

HOW WALLACE GOT EVEN.

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BY HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH.

"Toot! Toot! Toot!"

Wallace jumped aside in haste. The warning came so suddenly that he did not have time to realize the direction of the danger; but he knew that the danger was very real and very close, and he leaped for his life. His feet struck the gutter and he slipped and fell with a splash, and then he heard Oliver Ryerson's shout of mocking laughter. Wallace arose to his feet, his eyes flashing. The red automobile was at the other end of the block by now; but the driver, a lad not many years Wallace's senior, turned to look back over his shoulder. Wallace knew just what a mischievous grin illumined Oliver's freckled face. He clinched his fists and breathed hard.

A voice spoke from the sidewalk: "All those clean clothes in a mess! Ain't it a shame!" An old woman with a market-basket on her arm had come around the corner in time to see all that had happened, and her voice quavered with sympathy.

Wallace uttered a little cry. He had forgotten the shirt waists that he was carrying home to Miss Winter, the high school teacher. In the dreadful moment when he heard the toot of Oliver's horn he had room in his mind for just one thought, and that was the saving of his life. But now the remembrance of those freshly ironed shirt waists struck him with dismay. He turned his head slowly, as if reluctant to know the worst.

"It's a shame the way that Ryerson boy acts with that automobile of his'n," exclaimed the old woman. "Tain't his fault that he hasn't run over somebody before this. And now look at them nice clean clothes that cost somebody a whole lot of work, and have got to go right into the tubs again!"

"I should say they will," groaned Wallace. He picked up the mussed, muddy shirt waists, which were so immaculate when he left home, and silently restored them to the basket from which they had fallen when he made his leap for life. His face was so downcast that the old woman tried to comfort him.

"Well, it ain't as bad as it might be. Dirtying up a few shirt waists ain't much to worry over alongside of getting killed. I guess your ma will be so thankful to have you come home

with whole bones that she won't fret about doing a little extra work. But it's a shame about that Oliver Ryerson. Just because his father is rich he thinks it's everybody's business to get out of his way."

Wallace's unknown sympathizer was expressing a view very prevalent in the little town. When Oliver Ryerson began to drive his father's automobile, a great many of the townspeople expressed decided disapproval. Oliver was not a careful boy, and as he gained familiarity with the machine he began to exhibit a recklessness which promised disaster sooner or later. Oliver had a somewhat peculiar sense of humor, and the fact that his appearance brought consternation appealed to him as amusing. Many a time that morning as he swept through the town, tooting his warning, he chuckled to himself on recalling Wallace's leap.

Wallace, on the other hand, did not see the humor of the situation. He went home, his heart swelling with an anger that choked him. The old woman on the sidewalk had been right when she said that Oliver Ryerson claimed especial privileges for himself because he was the son of a rich man. It was Wallace's opinion that the time had come to show him his mistake.

The little woman in the kitchen, who looked so slight and frail as she bent over the washtub, paled at the sight of the soiled shirt waists.

"O Wallace!" she said, and her voice shook.

"Yes, I know it; but it wasn't my fault." Wallace told the story, the angry tears moistening his eyes as he explained; and when he had ended, the little woman was crying, but happily.

"We won't fret about a little extra work, will we, dear," she said, just as the little woman on the sidewalk had prophesied, "as long as my boy is safe? And now I'll do these shirt waists the first thing. It won't do to disappoint Miss Winter."

"Some day," Wallace said, and he could not keep his voice steady—"some day I'm going to even things up with Oliver Ryerson."

"I wouldn't let myself feel that way, dear."

"But I do feel that way. He thinks he can do anything he likes, shooting around town in that red automobile, just because his father's richer than anybody around here. This isn't the first time he's played a mean trick on me, and now it's my turn."

Wallace's mother did not say very much just then. She could see that Wallace's excited mood was not favorable to the reception of good advice, and she resolved to talk the matter over with him later, when his sense of injury had had time to cool. But that night, when Wallace lay awake listening to the thud of his mother's flatiron as she toiled to repair the damage due to Oliver's recklessness, he promised himself again to find a way of getting even with the driver of the red automobile.

