written in 1893

~~How Joe Went to the Ball Game~~

A Change for Joe

"Can't I mother? I aint never asked before an' I'll promise not to ask agin' fur a long time, if you let me go this time. Please let me go, wont you?

"Now, Joe Hadley, aint I told you time an' again not to bother me 'bout that there base ball game. You can't go, that's all there's of it. I don't want to see you with that crowd of boys anyway, with their uppish motions. Mater you lazy and unwillin'! Now, go' yo and finish that'ere wood pile before supper or you'll have sumthin' else to think about for a season, I recton."

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

"Hm" and her! referred to were Old Silas Senn and wife Maria a couple who, having six children of

"Can't I mother? I ain't never asked 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 qualities 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 worried hard was a fact which Silas well knew. Why then, he did not treat Joe with more leniency, 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 parents well knew would try to make Joe 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. We find him in the above conversation reading.

a last plea for permission, and his feelings can be imagined.

And now as he worked away savagely at his wood pile 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 his only reward for a well done task was that shrill voice commanding him to do still more.

Joe finished his work and went into the house. His mother was preparing the evening meal ~~and~~ which was a sign that she was in her sourest moods. Nort acted strangely on old Maria. It knotted up the cords of her affection and if anything went wrong - which was the case tonight - how she would storm! The thought ~~came~~ had come over Joe that if his work ~~that~~ would be appreciated it would be a small compensation for giving up the ball game, but the left him when he saw his mother.

"Joe!" roared a voice from the direction of the barnyard, "aint you goin' to help me with the milkin' an' other work tonight? Sittin' too stylish

to work air you. Hustle a long now, or little supper will you get."
A kind voice would have been like ointment to Joe's wounded feelings, but the sound of that harsh voice roused 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 "Goodby, mother, I've tried all my life to get you ~~can't~~ to love me even a little; I have ~~to~~ 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.

Dark 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 flame.

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 pocket and a ragged suit of clothes his only belongings. But

fairye? Hustle along now, or little supper will you get."
A kind voice would have been like healing ointment to Joe's wounded feelings but that harsh voice roused ~~at~~ his spirit to

in his anger he did not let those thoughts 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 actions. He sat down under some hazel bushes on the roadside and gave himself up to gloomy meditations. "For the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts," and it had become a habit of Joe, sunny 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 Willow Creek wound its way in fantastic curves tho' 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 cottonwoods, 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 garments over the sky. Harsh lines are softened, and Nature

is transformed with a beauty which vanishes with the breat of dawn.

"Wonder what the little calf will do ~~when~~ without me around," he thought. "And Skip the dog, and Bess the little colt. They at least knew when I treated 'em kind. Little pettin' will they get now, 'ruckon."

As his thoughts 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. Joe grew uneasy. A nameless something was oppressing him with a sense of danger. Was that the wind! Impossible! Hark, there it is again! Men's voices! In a moment he is wide awake, every sense alert, ~~and~~ as he strains to over hear the conversation. His 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 ruffian who ~~the~~ a few years ago had worked on the old farm and who had been sent away by Silas for ~~his~~ ill behavior. Joe knew that these men were not there for ~~very~~ 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 ol'man allus 'carries his swag in the house, the ol' codger don't believe in banks. Luckey for us. We'll wait here until the moon's a little lower, go up and have it all our way. He won't expect anything this moonlight night," said ~~the~~ one.

"Spose he gets onto the job and won't tell where he's got the dough. What'll we do?"

"If he gets to kickin' up a fuss we'll knife him. Dead men tell no tales an' I want to kinda square 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 words came back, "knife him." And then, "O horrors," 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 up

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 ~~even~~ owing to 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 flash~~.

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 training stand him in such good stead as now. With measured stroke he silently 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 energies were bent on the attainment of that one object.

"Well, Bill, d— n your carelessness, we must find that kid or give up the game," muttered one of the ruffians on the bridge.

