

ANOTHER CHANCE

Jimmy was so deeply immersed in Greek translation that he failed to note Art's occupation until the slamming of a trunk cover roused his curiosity; he turned to find his room-mate busy with the shaving outfit.

"Hello, anything special going on?" he inquired.

"Yah, good show at the "Princess" to night;—I'm goin'." There was a slight shade of defiance in Art's tone.

Jimmy looked troubled. "Anyone else going? Did you get permission?"

"No, I didn't ask; what's the use?" Answering the last question first, "I don't care who's going"—more defiant this time,—"I am."

There was real concern on Jimmy's face now. "Look here, Art, you've skipped twice before this year and got away with it, but don't risk it again: you'll be caught sure, and you know what that'll mean."

"Don't worry about me, Old Top, I'll be back before Father Prefect will know I'm gone."

Jimmy continued to expostulate, but his jovial room-mate went on with his preparation for the theatre, quite unmoved by arguments, pleadings, or threats. When fully attired he departed—through the window.

For a long time after he had gone Jimmy stared at the open window. He wondered how Art would have managed his stolen departures and returns if they had been rooming on an upper corridor. Then he got up and closed the window. It was March, and a closed window would make the room uncomfortable, but wide open, it might suggest something to a visiting professor.

Jimmy tried to get down to work again, but the room kept getting warmer, and his mind grew more disturbed every minute. He opened the window an inch or two, and tried again. No go.

"Confound that fellow anyhow," he muttered. "If he does get caught, it will serve him good and right." But

the memory of a frail white-faced woman came to him; he could almost hear her speak: "I must let him go, Jimmy, but you'll room with him; and I know you'll look after him for me." Jimmy had promised that he would do his best, but Arthur Dolan's mother hadn't any idea of the magnitude of the task she had intrusted to this serious-minded friend of her irresponsible son. However, Jimmy Sharon cherished no illusions regarding "Artless Arthur," as his chums had fittingly dubbed him. He knew him "from the ground up," so to speak; but Art's mother was the first one who had been kind to the motherless boy, and Jimmy had a grateful heart.

He was only six when he came to M—— from a Halifax Orphanage, and neither Andrew Sharon nor his crotchety spouse had understood the shy affectionate child. Life, for him, became a series of reprimands and punishments, under which treatment the boy's nature was becoming sullen. Then, one day, he discovered the understanding sympathy of Art Dolan's mother, and things were changed for him.

He was nine the day he made this wonderful discovery, and from the time he started to school in the morning until the crowning mishap in the evening, that day had been a trying one.

He wasn't in any mood to listen to the names that the Drake gang were shouting after him, as he started out on an errand after supper, and he was just sore enough to be utterly reckless of the consequence when he went after their ringleader. He got him, thrashed him well, and was starting after the others, when someone touched his shoulder softly. It was Art Dolan's mother. They lived across the street from Sharon's and Jimmy had seen her before.

"Never mind them, son," she said gently. Even now, ten years later, he could recall the soothing way she spoke to him. "Come into the shop with me first, then we'll walk home together."

How glad he had been to go with her, and how she had talked as they went along. Emotions kept him dumb, but that talk planted seeds of ambition in the heart of the lonely boy.

Then he recalled the hopeless feeling that had engulfed him as they approached Sharon's and found that young Drake's father had arrived before them, and was shouting angry threats in the face of Andrew Sharon.

"I tell you he's got a bad streak in him; he nearly killed my boy."

"He did, did he!" Andrew's face was blazing. "Then I'll give him a dang good thrashin!"

Mrs Dolan put her arm around his trembling shoulders and they went up to the two men together. When Andrew picked up a stick and approached them, she pushed Jimmy behind her.

"You'll not touch him," she said sharply. "I saw and heard everything that went on, and I want to tell you, John Drake, your son deserved more than he got. I heard the awful names he called this orphan lad, and if Jimmy hadn't thrashed him, I would have done it myself."

That was the beginning, and ever after that she was his staunch friend and champion. Although she was a widow, with a housefull of boarders, she could always find a minute for Art or Jimmy. Her own boy seemed less appreciative than Jimmy, more inclined to accept this legacy of affection as his just due. He was inclined always to skim along the surface of things, and avoid all forms of exertion that didn't make for amusement. He wasn't a bad boy, in any sense of the word, but he hated "getting down to brass tacks," as he expressed it himself. His mother saw no reason why he shouldn't be an irresponsible boy at twenty; she assured Jimmy on more than one occasion that, "Arthur had more depth of feeling than anyone but herself suspected, and that some day he would surprise his friends."

As time went by Jimmy was agreeing less and less with her opinion. He felt that a chap one year older than himself should exhibit, at least, a little more common sense. He was tired of pulling Art out of bed in the mornings, and tired driving him there at night; and he was tired of dragging him back on time every Thursday,—and tired of doing all the sweeping, dusting, and translating.

Art was resenting the espionage, as he called it, and Jimmy was finding it harder all the time. Tonight he felt inclined to lock the window, and let his room-mate get what he deserved. Somehow, when it came to “lights out”, Jimmy couldn’t do that. He opened the window wide and crept into bed, though not to sleep. Mrs Dolan’s face kept coming before him, and as time passed he grew more and more worried. He heard the steps of Father Prefect pacing the corridor; “He must be watching,” Jimmy thought, “perhaps some other fellows skipped too.”

