had evidently not yet thought of being tired; but the road was growing smoother, and somehow Reuben felt less frightened with the drunken man asleep beside him, than he had while the muttering was going on. He sat up straight, and tugged hard at the reins, and let himself be whisked over the snowy ground, and tried to calculate how far they had travelled, and felt that somehow, whatever the reason, he was not trembling as he had been, and his hope of sometime reaching home alive, began to revive. On they went! Spunk seemed somewhat less frightened now, and inclined to enter into the fun of the thing, and run away just because he had thought of it, and had a good chance. There was no danger of *his* freezing; indeed, cold as the night was, his brown coat was steaming. At last — Reuben did not know how long after the first let up of his terror, but sometime during that wild ride — it became plain to him that Spunk had given up the idea of getting entirely away from everybody, and was quieting into a steady rapid gait. "I wonder if he would bear turning around?" Reuben said to himself; "this road is wide enough to turn comfortably, and it seems to me it is about time we were travelling towards home. Maybe, though, he would kick up his heels, and be off again like the wind, if I should attempt it. Well, what if he should? The faster he went, the quicker we would get back to the city, and I suppose we've got to go back there. I wonder where he lives, any how? Spunk, what do you say? Will you behave like a lunatic if I turned around?" Nobody answered; Reuben was in great doubt what to do. He thought of his prayers; he was not nearly so fright-

ened; he believed in his heart that some of the terror died out, just as he spoke those words to God. Maybe God would tell him what to do? How did he tell people, Reuben wondered. It couldn't be that he spoke to them, so that they really heard words! Reuben had been to church a good many times in his life, and to Sunday-school; he had heard a good many prayers, but no answers. Perhaps only the people who are praying in their hearts hear the answers, said Reuben to himself; and he at once had to own, that he didn't believe he had ever prayed in his heart until a little while ago. "I didn't hear any answer, though," he said, aloud. "Hold on! yes I did too! I *felt* an answer; I guess that's just as good. So then, without letting go of the reins, he spoke the words out distinctly in the solemn night, feeling only too sure that none but God could hear him. "Oh, God! Tell me just what to do." Was he answered? Did he *feel* an answer? He asked himself that question, and so interested and strangely solemnized was he with the thought that God and he were having a talk together, that every bit of fear went out of his heart. After a few moments more of steady progress, Spunk dropping into quieter ways with every step, Reuben, watching his road, suddenly drew skilfully off toward the right, and intimated plainly to Spunk that he wanted to go back over the same road he had come. Spunk made not the slightest objection; on the contrary he whisked the sleigh around with such suddenness as to almost take Reuben's breath away, and was off! Not in any wild fashion, though; just a steady business-like trot. Now all this matter had taken a good deal of time, and Reuben knew perfectly well that a good many miles must have been gone over. "You went like the wind, old fellow, when you came this way," he told Spunk, "and you're not going back so fast by a good deal, I'm happy to say; I'd rather go slower, and be sure of my bones. But it will take us a good while to get home, if we ever do, and I believe we will; at least *I* shall; I wish you could tell me where your home is, Spunk." All the while he talked thus cheerily to the horse, his heart was full of a little gleeful song. He felt perfectly certain that the great God himself had actually bent his ear and heard his — Reuben Stone's — words, and directed his steps! "What else could it be?" said Reuben, talking aloud. "You see, one minute I didn't have the least kind of a notion what it was best to do, whether to go on, or try to turn around, or *what*; my mind was all in a muddle; and there was nothing around here that a fellow could see to help me make up my mind; then, all of a sudden, it seemed to me just as clear as day that the thing to do was to turn right around, and something seemed to say to me that Spunk would behave himself and trot back

towards home; and I did it, and he *does*. Yes, *sir*, I believe that I got some help from somewhere; and I should like to have anybody tell me who could have helped me but the One I asked." Now, if Reuben had lived a little later in life, and became acquainted with a man named Robert Ingersoll, and had asked him this question, there is no knowing what nonsense he might have been told, in answer. But having the good fortune to live a thousand miles away from that foolish man, among people who had common sense, he never thought of imagining that there could be an effect without a cause. In the course of time, — and it seemed a long time to Reuben — the railroad track over which they had flown in such fury was reached; at least its rails could be seen in the distance. And there, sure enough, was the snort of the engine, and the roar of the coming train! The boy's heart beat fast now. What was he to do? It was not possible to cross the track before the cars would be upon them, and what if Spunk insisted upon going on, faster and faster? It had all to be settled in a second. Of course the thing to do was to try to stop Spunk. He did not have to hesitate over that. To his intense relief, Spunk made not the slightest objection to stopping; on the contrary, seemed to think it a wise idea. Whether he was not, in his sensible moments, afraid of the cars or whether he was just then too tired and sleepy to think about them, Reuben did not know; but certain it was that he stood perfectly still, not even winking so far as could be seen, while the fiery-eyed monster thundered by. Reuben gave a sigh of relief when the last great danger that he knew of, on their way was past, and stooping down drew the great furry robes more closely over his sleeping companion. "I call that sensible of you, Spunk, he said, in admiration, to the horse, as that animal obeyed a gentle hint with the reins and trotted on. "And I called it very kind indeed in the One who is taking care of us. Reuben spoke the words reverently; it was all new business to him, this night's work; he did not know how to express his gratitude to the great God, in the words that most people would have used, but he felt it very deeply. A long steady pull now in silence, and by the widening road and certain other signs Reuben judged that they must be nearing the outskirts of the city. He slackened his hold on the reins slightly, and gave himself up to wonderment as to what he should do when he reached North street. "Seems as though I'd got to do a little planning now," he said aloud; "I've been taken care of so far, but now we are getting to the city I ought to know something about which way I want to go, but I don't. Suppose I go home; I'm as good as three miles from there likely enough; mother and Beth are pretty near scared to death about me by

this time, it's likely, and they would be *quite*, if I appeared in such company; then how would I get him in? I couldn't leave him outside all night, he'd freeze, and it wouldn't do, any how; but I couldn't lift him in, and mother oughtn't to help; and what would I do with the horse? It's just as much of a muddle as ever, for all I see. I can't plan!" But behold, just at this point, who should assert his right to plan but Spunk himself! He glanced around to see if all was quiet in the rear, then, having reached a turn in the road, he suddenly whisked around the corner with the briskness of a kitten, and quickened his speed almost into a gallop so glad did he seem over having his own way.