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

Several hundred yards down stream, a short time after, a ~~short~~ 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 grasping the roots of the undergrowth he climbed up on the bank. After a short rest he started again for the farm his intention being 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~~ seized by the ruffians and the next moment he was lying on the ground, his hands and feet firmly tied, while his captors were on their way to the old farm.

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"Now Marier that's jes' what comes of lettin' that boy go with them kids from town," said old Silas, ~~all~~ 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 kep' him fer years and given him a holiday 'bout once a year, an' now he's gone an' I'll have ter look for a new hired hand. Trouble is I've been too easy on him. A good wallopin' now an' then would have kep' his spirit down, I'm

a-thinkin'.

To tell the truth the sudden leave of Joe troubled them more than they dared admit. They both knew how valuable Joe was on 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~~ an' fergit about it the better. I'll bet that ere little rascal won't enjoy a meal like this fer a long time. Wonder what he'll do anyway."

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

"No yer won't Silas Senn, not while I'm alive. I don't ~~go~~ want you to be losin' yer money in banks an' sich like. Keep yer money while you've got it, I'm a-thinkin'."

"Well, we won't fight about it." "I'm tired," with a yawn, "I-aw-h-h-h- guess I'll go to bed".

and saying this with his customary ~~manner~~ stepping to the door to take a last look at the sky, Silas lit his candle and retired.

Maria busied herself with her kitchen duties. She did not want to admit it, but Joe's absence was already noticeable. There was no one to talk to all the day now. 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 ~~criticism~~ 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.

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Maria awoke with a start. What was wrong.

"Did I lock the pantry window, I wonder" she thought. "I'm a gettin' scary, myself with that money here. I wish 'twas mornin.' Hush, 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 git up an' see what's 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; ~~and~~ he felt an iron hand close 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 an' tell us where your money is. No foolin' 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 ~~giving~~ getting value received. Not even in his present plight could the thought of losing all ~~that~~ money fail to give him severe pangs. He determined to hold out as long as possible for it was probable that aid ~~would~~ might arrive in time.

"What makes you fellers ~~think that~~ I've got some money?" he asked. "Yer might know ~~that~~ if I've got a big lot of money I wouldn't keep it here at home ready to be took by the first ~~thief that~~ comes along. Little money will ye find 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 wicked

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 to Silas did the seconds fly. A minute and a half.

Must he give up his money? Two minutes. With a muttered oath the ruffians seized him and bore him to the floor.

"Mercy, will yer," 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 ruffians prone upon the floor. The rescuers had come in the nick of time. ~~Unlocks~~ Loosing the bonds 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 poor

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 ~~also~~ revived, and attempted to assure her that everything was safe.

"Neighbor Senn," said one of his neighbors. "You have been taught a lesson tonight which should go with you all your life. You have in ~~that~~ boy there 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 know 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 two would be murderers along the neighbors left.

"Joe said Silas," taking the boy's hand in his, as neighbor Wilburn said a minit ago, I've had my eyes opened urright. I see I ain't treated you right

But Joe, is it too late to begin now? Let us try to ~~make~~ begin a new way of livin' on this farm. And Maria, I know you'll help, won't you?"

"Dear Joe," said Maria, "I never thought until tonight what kind of a boy you really were. Seems as if the scramble an' rush fer money has jes' blinded me to all thought of you or everybody else. Won't you 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 pure joy.

"Course I will, mother. I felt as tho' I'd not done right the minut I left ~~the farm~~, an' I'm glad I'm back agin."

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 — drove along the road.

He could hear the horses tramp over the bridge in the quiet night air and had shouted at the top of his voice for help. He was heard and found an all haste was made to arrive at the farm before it was too late. "And," said Joe, "when I saw those two murderers standin' over you I thought I'd die if I couldn't save you. But," and he gave his mother his first kiss "you're all right an' 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~~ ninth inning, with the visiting team to bat. No one can forget the wonderful ~~pitching~~ playing by the pitcher of the home team how 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 ~~looks~~ encouraging smiles were bent upon him. They were Silas and Maria, who "had come to watch that ere new fangled game of ball." And Joe was the happiest boy in the country. All's well that ends well