

(continued from previous page)

was too extravagant. With words like "vindicate," "kill," "hot little brain," "grotesquely," she attempted to create an exciting image. She overdid it. Understatement would have been more effective.

To summarise:

Elizabeth Parsons receives first prize for her idea. One guinea goes to this entrant.

E. E. Malden and E. Miles Samuel receive additional prizes of half a guinea each.

These two entries were certainly not the most original, but they kept a safe middle course in their conceptions and in writing them down, where more original ideas were spoiled either by incongruities or by extreme dullness. Where the idea was bright, the writing was usually a reflection of the author's inability to exercise restraint. These two entries won their prizes by telling their tales in simple language.

—S.B.

Mr. Potts Completes His Walk

FIRST PRIZE

(Elizabeth Parsons)

IT was dark—and as the darkness dropped, Mr. Potts's anger rose.

A vicious little grunt winged his stones, and his small eyes gleamed with some peculiar, hitherto unsuspected savagery when a howl of pain and wrath assured him of a deadly accuracy.

For with the night had come courage, and with the elation of his comparative success had come determination—determination to prove himself. To wipe from his tortured little mind the ignominy of his former retreats.

To vindicate his manhood.

To attack—to fight—if necessary to kill. Kill! He shivered in a strange excitement. That was it. Men killed. To kill—to be a man.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men". . .

The quotation beat through the hot little brain of the hot little man.

"Which taken on the full. . ." Mr. Potts grasped at a length of rusty iron standard and pattered down the road.

The big man was moving quickly. He didn't understand the strange behaviour of the little man behind him, and because he didn't understand, he feared. And because he feared, he hurried, and turned often in his tracks. And it was while he was hastening, and peering uneasily over his shoulder, that he tripped. And he fell—and lay still.

Mr. Potts stopped.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken on the full. . ." His eyes were narrowed, and the fingers clenched about his weapon were tense.

To strike—To kill—To vindicate his manhood.

He crept forward.

The big man lay still in the dust. Strangely sprawled to the night, his long neck twisted grotesquely to the left, his lids flared back to let the mist film the glassiness of his eyes.

It was his eyes that first prompted Mr. Potts to grope fearfully for his pulse. But it was his pulse, or rather the ces-

sation of it, that goaded Mr. Potts into an unreasoning hatred towards the big man—towards Destiny.

What right had the fellow to be dead—what right had destiny to maliciously interfere in the vindication of Mr. Potts.

He bowed his head—his fingers clawed spasmodically, almost rhythmically to the waves of disappointment and self pity that moved him.

And then he wept.

Desolation descended upon Mr. Potts's resentful little soul.

It was a motor horn that first roused the little man from his apathy. He stood mulishly on planted legs, and blinked into the glare of the headlights.

Mr. Potts refused to move. The car stopped.

The driver spoke laconically.

"Trouble?"

Mr. Potts said nothing. He was thinking, and as he thought a strange smile caught the corners of his pink mouth, and spread till his whole round pink face became illumined with inner purpose. He turned and faced the driver now kneeling anxiously over the still form. He still smiled as the man turned horrified eyes from the body.

"He's cold," said the driver.

Mr. Potts stood straight, and ready. But not yet, not yet. His moment was not at hand.

"He's dead," persisted the driver.

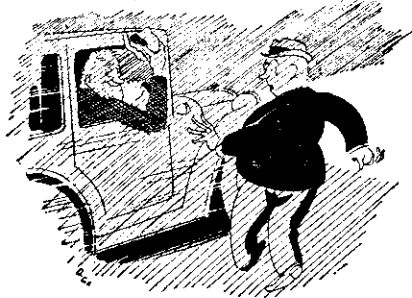
The little man raised his head exultantly to his cavalcade of lost opportunity and failures. . . .

"I killed him," he said.

ADDITIONAL PRIZE

(E. E. Malden)

IT was dark . . . And suddenly the road took a turn under some dark and overhanging trees. As Mr. Potts came round the corner, instead of seeing his man walking steadily ahead of him, all he saw was the white ribbon of the road fading into the dusk—his man was gone! And with the realisation that somehow and somewhere he had given him the slip, all Mr. Potts's old fears and inhibitions came back like a rising tide, completely swamping his new found courage and powers of decision. At first he hurried on to where it was lighter, then he came back slowly, peering into the shadows, throwing an occasional



" . . . He not only saw the ironical salute of the driver, but also its number"

stone at the deeper shadows under the trees and then running back quickly to the lighter part of the road. In fact Mr. Potts was dithering. As it got darker the more confused he became, having no mind but in his imagination he found it impossible to decide on any line of action. Was the man behind him or in

front? Was that his shadow just beyond the tall gum tree? Should he go back to his car? And so while he was still trying to make up his mind it was decided for him. The lights of a baby car swept down the road, and as it flashed by, he not only saw the ironical salute of the driver, but also its number; and like the worm he was, Mr. Potts turned and began his long walk back to Christchurch.

ADDITIONAL PRIZE

(E. Miles Samuel)

IT was dark. . . Mr. Potts was feeling very, very tired, and very dispirited. His thoughts turned back to his small car, standing, unlighted, somewhere in the distance behind him, and a danger to traffic. He recalled a tremendous ticking off only a few days ago from a traffic cop over a very minor offence. His irritation increased.

Slightly ahead of him he could hear, but not see, his adversary, who appeared to be not only as weary as Mr. Potts himself, but, from the sound of his irregular footfalls, limping as well.

The road turned left in a curve and mounted. Suddenly ahead and above him Mr. Potts stared at a steady red light. He stopped abruptly. He remembered now having gone over this railway crossing earlier in the afternoon.

A slight rumble and vibration indicated the approach of a train. Mr. Potts, still firmly grasping his stick, cautiously approached to within a few yards of the crossing, looking about in every direction for his enemy. At last he saw him; but a strangely immobile figure this time, lying at an odd angle across the line. He had evidently tripped and, in falling, had struck his head and lost consciousness.

The thunder of the approaching train had increased now and the very air seemed to be vibrating as Mr. Potts, his thought soaring high among the angels, dashed forward to the prone figure and tried partly to lift and partly to push it clear of the rails.

His heart was pounding like a hammer, or was it those thundering wheels, as with one last heave, which taxed Mr. Potts to the last remaining ounce of his strength, he pushed the heavy figure off and clear, just in time.

The air was one rushing sound of screeching brakes, then noise gradually ceased save for that of hissing steam. In the nearby hedge some frightened birds rose in a flurry of beating wings. Shouts were heard and running feet, and far off, faint but staccato clear, the sharp barking of a dog.

But Mr. Potts heard none of these things. He would never hear any of these things again.

On angels' wings, and as heroes ride, he had entered Valhalla.



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