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By Harriet Lummis Smith

A VERY fortunate girl did Frederick McNabb's sister Hannah consider herself, and for a self-evident reason. Frederick was a genius. Nearly every week one of his poems appeared in the Grant County *Republican*, and as if to prove that men of genius are above narrow partizanship, the Pikesville *Democrat* was also favored. These contributions were gratuitous; but Frederick had sold several poems elsewhere, and the circulation of the purchasing periodicals had forthwith received a noticeable impetus in Grant County, due perhaps to Frederick's habit of expending the entire sum received for each poem upon copies of the paper containing it for complimentary distribution among his friends.

Frederick McNabb was a good-looking young man, with long hair and a short memory. Hannah had proved conclusively the uselessness of trusting him with an errand to the grocer's. As a rule, one genius is enough for a family, and luckily, Hannah was quite an ordinary little person, alert, energetic, and very comfortable to live with. Her mind was as practical as Frederick's was dreamy. When the roof leaked, it was Frederick who suggested boring a hole in the floor, that the water might run through, and this casual remark almost precipitated an unpleasantness between Hannah and Mrs. Dobbs, the washerwoman. But the comment which roused Hannah's ire was little enough compared to what Mrs. Dobbs said to her family after she went home.

"It may be nothing more than genius that ails him," said Mrs. Dobbs, shaking her head dubiously. "But if that's all, it's an own cousin to feeble-mindedness. That little sister is worth six of him, according to my way of thinking. Why, she watches him like a child to see that he doesn't do himself a mischief! She's so set up over his writing poetry, and yet she has to tell him if he's scorching his coat tails!"

When Frederick poured vinegar into his coffee one morning, in place of cream, Hannah knew that a poem was under way. She liked the poem on spring which had appeared in the *Democrat* much better than the ode to liberty for which the *Home Helper* had paid Frederick three dollars, but she felt for the latter poem a reverence tinctured with awe. A poem for which a flesh-and-blood editor was ready to pay cash could be nothing less than a masterpiece, and her inability to grasp the meaning of some of the lines prompted Hannah to humility, instead of leading her to question the poet.

After the episode of the vinegar Hannah procured a clean cup, and took upon herself the responsibility of adding the proper proportions of cream and sugar to the coffee. It was rather disappointing to have Frederick push the cup away, and say, decisively, "I can't eat!"

"Don't you feel well, Frederick?"

"For two days," Frederick declared, gloomily, "I have been in the grip of an idea. It gives me no peace. It will not leave me alone. I cannot sleep at night, and by day my food has no flavor."

"I think you ought to eat, Frederick," Hannah said, firmly, "whether you feel like it or not. Literary work is so very wearing."

Frederick looked at his sister with a smile of superior melancholy. "Literary work wearing!" he repeated. "What do you know about it?"

Hannah blushed. "Why, I've noticed, Frederick, dear," she replied, "that when you are writing a poem you get so tired that you're not equal to anything." It was all true. He was not even equal to filling the wood-box. Hannah did it herself, and reflected, as she worked, that if Frederick ever found it out he would be angry. Fortunately, there did not seem much likelihood of Frederick making the startling discovery. Apparently he labored under the impression that wood-boxes filled themselves, like springs.

"The thing haunted me all night," said Frederick. "I only slept by fits and starts. I left a lighted candle on the chair beside the bed, so I could jot down whatever came to me."

"Oh, did you, Frederick!" exclaimed Hannah, with a guilty start. Once Frederick had left a candle lighted on the chair by his bed, and then when fast asleep had thrown out his arm and overturned the candle against the

DRAWN BY W. F. STECHER

"FREDERICK! O FREDERICK!"

window-curtain. Hannah had arrived on the scene to find the curtain in a blaze and some of the bedclothes shriveling at the edges. And for once forgetting the serious consequences of sudden shocks to sensitive natures, she had awakened Frederick by deluging him with the contents of the water-pitcher. Now she blamed herself for not having been on her guard the evening before. It was not due to her watchfulness, she told herself reproachfully, that Frederick had not set himself on fire. Another night she must be sure not to go to sleep till the lights were out in his room.

Breakfast over, Frederick went up-stairs, while Hannah fell to work. Mrs. Dobbs was in the kitchen, ironing vigorously. By the time Hannah had the breakfast dishes finished Frederick was down-stairs.

