A Change for Joe

"Can't I mother? I ain't never asked before an' I'll promise not to ask again for a long time, if you let me go this time. Please let me go, won't you?"

"Now, Joe Hadley, ain't I told you time an' again not to bother me about that there base ball game you can't go. That's all there is to it. I don't want to see you with that crowd of boys anyway, with their stupid notions. Makes you lazy and unwilling. Now go, go and finish that there wood job before supper or you'll have somethin' else to think about for a season, brother."

"Joe Hadley, Pleasy Joe, as he was called turned away from the door with a feeling akin to rebellion in his heart. 'Might have known it, before I asked,' he muttered. 'Dain't had a single holiday this year, and him and her always behind me with their, for this and for that! Why can't I enjoy myself like the other boys, just a day at least."

"Him" and "her" referred to was Silas Benn and his wife Maria, a couple who, having five children of
Can't I mother? I ain't never done it again, and I'll promise.
their own. Had taken Joe while but a
baby from the county poor farm to
raise him as their own. Strange to
say the boy with all his good qualite
had seemed to find no warm spot in
the hearts of the old couple his adopted
parents, and it seemed as if old
Silas had merely taken Joe from the
poor farm in order to save paying
wages for farm help.
And that Joe worked hard was a fact
which Silas well knew. Why then, he
did not treat Joe with more leninacy,
Joe could not understand.
During the late fall and winter
months Joe had gone to the town school
and his naturally bright and sunny
disposition had made him a favorite
with a crowd of lads which his parent
well knew would try to make him
rebel against the really unjust treatment
Joe had also become the best base
ball player, pitcher, in the school and
although he had left the school several
weeks ago he had been prevailed upon
to agree to play in a ball game on the
day that school closed. He found him
in the above conversations meeting.
a last plea for permission, and his feelings can be imagined.

And now as he worked away savagely at his wood side, his thoughts ran back as far as his memory allowed him and he could see no reason for the treatment he had received. He had worked hard. But from his earliest remembrance the only reward for a well done task was that a shrill voice commanding him to do still more.

We finished his work and went into the house. His mother was here, preparing the evening meal and which was a sign that she was in her sourest moods. Both acted strangely by old Maria. She looked up the cards of her affection and, if anything went wrong— which was the case tonight—how she would storm! The thought had come over Joe that if his work would be appreciated it would be a small confession for giving up the bad game, but left him when he saw his mother.

"Joe!" roared a voice from the direction of the barnyard, "ain't you going to help me with the mulch in an other week?" loo Stylish.
to work all day. Hurry a long now, or little supper will you eat.

A kind voice would have been like sunshine to Joe's wounded feelings, but the sound of that harsh voice aroused his spirit to the utmost. All his nature rose in revolt— the abuse of years had become too heavy to be borne. He picked up his hat, walked to the door, and said, "Goodbye, mother. I've tried all my life to get you and Joe to love me even a little; I have worked as hard as I could, and I see that you don't care for me a bit. So I guess I'll leave."

And without waiting to hear the torrent of abuse and names which were hurled at him, he hurried out to the road.

Dart and wicked thoughts prompted by his sudden anger flashed through his mind as he walked toward the town and all the harsh words and cruel blows which he had endured since childhood came back to him now—and added fuel to the flames.

He would never go back. No not for all the money in the world, but what was he to do without a cent of money in his pockets and a ragged suit of clothes his only belongings? But
fair ye? Hustle along now, or little suffer will you get."

A kind voice would have been like healing ointment to his wounded feelings but that harsh voice caused his spirit to
in his anger he did not let them trouble him—all he wished was to get to town and explain the matter to the boys. He knew they would help him.

By this time he had reached the hill just north of the farm and on the summit he turned to take one last look at his old home. Still no regret did he feel in regard to his action. He sat down under some hazel bushes on the roadside and gave himself up to gloomy meditations: for the thought of youth are long, long thoughts; and it had become a habit of his, weary tempered, tho' he was to give himself up to fits of melancholy. The full moon came up in all her beauty, and bathed her mother earth in light. Down the hill Millers Creek wound its way in fantastic curves thru the woodland and to Joe it seemed like a thread of silver. He could hear an owl hooting in the woods across the way, and even when he glanced at the little farm house in the vale below, nestling in the grove of cotton woods, it seemed more peaceful than he had ever known it before.

So does this night cover with beauty the horrid part of life. The scenes of suffering in the city, and the heaps of dead on the battlefield all disappear when night spreads her sable garment over the sky. Hard lines are softened, and nature dream.
transformed with a beauty which vanced with the break of dawn.

"Wonder what the little calf will do about me and that thought. And rip the dog, and bear the little calf. They at least know when I treated them kind. Little Petun' well they get now, traction."

And his thought ran on and on, he grew more peaceful; his head nodded, he fell fast asleep.

