

EDITED
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The Pansy.

THE MAN
OF THE HOUSE.

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THE MAN OF THE HOUSE.

BY PANSY.

OH dear! What a boy was Reuben for getting himself into scrapes with horses! Here was he being whirled along too fast for thinking one would suppose, while Mr. Barrows without his hat and with his coat-skirts flying in the air, followed on foot, shouting at the top of his lungs: "Stop that horse! Stop that horse!"

As if one could stop the wind! Men came out from their store doors and stared and winked, and by that time Samson had passed them. Meantime a white, frightened little heap was curled up in the closest corner of the back seat. This was Grace Barrows.

"Don't you be frightened, Gracie; I'm coming."

This was what she heard in the cheeriest of tones coming from somewhere near the ground behind her. Sure enough! Reuben had not clung to the hind spring for nothing. He had climbed like a monkey to the back of the carriage, and was hard at work with hands and teeth trying to unfasten the curtain; all the time he worked, he kept up a cheery conversation with Grace Barrows.

"Don't you be scared, Gracie; I'll be there in a jiff. Can't you catch hold of the reins? Then perhaps he will stop."

"I can't," said the white, trembling lips. "They have dropped away down at the side."

"That so? Well, never you mind; this old buckle is giving way now; in another second I'll be there and I'll get the reins."

"O Reuben! Do you suppose you can stop him?"

"Of course I can. You'll see how quick he will mind when he has to."

What lovely music Reuben Watson Stone's voice was to poor frightened little Gracie! Another vigorous twitch to the strap, and Reuben had clambered over the seat, and was reaching over the dash-board for the reins, all the time talking to Samson in a good-natured tone:

"Old fellow, good old fellow, don't be scared; nothing is the matter; it is just a notion of yours. You needn't go so fast as that; plenty of time; you are scaring your little mistress, and that is mean of you!"

At last he had the reins gathered firmly in his two stout young hands, and had climbed back to a seat, and pressed his two stout feet firmly against the dash-board. Then his tones suddenly changed, and Samson was greeted with a loud, firm "Whoa!" at the same time the pull on the reins was steady and strong.

"Whew!" said Samson to himself. "That means business! A minute ago I was my own master and was flying away from that awful white thing that came up to swallow me, and here I am being jerked at in the same old fashion. I wonder if I've got to stop! How he *does* jerk! I don't know his voice; it isn't my master; I don't believe I'll stop. It is rather pleasant, this running away; I never tried it before."

"Whoa!" said the firm voice again, and the pull on the reins was steady and strong.

"I do believe I've got to stop going like the wind," said Samson.

To be sure I did not hear him say all this, but don't you know that actions speak louder than words? By the time they had reached the corner of the long square around which the town was built, Samson's wild run had steadied into a most respectable trot, and the people who looked saw only a little boy and girl taking a ride. To be sure the boy had no hat on, and rather a light jacket for such a frosty morning; but that, of course, concerned only himself.

"Has he truly stopped running away?" asked Gracie coming out of her little huddle in the corner.

"Of course he has; no danger of his doing any more



of it very soon; he is beginning to be real ashamed of himself now; he feels mean. He wasn't exactly running away, only making up his mind he would. Now he is sorry that he didn't behave better, so he could be trusted. I see by his ears that he is sorry."

"He ought to be," said Gracie, drawing a long breath and speaking in a voice that trembled. "He never did such a thing before; papa has left me in the carriage lots of times and not tied him, and he always stood just as still!"

"Well, you see he thought that piece of newspaper was a great white elephant come to swallow him. He isn't a literary horse, and so he didn't recognize the morning paper." And Reuben fumbled in his pocket as he added: "I wonder if I've got that other paper safe! Yes, here it is. What a pity it isn't anything but a paper! It deserves a New Year's dinner or something for blowing out of the door just in the nick of time."

Whereupon he explained to Gracie how the little piece of paper with a few words written on it had suddenly started up and gone down to the carriage, and how he had been sent for it and had just taken hold of the carriage to pick it up when Samson made up his mind to leave.

"Says I to myself, I'll hold on to the paper and you too, old fellow. I'm fond of riding myself, and if you won't wait for me to get my hat, why I can go without it. See here, Gracie, if I turn at this corner will I get to the factory sooner? I'm in a hurry to see your father;



or at least, I guess he is in a hurry to see you.

Do you expect me to try to tell you how Mr. Barrows felt as he saw that wicked horse whisking around the corner with his only little daughter alone in the carriage? It seemed to him that he fairly flew through the street, but Samson flew faster. However, he remembered the cross street also, and with a wild hope that he might in some way head the horse off, he dashed across lots and reached the further corner just as Reuben guided Samson skillfully around it; meek Samson, obedient to every touch of the harness.