"I'm going out," he said, abruptly. "That horrible thumping has got on my nerves. I can't stand it any longer."

"That thumping? Oh, I see!" For a person not sensitive, Hannah showed a surprising ability to comprehend the moods of the more delicately organized. She herself rather enjoyed the rhythmic thud of Mrs. Dobbs's flat-iron. But then, she was not a poet, but only the sister of one.

Frederick strode out of the house, leaving the screen door open. Hannah was prepared for this. She followed close at his heels, shooed out two or three bluebottles which had been awaiting just this opportunity, and closed the door after her brother. Then she went back to look over her accounts for the week. This problem, although it seemed nothing more than simple addition, frequently caused rather deep furrows in Hannah's smooth forehead before she had finished. The brother and sister were orphans, with a little income which only by dint of strict economy was sufficient for their needs. Mrs. Dobbs glanced at the girlish face, frowning over the question of how to reduce the month's groceries so as to make up for an excess in Frederick's livery bill. And she pursed her mouth in sympathy.

"It's a pity," said Mrs. Dobbs, testing her flat-iron with her forefinger, "that your brother doesn't go to work."

Hannah looked up with a start. "Why, Mrs. Dobbs, he *does* work—very hard!"

"I want to know!" In her surprise, Mrs. Dobbs came near burning one of the best table-napkins. "And no one ever sees him doing a lick."

"He works," said Hannah, with dignity, "very hard at his poetry."

She returned to her accounts, and Mrs. Dobbs said, "Oh!"

At half past twelve dinner was ready. Hannah, her eye on the clock, moved saucepans to the back of the stove and set covered dishes in the oven. At quarter of one she looked anxious; at one o'clock distressed. "Frederick does hate warmed-over things!" she sighed.

Mrs. Dobbs sniffed. "Then why doesn't he come to his dinner?"

"I suppose he's forgotten all about what time it is. He'd never know meal-time if I wasn't round to tell him."

Half past one passed. The clock struck two. Hannah groaned over the spoiled dinner, put on her hat and started out to discover her brother's whereabouts. Mrs. Dobbs's flat-iron thumped disapprovingly.

"Thank heaven," she said to herself, "that out of my four there's not a one that shows any signs of being a poet. And if I saw it coming on I'd dose it out of him, if calomel could do it!"

Long experience had made Hannah familiar with the haunts where Frederick might reasonably be sought when the frenzy of poetic inspiration was upon him. After searching the most accessible, she turned her steps toward the river. It ran between high banks, with a stretch of rapids halfway between the bridges. Frederick loved the stream, and would have gladly celebrated it in his poems had it not been encumbered with the name Jones River, given in honor of one of the early settlers.

Hannah reached the high bank and looked up the river. It lay blue and sparkling under the summer sun, without a craft in sight. She looked down the stream. A little white boat was being borne rapidly along by the current. In the stern sat a young man, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes fixed upon the heavens above him. It did not need a second glance to assure her that this was Frederick.

She hurried along in the direction in which the boat was moving, and her heart began to beat hard, although not altogether because of her haste. The darker line which ran in a zigzag course across the stream, and marked the beginning of the rapids, was not very far in advance of the little boat moving swiftly down the stream, while the abstracted master sought a fitting rime for "blithe." Hannah remembered how Jamie Richards had been drowned in these very rapids. Her heart came up into her throat, half-stifling her, as she screamed, "Frederick! O Frederick!"

The poet did not move.

"Frederick!" she cried again, and this time her voice had the shrillness of despair.

Her hurrying feet had carried her a little below the oncoming boat. She turned and waved her arms frantically. Frederick sat immovable, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes upon the sky.

Her next impulse Hannah did not stop to weigh. The most practical people at times act without deliberation. Something must be done to attract Frederick's attention. Delay in this case would be fatal. Accordingly, Hannah poised herself for a breathless second on the edge of the bank, which just here rose almost straight from the water, shut her eyes, and jumped.

There are some things so startling as to penetrate even the atmosphere of abstraction into which a poet withdraws, and the sight of a young woman descending meteor-like from the sky is one of them.