He awoke with a start. Was it very late? The moon was high in the beautiful summer sky, and all was quiet. He grew uneasy. A nameless something was oppressing him with a sense of danger. Was that the wind? Impossible! No, it is again! Men's voices! In a moment he was wide awake, every sense alert, and as he strained to listen hear the conversation. The heart is beating violently, his breath comes in gasps. He is thoroughly frightened.

The voices of men can be indistinctly heard; but sufficiently for him to recognize a hushan who years ago had worked on the old farm, and who had been sent away by Etac for his ill behavior. Joe knew that these men were not there for any good purpose. He regained his composure and crept along the road under the shadow of the
hazel bushes until he could more distinctly hear the conversation.

"Now, I know the ole man allus' came his swing in the house, the ole codger don't believe in bars. Lucky for us. We'll wait here until the moon is a little lower go up and have it all our way. He won't expect anything this moonlight night," said the one.

"Yes, he gets on to the job and won't tell where he's got the dough. What'll we do?"

"If he gets to heardin' up a fuss we'll knife him. I had men tell me tale an' I wants to know. Squire up with him for the dirt he's done me."

These words burned into Joe's memory never to be effaced. Then the thought came home to him that Silas had but a few days before received a large amount of money in payment for a shipment of hogs, and as usual, kept the money at his house. Well what did he care if Silas did lose some money. But what was that when the word came back, "knife him." And then, "O horror," thought Joe, "they'll think I did it. I must stop em."

In that moment Joe became a man in every sense of the word. He sprang...
and was about to jump to the road and run, when he unfortunately stepped on an old rotten stick which broke with a loud crack. But he was gone, speeding down the hill like an arrow.

But the two men whose conversation had been thus suddenly interrupted jumped to the road and could distinctly see the boy running down the hill. They must never let him escape. Whipping out a revolver one of the men shouted, "Stop or we'll shoot," and began to fire. But fate was against the terrible rate with which Joe plunged along the bullets flew wide and the men saw that it was to be a race between the three.

As Joe neared the bridge over Willow creek he glanced back at his pursuers. It was fatal to him. His foot caught the first plank at the end of the bridge. He stumbled, fell, and rolled off into the stream below.

In a moment his pursuers dashed over the bridge and began to search the stream for the reappearance of Joe. They had heard the splash.
They had seen the fall and had heard the splash and thought that the object of their pursuit was as good as caught. But never before did Joe's wonderful body stand him in such good stead as now. Not measured stroke hesitantly swam down stream, the dense undergrowth on the bank preventing his being seen by his pursuers.

He must reach his old home in time. His abuses were forgotten and all his energy was bent on the attainment of that one object.

"Well, Bill, down your carlessness, we must find that kid or give up the game," muttered one of the suffians on the bridge.

"Sh-h, whispered Bill, that fellow must have gone down stream. No human being could swim up stream against this cre. current without making a racket. So down stream it is. We must have him."

Several hundred yards down stream a short time after, a white face could be seen nearing the shore. Then as the water grew shallower, the shoulders and then the body of Joe appeared. He looked carefully up.
and down the stream, and then grasped the roots of the undergrowth. He climbed up on the bank. After a short rest he started again for the farm. His intention was to cut across the fields and thus save time.

"Stop where you are or you are a dead man," suddenly said a rough voice in his ear and Joe felt a revolver pressed to his forehead.

Joe stopped. He was thrown by the ruffian and the next moment he was lying on the ground, his hands and feet firmly tied, while his captors went on their way to the old farm.

"Now Marion, that's what comes of letting that boy go with them kids from town," said old Elias, who, having waited in vain for the appearance of Joe in the barnyard to help with the milking, had come into the house to inquire. "Here I've kept him five years and given him a holiday 'bout once a year, an' now he's gone an' I'll have to look for a new hired hand. Trouble as I've been to easy on him. A good workman never can then would have kept his spirit down. I'm
arthritic.

To tell the truth, the sudden leak of Joe troubled them more than they dared admit. They both knew how valuable Joe was in the farm and in their heart they felt sorry that this loss was the result of their own actions.

"Well," said his spouse, "no use in cryin' over spilt milk so the sooner we eat supper the better and forget about it the better. I'll bet that little rascal won't enjoy a meal like this for a long time. Wonder what he'll do anyway."

"Well I'll go to town tomorrow night and Bill Noyer to work for me until after Hayin' I'll have to use some of that hog money, though. Come to think on it that was a good price I got for them hogs. I feel kinder shady with all that money around. When I go to town tomorrow I'll take it along and put it in the bank."

"No yer won't, Silas Lem, not while I'm alive. I don't want you to be losin' yer money in banks and sick like. Keep yer money while you've got it. I'm afeard of it."

"Well we won't fight about it. I'm tired," with a yawn. "I'll go to bed, guess I'll go to bed."
And saying this with his customary stepping to the door to take a last look at the sky, Silas lit his candle and retired.

Maria buried herself with her kitchen duties. She did not want to admit it, but Joe's absence was already noticeable. There was no one to help—to all the day how lonesome she would be. Who would carry the water for her now? Who would help her with the dishes? As she mentally asked these questions she wished Joe back already.