Miss Winter's shirt waists were sent home a day late, accompanied by an apologetic note from Wallace's mother. Wallace was returning from the errand when he came upon a sight that interested him. Standing directly across the switch track, which led down to the Ryerson factory was a red automobile. A boy with a flushed, puzzled face leaned forward, evidently doing his utmost to start the machine. Perhaps it was not strange that Wallace viewed this picture with a sense of satisfaction.

"He's in trouble himself now. Wonder how he likes it." Wallace stood looking on, a sparkle of malicious pleasure in his eyes. Oliver seemed hot and uncomfortable enough. It would do him good to worry a little, and Wallace also felt sure that it would do him good to witness the process.

Then something happened which greatly surprised and startled him. From the thick woods along the river sounded the whistle of a freight engine. Wallace saw Oliver throw up his arms in a frightened gesture. In spite

of himself, Wallace thrilled with a responsive dismay.

"If he can't start the machine, it'll be smashed. The engineer won't see it till he rounds the curve, and then it'll be too late to stop." All his resentment toward Oliver was swallowed up in sympathy. He ran nearer the tracks, realizing his inability to be of assistance, but vaguely anxious to help in some way. "My, he's plucky all right," thought Wallace. In the admiration for courage which is instinctive in every boy he temporarily forgot his uncomplimentary opinion of Oliver Ryerson. "He's going to stick by that car till the very last minute and save it if he can. He had better be careful, or he'll stay too long."

The whistle sounded again, and Wallace's heart leaped; for the engine had rounded the curve. And then in a strange flash of insight he saw that he was mistaken. Oliver was not pluckily standing by the automobile till the last moment, but prepared to save his life when it became apparent that he could not save the machine too. His frantic gestures told the truth. He had lost his head completely. He was staying on in the automobile because it had not occurred to him that escape was simple and easy if he left the machine to its fate.

Wallace leaped forward. It was not an act recklessly impulsive, blind to consequences. His mind was curiously clear. He realized vividly the danger to which he was exposing himself. His mother's face came up before him—that dear worn face with the tired circles under its eyes and its undaunted smile. Poor mother! And yet if he missed his chance now, how could he face her?

The cowering, ashen-cheeked boy whose coat collar Wallace gripped fought frantically against rescue. But the strength of desperation was in Wallace's slender arms. He jerked Oliver from his seat and then dragged him from the tracks just in front of the locomotive, which a white-faced engineer was doing his best to bring to a standstill. And then both boys heard, without quite understanding what it meant, the crash which rendered the red automobile a hopeless wreck.

The news of the accident spread like wild-fire. People who had been prophesying that the Ryerson boy would kill somebody sooner or later were surprised to find how near he had come to losing his own life. As for Oliver himself, he was a rather pitiable spectacle as Wallace helped him home. Like many reckless people, Oliver's courage was largely superficial, and the peril he had just escaped had drained him dry of self-control. He trembled so that he could not have stood but for the support Wallace gave him, and with difficulty he swallowed down the choking sobs. It did not seem to him that he could ever bear to enter an automobile again.

That night, after Wallace had gone to bed, his mother was startled by a burst of laughter from his little room. She hurried to him, surprised and anxious. She herself had not felt like laughing since Wallace came home with his news, though her heart was overflowing with gratitude for the boy's preservation. As she smoothed Wallace's pillow with a motherly hand a smothered chuckle came from under the bedclothes.

"Nothing's the matter, mother," Wallace acknowledged rather shamefacedly. "But I can't help laughing to think how I was wishing yesterday for a chance to hurt Oliver Ryerson some way or other, I didn't care how; and when I saw him in trouble, the only thing I thought of was how to help him out. It was a queer way to get even, but I guess it'll have to do."

"It was a very good way, I think," said Wallace's mother. She stooped to kiss him, and in the dim light he could not see that her eyes were alight with pride and tenderness.—"The Visitor."