"Whoa!" said Reuben again, and Samson stopped.

"Here we are, Mr. Barrows," said Reuben. "It's pretty cold this morning for riding, still we had a nice time."

"My little darling!" this was every word Mr. Barrows said, and he had his arms around Gracie.

"I'm not hurt a bit, papa; not a bit," she assured him. "Reuben tugged at the straps and got them loose and climbed in and Samson minded him right

away, after a minute. O papa, aren't you glad you brought Reuben home with you?"

"Shall I drive on, sir?" asked Reuben, who had slipped into the front of the carriage and who seemed to think that the talk was getting too personal.

"Yes," said Mr. Barrows, his voice very gentle and tremulous. He did not speak again, only to ask Gracie if she was very much afraid, and if she was quite warm now, and over her fright; but after he had lifted her tenderly to the ground and watched her into the house, he turned to Reuben who stood at Samson's bridle awaiting orders and said: "I shall never forget this morning, my boy."

Perhaps you think it was not much to say, but it sent the blood dancing through Reuben's veins and rollicking all over his face.

"Will you take the horse around to the stable for me, and unharness him?"

This was Mr. Barrows' next sentence, and almost before it was finished, Reuben had bounded back again into the carriage with a delighted "Yes, sir."

"What a lark this is!" he told himself as he drove through the avenue. "I shouldn't wonder if it would get me the chance of taking care of this great big splendid horse now and then. Clarke Potter said he wouldn't let one of the factory boys look at his old horse, but I've looked at him several times to-day, I'm thinking."

It was not until dinner-time that Mr. Barrows met Reuben again, just as he was leaving the Box Factory, and said:

"I suppose, my boy, the first piece of paper went off on the wind, did it?"

Then Reuben, with a red face, fumbled in his pocket.

"I forgot to give it to you, sir; Samson and everything sent it right out of my mind."

"Then you really picked it up!" The surprise in his voice gave Reuben a queer sense of delight that he could not have explained if he had tried. "It is worth a thousand dollars, my boy. But you saved something for me this morning that is worth a thousand worlds, if I had them."

"My!" said Reuben. It was his only way of expressing astonishment; not over the "thousand worlds;" he was prepared to believe that Grace Barrows was worth a great deal more than that, but over the fact that that simple-looking bit of paper could actually be worth a thousand dollars!

"I don't see how you got in," continued Mr. Barrows, staring down at the piece of paper. "Those buckles haven't been unfastened in six months, and I noticed yesterday that they were rusty."

There was a mischievous twinkle in Reuben's eyes and he felt exactly like saying that he didn't get into that piece of paper, and there were no buckles on it so far as he could see, but he controlled his tongue and answered respectfully:

"Tugged at 'em, sir. You see I knew they had got to come unbuckled so I could get in. I didn't think I could climb over the top and get down that way in time to save mischief; besides, there was the danger of scaring the horse more by doing that."

"My boy, did you know that the lake was less than a quarter of a mile away in a straight line with the direction that the horse took?" Mr. Barrows' voice was husky and his eyes were dim.

"Yes, sir," said Reuben, looking down so that he might not seem to see the tears in the gentleman's eyes; "that was the reason I had to hurry so."

Mr. Barrows turned away abruptly; he could not trust himself to say any more just then.

On his way back from dinner, Reuben discovered that the work of cleaning had been begun on the little house. The windows were out, two pails and a broom

stood in the doorway, and a thick smoke was puffing out from the chimney.

"I wonder where she got a stove to make a fire in," said Reuben as he stood, hands in his pockets, staring up at it. Someway, that smoke seemed like a little piece of home.

He wanted to go in and look around, but the clock in the church-tower just then gave a single solemn stroke, and he took his hands out of his pockets and ran.

Several things not before mentioned had happened during the days that Reuben had been away from home. Among others, it had rained steadily and fast a day and a night, taking away every bit of the sleighing; then the ground had frozen and the lake had skimmed over as though it really meant, if the weather did not change its mind too soon, to give the boys a chance at skating; though as the water was deep, this did not happen except in severe winters.

The boys discussed the chances as they worked. They were about equally divided in their opinion of Reuben; part of them disposed to admire him and the others to envy what they called his good luck.

"I'll tell you what it is," young Wesley said with an emphatic shake of his head while Reuben was gone to the office, "it took something more than luck to climb into the back of that carriage and stop that horse. My father says there isn't one boy in ten who would have thought of it at all, and half of them would have been so scared they couldn't do it. I think he showed himself a plucky fellow, and I say, let's all give in and be friendly. I'm going to ask him to go skating with us to-night."