Frederick woke up,—thrilled with the horrified realization that some one among his fellow townsmen was bent on suicide,—and seized his oars. The process of turning the boat's head to the shore was not an easy one. He had drifted into the grip of a determined current that held his little craft with vise-like clutch. Frederick suddenly realized that he was pulling to save two lives, that of the girl who had thrown herself into the river—and his own.

He set his teeth and bent to his oars. Frederick had been wont to belittle physical exertion. No one knew the meaning of hard work, he had told Hannah, who had not tried his hand at literature.

In the next few moments he had a chance to revise that opinion. Pulling with the desperate strength which the love of life puts into flabby muscles, his thoughts circled despairingly about that tragic figure which, falling from mid-air, had broken in upon his dreams. Was the girl drowning while he struggled with the relentless current?

At last the boat was moving. The stream was baffled. But Frederick, pulling, with set teeth, realized how narrow had been his escape. If he had drifted a little farther it would have been impossible for him to extricate himself. The boat would have been dashed against the hidden rocks. He himself — He pulled desperately, driving the boat ahead. For a girl was drowning.

He could hardly believe his eyes when he saw a figure seated on the narrow ledge at the base of the steep bank,—apparently watching for him,—a dripping, pathetic little figure, with something curiously familiar gripping his attention beneath the oddity of her appearance. The boat fairly flew as an idea, grotesquely unbelievable, crept into his mind and stuck there, defying dislodgment. It could not be Hannah! And yet, by some extraordinary perversity of circumstance, it could not be anybody else.

When he reached her, panting, scarlet, an agony of apprehension written on his face, Hannah's swift intuition told her of what he was thinking. "I made you look," she said, faintly, and smiled.

"Made me look?" he repeated, stupidly.

"I tried to, Frederick. You were drifting down into the rapids. It would have been too late if I had waited, so I jumped."

He stared at her. "You might have been drowned," he said. His voice was very low.

Hannah laughed. "I never thought of such a thing. I can swim a little, you know. It wasn't such hard work getting out, but I hated it when the water went over my head. I guess we'd better go home, Frederick. I'm afraid your dinner is spoiled."

She swayed slightly as he helped her to her feet, and dropped over against him, a dead weight. For the first time in her life Hannah had left her brother to meet an emergency without her assistance.

Frederick did not eat any dinner that day. What with getting Hannah home, and explaining to Mrs. Dobbs that it was only a faint and not a case of drowning, and summoning the doctor, and running to the drug-store, his time was well occupied. And such vestiges of appetite as he might have had vanished after his interview with Mrs. Dobbs, who, acting on the doctor's direction, was beating up some white of egg for Hannah.

"What I can't understand," said Mrs. Dobbs, curtly, "is how it was *her* that came to get in the river. If it had been you, now —" Mrs. Dobbs left her remark unfinished, but the meaning was obvious.

Frederick explained, to the accompaniment of the egg-beater. "It was a very extraordinary thing for her to do," he ended, uncomfortably, for once or twice during his recital Mrs. Dobbs had grunted.

"Extraordinary!" cried Mrs. Dobbs. "Why, she's doing it all the time."

"Jumping into the river?" exclaimed Frederick, protestingly. "Hannah?"

"If she's not jumping into the river, she's doing something else, waiting on you and slaving for you, and skimping her own self, because you don't know the worth of money. It's all of a piece with what she does every day."

Frederick only stared.

"I've nothing much against poetry," said Mrs. Dobbs, magnanimously, "if folks have brains enough to divide up between that and other things. But if being poets is going to make 'em blind as bats and helpless as babies, and selfish without knowing it, I say that the sooner it's dosed out of 'em the better. I'd like to see one of my four trying to write a poem! Just let him try it!" said Mrs. Dobbs, raising her voice. "That's all!"

The atmosphere of that particular day was not favorable to poetic inspiration. Frederick did more thinking in plain prose during the next twenty-four hours than he had done for many a day. And before Hannah was quite herself again Frederick was at work in the office of Mr. Peal, the real estate man.

In taking this step, Frederick felt that he was resigning the dearest of his ambitions. But in less than three weeks a poem appeared in the Grant County *Republican*, which some people considered the best thing Frederick had ever done.

It was called "Lines to a Sister," and in the scrap-book where Hannah keeps her brother's poems it is the chief treasure.