And then as she thought of the many words of abuse and the few of kindness which she had spoken to him, she felt like going out after him and bringing him back. But she was done now with her work. She locked and double-locked the doors and soon all was dark around the farm.

Maria awoke with a start. What was wrong.

"Did I shut the pantry window, I wondered she thought. "I'm a getting weak, myself with that money here. I wish it was mornin'. Huck, what's that? My goodness! Silas! Silas! Wake up! There's somebody in the house."
Silas ceased snoring and sat up wide awake.

"Silas, for mercy sake, do get up and see what it is the matter! We'll all be murdered in our beds. I wish Joe was here."

Silas got up and started cautiously for the hall. But as he neared the door a bulky form loomed up in front, he felt an iron hard clasp on his throat, while the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against his forehead added weight to the warning,

"Move and you are a dead man."

In a short time he was carried to the kitchen, bound hand and foot, and placed in a chair, with Maria aside of him bound in a like manner. The sudden act had nearly paralyzed the latter, and both sat dumb and motionless before their captors.

"Now old man, speak up and tell us where your money is. No jobbin' now. You've got money in this house. We want it.
"The sooner you tell, the better,"
Silas hesitated. Never in all his life had he been in the position in which he found himself at present. He never had known before what it was to give money without getting value received. Not even in his first flush of thought of losing all that money, that gave him seven ranges. He determined to hold out as long as possible for it was probable that aid would arrive in time.

"What makes you fellows think that he got some money?" he asked. "You might know that if I've got a big lot of money I wouldn't keep it here at home ready to be tied up by the first thief that comes along. Little money will go further around here."

"Now, old man enough of that," replied the spokesman of the two. "You've got money here. You know it. We know it. We'll give you just two minutes by the clock to tell us. If not, then you are a dead man.

And as he spoke he drew out a wig.
looking dagger and allowed it polished blade to flicker in the dim light of the candle.

Silas was frightened; thoroughly so. But he had no thought of giving up the hiding place of the treasure. He was hoping against hope for aid.

One minute passed. Poor Maria was in a dead faint now. How swiftly Silas did the second fly. A minute and a half.

Must he give up his money? Two minutes.

With a muttered oath the ruffian urged him and bore him to the floor.

"Mercy, will ye," he pleaded, "I'll tell yer. Only let me up."

As he spoke the door burst open and in rushed several men who with a few blows laid the ruffian prone upon the floor. The rescuers had come in the nick of time.

Loosening the bands of Maria Silas they bound the prisoners safely together.

Silas was too dazed to speak. He recognized the faces of his neighbors and saw one anxious and excited face which held his attention more than the rest. It was Joe. Then he seemed to realize what had
abused Joe had done, and the tears of repentance and shame coursed down his cheeks.

Joe helped Silas to rise and then went over to Maria who had been revived and attempted to assure her that everything was safe.

"Neighbors Jim," said one of his neighbors, "you have been taught a lesson tonight which should go with you all your life. You have seen that boy there is a treasure which you should cherish and keep as best you know how. That boy has tonight risked his life to save you and your wife from death. He will tell you how himself, better than we. We knew you've been hard on him, and we tell you tonight that you must do better with him in the future or we'll call on you again. Goodnight." And taking the boy's hand, the neighbors left.

"Joe said Silas," taking the boy's hand in his, as neighbor Milburn said a minute ago, I've had my eyes opened tonight. Once I ain't treated you right.
But Joe it is too late to begin now
Let us try to begin a new way of livin' on this farm. And Maria I know you'll help won't you?

"Dear Joe," said Maria, "I've never thought until tonight what kind of a boy you really were. Seems as if the scramble an' rush for money has just blinded me to all thought of you or anybody else. Won't ye forgive me?

Joe could scarcely believe his ears. He had been prompted to do as he had done to show his parents that he had not attempted robbery on them. But as he heard these kind and loving words for the first time new emotions sprang up in his breast, and he wept for joy.

"Course I will, mother. I felt as tho' I done right the morn I left the farm, an' I'm glad I'm back again.

Joe's story was soon told. He had lain on the bank of the stream only a short time, when a load of folks neighbors they proved to be. They drove along the road
He could hear the horses tramp over the bridge in the quiet mountain and had shouted at the top of his voice for help. He was heard and found an all night was made to arrive at the farm before it was too late. "And," said Joe, "when I saw those two murderers standing over you, I thought I'd die if I couldn't save you. But," and he gave his mother a kiss, "you're all right and I am back again.

And the game of ball on the last day of school was a grand success. The score stood 6 to 6 in the eighth inning, with the visiting team to bat. No one can forget the wonderful pitching by the pitcher of the home team, show he struck out three men in quick succession, and how when his last chance came to bat, he sent home the winning run. Perhaps the reason for his brilliant work was that way up on the top row of seats he could see a quaint old couple whose encouraging smiles were bent upon him. They were Silas and Maria, who "had come to watch that fine new-fangled game of ball." And Joe was the happiest boy in the country. All's well that ends well.