Not a boy approved of this; some of them were really out of sorts about Reuben's coming, and some of them liked to disagree with whatever was proposed; so they argued the question hotly, declaring that Reuben was a little dried-up city dunce and they would have nothing to do with him. The more they talked, the more determined was Wesley to carry out his plan, and the moment Reuben came back he said:

"It's freezing hard; the ice will be prime to-night; want to go to the lake and have a skate?"

Reuben's eyes glistened his thanks for the invitation, but his answer was prompt:

"There's two reasons why I can't go; one is I ain't got any skates, and the other is I never skated a rod in my life."

If you could have heard the shout of laughter that greeted this answer you would have thought that the strangest and most ridiculous thing in life was a boy who could not skate.

"Poor little fellow!" mimicked one in a tone that he might have used to a boy of six. "Didn't his muvver ever let him go on the ice? It's a shame, so it is! Poor little boy! we'll stop on the way down and buy him a stick of red-and-white candy, so we will."

These were some of the sentences those rude and silly boys giggled out at Reuben. His cheeks were pretty red; no boy likes to be laughed at; still he answered good-naturedly:

"You can't pity me any more than I've pitied myself. I s'pose you haven't much notion of how I've wanted a pair of skates; but the honest truth is, boys, it was a choice between skates or bread, and when it comes to that, it doesn't take a fellow long to choose. Fact is, I'm poor. Always have been ever since father died, and I haven't got around to skates yet; maybe I shall some day."

There was something in this manly little explanation that seemed to please Wesley, although he had been laughing as hard as any of them. "Quit bothering him," he said. "He's a plucky fellow, and a friend of mine. I won't have him abused."

Nevertheless the fun about the skating went on. Not to know how to skate was something so strange to these country-bred boys that it seemed as though they could not get over laughing about it. Presently, came Andrew Porter to call on the boys, and he brought news which turned their thoughts into another channel.

"You here yet!" was his greeting to Reuben, in a tone of mock surprise. "I thought you would be gone home to your mother by this time. Had any more scares?" Then he told his version of the stage-coach story. "He came up in the four-horse with me, and rode outside till he got so awful scared at the horses that he had to creep inside, and let a fellow take his place." I think the boys would have been more ready to believe this story if they had not known about Samson's performance that morning, and Reuben's share in the matter. As it was, knowing Andrew as well as they did, not a boy believed that he had told the truth. Yet they laughed. Then Andrew produced his news. "Say, boys, are any of you going to the rig-magig at the Hall to-night? I peeked in there this afternoon and saw some of the pictures while they was fixing the canvas; just splendid, they are! Great big things! cover all one end of the Hall, and just as natural as life. A hundred pictures! Don't you know about them? Why, it's the nicest thing that ever come along here; everybody says so. Of course I'm going. The tickets are only fifty cents."

Andrew talked exactly as though fifty-cent pieces grew on the bare branches of the winter trees. If the boys had only known how many twists and turns he had had to make, turns that were not even *quite* honest in order to get that fifty cents, they might not have envied him so much. As it was, they patted away and looked disgusted, some of them. Not a boy there who could by any means afford to pay fifty cents to see pictures. Yet they were very fond of pictures. All boys are.

Andrew went on with his extravagant account of the wonderful "peeps" he had taken that afternoon, and of this and that, and the other favored boy who was going; all rich men's sons. Skating might be all well enough, but it was fast losing its charm for that evening. Every boy wanted to go to the Panorama.

In the midst of Andrew's description, Reuben was summoned to the office again. Andrew paused long enough to say: "Now, old fellow, you're going to get your walking paper. I heard Barrows as I was coming along, telling what an awful nuisance you were." Then he went on with his description. Reuben went away smiling; he was too sadly used to all sorts of bad boys in the city, to be shocked with Andrew; and he could afford to smile on his own account. He knew very well how far Mr. Barrows was from considering him a nuisance. He came back with eyes shining, and worked with double speed the rest of the afternoon. If you had been in the office with him, this is what you would have heard Mr. Barrows say: "My boy, here are a couple of tickets to the exhibition this evening at the Duan Street Hall; I think you will like to go. Perhaps there is some boy in the shop, or out of it, that you would like to take with you, since Beth isn't here. And Reuben, one thing more; I would rather you wouldn't go into the little house until after the cleaning is done. Just wait until I give you permission, will you? The person working there doesn't like to be disturbed."

Over this last, Reuben pondered as he worked. He felt a great longing to see the little house with clean floors and windows. "She must be a touchy body," he said, thinking of the "person" who was hired to clean house. "Just as if I would disturb her! But I suppose she thinks if I come the other boys will. I can wait." And he whistled over the thought of all his joys.