"Well, I never!" said Reuben, rubbing his eyes



with his unoccupied hand; "where are we now? What road is this I wonder, and what did you whisk us into it, in this style for?"

Something in the impatient snort that Spunk gave in answer to all these questions, led Reuben who had watched horses a good deal, to conclude that this spunky little fellow knew more about things than he had been planning for; in short, knew the way home and was going there as fast as his four legs could take him. "I never once thought of that!" said Reuben, delighted at the turn affairs had taken; "I shouldn't wonder if he would take this awful-acting old fellow, right straight home, and it is to be hoped there will be somebody to lift him out and put him to bed. Well, Spunk, go ahead. Somebody is taking care of us to-night, who knows how to do it, and

we'll get safely out of the worst scrape we ever had in our lives, I verily believe. You've got good taste, any how, old fellow; this is as wide and nice a road as I ever saw, and there are some splendid-looking houses along here; since you've taken matters into your own hands, — or rather feet, — I hope you'll pick out a nice one for us to stop at. Seems to me I've had about ride enough for one night." As if mindful of this last bit of advice, Spunk with a neigh of satisfaction presently whisked into an elm-lined avenue, which wound in and out among great trees, in a fashion that in summer must have been perfectly delightful, and drew up presently before a flight of steps that led to one of the finest houses Reuben had ever seen, — at least this was what he thought about it afterwards. There was little time to bestow upon houses just then, he was so occupied in wondering what would happen to them next. Almost before Spunk had fairly stopped, the door opened, letting out a flood of light over the snowy world, and a woman's form appeared on the piazza, a low anxious voice asking, — "Edward, is that you?"

Now Reuben for a moment was silent, in doubt what to say; he did not know whether it was Edward or not; and he had no way of finding out, unless this woman could help him. She stepped nearer; "Spunk," she said, anxiously, "is it Spunk?"

"Yes'm," said Reuben, promptly, of that much he was certain. "It is Spunk, and he insisted on coming here, so I thought I would let him come, and see if it was all right."

Then the woman came entirely down the steps into the snow.

"What has happened," she asked, in a voice which though excited was low, as of one who was often obliged to keep troublesome things to herself. "Who are you? And where is Spunk's master?"

Reuben had a faint idea that Spunk had been his own master for a long time, but he hurried to explain. "I'm Reuben Watson Stone, ma'am; Spunk's master offered me a ride, and Spunk got wild and ran away, and his master went to sleep; he's all safe, I guess, I kept him tucked up as much as I could, but he's as sound asleep as a nut."

"Asleep!" repeated the lady, and her tone was full of horror and dismay.

Reuben felt sure that she knew, without any other explanation, just what was the matter with him.

"Wait," she said, "I'll get a lantern," and she glided into the house. Back again in a few minutes, with a lantern which she set down in a sheltered place on the piazza; then she came close to the sleigh.

"Boy," she said, still speaking in that low tone, "Are you strong? Do you suppose that you and I

could get him into the house and to his room without any other help? There is no man in the house but Mike, the new servant, and I don't like him, and don't want to trust him to see Edward sick in this way. He is sick, of course, or he would never have gone to sleep when the horse was running. And she turned and tried to look sharply into Reuben's face.

"Yes'm," said Reuben, simply, "I'm strong; I think we can manage it; and he felt as if there was the strength of a young lion in his little body just then! He was so sorry for the lady! He wondered if "Edward" was her son, and what *his* mother would do if her son should ever come home in such a fashion. "I never will! never, *never!*" he said to himself, and set his teeth hard. Then he hopped down like a squirrel and began tugging at the stupid lump which had slipped to the floor of the sleigh. How heavy he was! Yet he was a very slightly built young man; Reuben wondered how he could be so hard to lift; the mother — if it was his mother — tugged with all her might; fortunately the bottom of the sleigh was about on a level with the broad piazza, so after much puffing and panting, they had the sleeping mass pulled well across the piazza inside the brightly-lighted room, Spunk standing still and looking on with as much quiet patience as though he had never thought of dancing or running.

"Now do you think we could get him on this bed?" the lady asked, and she threw open a door leading into paradise; — at least it looked somewhat so to the cold, tired boy. — He took in the picture, almost without knowing that he saw it; a great, beautiful room, with rich crimson curtains at the windows, dropping in a glowing mass to the very floor. A large, beautifully-carved bedstead, made up in spotless white, a great crimson-covered easy chair, the crimson of the same strange brightness of the carpet, which made him think of the woods aflame with red-gold leaves in autumn, and two mirrors turning around whenever he did and making three or four of him in different corners of the room! — At least this was the way that Reuben's fascinated eyes took it in, during the moment that he stood staring. — Then he said, "yes'm, I guess we can," and turned toward that senseless fellow on the floor.

"How very small you are!" said the lady in surprise, seeming to look really at him for the first time. "I don't believe you can possibly lift him; why, you must be *very* young."

"I'm going on eleven, ma'am," said Reuben, drawing himself up, and looking as tall as he could; there seemed no need to tell her that, but the day before had been his tenth birthday!

[To be continued]