One night Art had risked the door on returning from a stolen visit to the City, and had managed to get in safely. Jimmy remembered this now, and grew more uneasy. Finally, unable to stand the suspense any longer, he slipped quietly into his clothes, and out through the window. He stole softly around the building and into the road. There was no sign of Art. Jimmy paced up and down in the shadow of the trees until he came; then he warned him that the Prefect was on guard, and they stole back quietly and in through the window.

Art threw off his coat, collar and boots immediately, and was under the bedclothes before Jimmy, who was the last getting in, had removed his shoes. He was in the act of pulling off his coat when the door opened and Father Prefect stood on the threshold; his face wore a look of puzzled amazement as he surveyed Jimmy’s embarrassed countenance; then as though to convince himself, he glanced at Dolan’s bed.

"So," he said, "you were out, Sharon? I've been waiting to receive some of our late students, but I didn't suspect your absence. You will report to Father Rector tomorrow, and don't expect any mercy. This wholesale breaking of rules must be stopped."

He was gone, and Jimmy stood staring at the closed door, a dazed look in his eyes. A moment on Art's bed roused him and he turned to see that jovial gentleman grinning happily in the moonlight.

"Man," he chuckled, "that was a close shave for me." Then something in the despondent droop of Jimmy's shoulders, or his silence, perhaps, conveyed the idea of hopelessness to Dolan, and he sat up in bed suddenly grave.

"Say. Old Top, don't take it to heart that way; they'll let you off easy."

"Let me off, will they!" Jimmy muttered savagely, "I guess so, when they know about you. I'm through shielding you; you can take your medicine, and that's expulsion."

"Hey, Jimmy, you're not goin' to squeal on me! There wouldn't be the ghost of a chance for a chap like me; but you've never broken rules—They'd call this your first offence. Ah, be a sport, Jimmy!"

Jimmy looked his disgust. *That*, from the friend he had been helping through the whole college year! *That*—from the chap whose mother believed capable of great things—of sacrifice. Suddenly his mind glimpsed her white thin face, her roughened work-worn hands; again he felt her protecting arm across his shoulders; he could almost hear her voice pleading with him to give her boy *one more chance*.

"All right, Dolan," and Jimmy's voice shook a little as he said it, "I'll be the goat again for your mother's sake. I don't think she'd live long if you were expelled for bad conduct. As for me, there's no one would care—much."

"Gosh, Jim, you're a good Scout! I guess you're right about Mother; I never thought about it that way before. I don't believe she'd want me to make you the goat, either, but you'll get off, Jimmy, and from this day forward I'm goin' to walk the *Chalk Line*."

Jimmy Sharon didn't sleep much that night. The goal he had set out to win would be almost unattainable after a college expulsion; yet, God helping, he felt that sometime—somehow, things would come out all right for him.

Art Dolan, too, was wakeful. For the first time in his care-free life he had faced possible calamity, and judged himself a coward. He contrasted Jimmy's steady courage with his own weak yielding, and he knew the time of reckoning had arrived—the time to call a halt.

Next morning Jimmy didn't have to pull Art out of bed; as a matter of fact he was dressed and at his Latin when the bell rang. A warm glow filled Jimmy's heart when he saw Dolan sitting there; he thought of something he had read somewhere: "How sweet the fruit of sacrifice."

Apart from the fact that Art was unusually wide-awake and devote at Mass that morning, nothing out of the ordinary happened until after breakfast, when Jimmy was summoned to the Rector's office. Dolan, watching him go, was more terrified than Jimmy himself. Art knew that Jimmy wouldn't lie outright, and under cross-examination would remain silent; silence would be accepted as a guilt, no doubt, and a light punishment meted out. But if he were to slip the truth, what then?

When Sharon returned he found his room-mate shaking with nervousness; "What did he say, Jim?" he asked immediately.

Jimmy tried to smile; it was a pitiful, twisted attempt, and he bent suddenly down to pull out his trunk.

"He said I must get out of here."

"What!" Art shouted, "Do you mean to say you're fired?"

"You said it." Jimmy told him.

"Jumpin' Crickets, Man, are you goin' without a word and you the straightest chap here?"

"You forget," Sharon replied, "I'm *going* to give you another chance to make good."

Art's face whitened, and he grasped the chair-back suddenly. He gave Jimmy one long look; then into his eyes flashed courage—determination—a look that had never been there before. "Yes," he said slowly, "You've given me a chance to make good, and with God's help I'll do it."

Before Sharon had time to question his meaning, Art Dolan was on his way to the Rector's office.

Lifelessly Jimmy set about collecting his things, wondering meantime how his foster parents would receive the orphan prodigal on his return. He finished his task and stood gazing listlessly through the window, when he heard the room door open, and turned to see Dolan and the Rector come in together.

"James," the Rector said, "unpack your trunk. Arthur has acknowledged himself to be the guilty party, and told me of your generosity. I'm sorry, boy, that you were falsely suspected."

For a minute Jimmy's emotions kept him silent. At last Art had measured up to his mother's expectations. Then he questioned eagerly: "How about Art, Father, must *he* go now?"

"He certainly should go, but his candid confession of misdeeds, his genuine regret, and his good resolutions compel me to give him *Another Chance*."

F. C. C. '26