"Look here," he said to Wesley, as the two went down the hall together with a pack of pasteboard on their shoulders. "I'm real obliged to you for asking me to go skating to-night; I'd like no better fun. But suppose I can't, suppose you go with me."

"Go where?"

"To that picture exhibition at the Hall."

"Just so. I'm agreed. Where shall we steal the tickets? Have you made your plans?" with a mischievous twinkle in his black eyes.

"Yes *sir*," said Reuben. "Got 'em all made. Look here!" And he showed two green tickets.

Then Wesley whistled.

A LITTLE FUN.

THE library was very still. Aunt Kate was writing letters, seated at the great study table. "Scratch, scratch," went the pen, and presently "scratch, scratch," went something in the tall waste-basket filled to the brim with bits of paper, old envelopes, old letters, old accounts, old everything that the lawyer and his wife and his clerk and his sister did not know what else to do with. Aunt Kate gave a nervous start. Could it be that she heard a mouse? or was it her foot against



"THERE YOU ARE, MY FINE FELLOW!"

the papers on the floor? She drew the foot away and listened. All was still; she went on with her writing. Rustle, rustle, rustle went the papers. This time the noise was certainly from the waste-basket. Aunt Kate jumped up, overturning the inkstand in her haste. If there was anything in the world that she had a perfect horror of, it was a mouse! She flew out of the library as though, at the least, a small bear was after her. How Dickie giggled when thus left alone! He came to

the top of the basket and looked about him. It was pretty close quarters, though the basket was large. He had had great trouble to get himself covered with the papers, and if aunt Kate had stopped to examine, she would have seen a bit of gray coat sleeve peeping out. What fun he had had! And it wasn't yet over. Nobody knew better than he how horribly afraid of a mouse aunt Kate was. He watched for her return. What would she do? Would she get somebody to come with a poker and try to kill the mouse? Supposing it was Bridget. Should he pop out on her with a noise like a caged tiger, or should he still be a mouse, and scamper away to find his hole? But he heard steps, and scurried down under the papers again.

As the door opened, a strong smell of toasted cheese came in with the air. Up came the mouse's head a little way to watch proceedings. There was aunt Kate with a mouse-trap all cunningly baited with toasted cheese, for the purpose of catching her nephew Dickie. It was too much for the boy. He had kept still in his close quarters some time, now he giggled outright.

Aunt Kate jumped up suddenly and looked around.

"Well, I never!" she said. Then she seized that mouse-trap and tucked a bit of the little gray coat skirt into its mouth. Click! went the trap, and the gray mouse was caught. He could not get his arms behind him to unfasten the trap.

"There you are, my fine fellow," said aunt Kate; "I'll warrant you'll do no more mischief for awhile."

Oh, poor Dickie! It was almost time for papa to drive past on his way to the bank, and Dickie was to be watching at the front gate, and to go with him. Mamma was down town, and they were to go for her, papa and he, and drive to the market for fruit, and Dickie was to order it, and pay for it himself. And here he was, a gray mouse in a trap! "If mamma was *only* at home," he mourned; "or if Thomas the office clerk would only have to come to the house for something, or if Bridget could hear down in the kitchen."

He tried it. "Bridget!" he called loud and long. He might as well have called to the cat. He thought of trying to go down-stairs, basket and all; but then he remembered that it would be impossible without tipping the basket and scattering the papers everywhere, and then, besides, how Bridget would laugh! and maybe that horrid little Timmy was there.

Dickie's courage held out quite a while; lasted, in fact, until long after the little clock on the mantel had struck the hour that he knew his father would leave the office for the bank; lasted until he heard the banging of doors, and the rushing up and down of feet that told him the boys were home from school; and then, when nobody came to the library, he cried.

That did no good. It was not until two hours afterwards that mamma came herself in search of Dickie, and released the little gray, sobbing mouse.

"I *could* have pulled my coat out," explained Dickie to her afterwards; "but I thought it would tear, and you wouldn't like that, so I didn't. Or I could have got down-stairs, somehow, in the basket, but I thought papa wouldn't like that."

"But you thought aunt Kate would like very much to be frightened by a mouse?" asked mamma. Then did Dickie hang his head and look foolish.

"After all, mamma," he began again after a while, "don't you think it is dreadfully silly in aunt Kate to be so awful scared at a little bit of a mouse that can't hurt anybody?"

"Perhaps so," said mamma. "Don't you think it is silly for little boys to be so awfully scared at a little black spider that won't hurt anybody?"

Now, as Dickie was ridiculously afraid of little black spiders, he hadn't a word to say.