# The Willoughby Stories

**“The Saving Grace”**
*November 1957*

On an oppressively hot day, Mrs. Willoughby is at her wit's end dealing with her seven chaotic children. Her stress is compounded when her husband, Tom, comes home angry about a botched cement delivery and storms off to the local bar. The conflict escalates as the children act as messengers, shuttling increasingly hostile threats between their estranged parents. The bartender, Nokomis, philosophizes that the extreme heat has evaporated the world's "saving grace," causing everyone's tempers to fray. The tension finally breaks when a cooling rainstorm falls. In the aftermath, everyone's mood is miraculously restored. The story ends with a cheerful Mrs. Willoughby and her now clean, well-behaved children arriving at the bar to lovingly collect her husband for a pleasant family dinner.

**“The Vanquished”**
*January 1958.*

The story is set in motion when Clarence Willoughby asks his mother the meaning of the word "vanquished." Unable to answer, Tom goes to the local bar, where he is insulted by a tough stranger named Duke Lucas. Tom is afraid to fight until his wife, Myra, arrives and tells him to hit the Duke. The Duke easily and repeatedly knocks him to the floor. Myra believes Tom is toying with his opponent and cheers him on with ferocious encouragement. Baffled and unnerved by Tom's refusal to stay down and his wife's bizarre confidence, the Duke becomes psychologically defeated and leaves. Myra proudly leads her "victorious" husband home, her misunderstanding of his character having accidentally created his victory.

**“Bridlegoose”**
*January 1958*

The Willoughby family is sued for five hundred dollars by their neighbor, Benjamin Bridlegoose, a notoriously litigious man who terrorizes the neighborhood with frivolous lawsuits. Facing financial ruin, Myra Willoughby decides to take matters into her own hands. After studying a second-hand "Home Legal Advisor" book, she prepares a counter-attack. At the preliminary hearing, the arrogant Bridlegoose is horrified when the judge reads a long and complex list of counter-suits Myra has filed on behalf of her entire family, citing obscure but pertinent legal precedents. Overwhelmed at having his own tactics used against him so effectively, the bully panics and flees the courtroom, utterly defeated.

**“Seven-Day Terror”**
*February 1958*

Clarence Willoughby builds a "disappearer" from a beer can and cardboard, and after successfully testing it on a neighbor's cat, he makes a fireplug vanish, causing a massive flood. This event triggers a "seven-day terror" in the neighborhood as objects, pets, and eventually a grocer disappear, leaving police, city officials, and two of the three eminent scientists baffled. The chaos is finally resolved by Clarence's eight-year-old sister, Clarissa, who reveals that Clarence stole the idea from her diary. She stages a dramatic ritual as the objects begin returning, each exactly seven days after it vanished. She calmly explains it was a simple "seven-day disappearer," ominously adding that she knows how to create disappearances that last for years.

**"Handful of Fire"**
*February 1958*

After Myra Willoughby makes an exasperated, joking wish for her youngest son, Cyril, to be slain, he is seemingly kidnapped by a local gang of boys led by "Desperate Danny." A ransom note leads Myra and a neighbor, Hodl Oskanian, to a garage where they find Cyril in a staged but menacing predicament—hanging upside down over a vat of what appears to be oil. The nine-year-old "kidnapper" threatens to burn him alive, but the bluff is revealed when the "oil" turns out to be non-flammable syrup. Myra spanks Danny, then unleashes a spectacular tirade at him and at Hodl, whom she accuses of knowing it was harmless. After the spanking, Desperate Danny is captivated by her performance, ending the story as an awestruck admirer of the Willoughby family's chaotic energy.

**"Three for a Quarrel"**
*March 1958*

A simple misunderstanding explodes into a neighborhood crisis when Tom Willoughby is playfully tickling his wife, Myra, and her screams of laughter are misread by Blanche Manners, whom the children deliberately deceive. This leads to police intervention and a forced separation of the couple, fueled by the gossip and misguided efforts of other "peacemakers" in the community. Both Tom and Myra are miserable apart, their situation made worse by the very people trying to "help." Seeking a solution, Myra visits Monsignor Growley, who wisely identifies the true source of the conflict: not the couple themselves, but the interference of third parties. He quotes Chesterton—"It takes three to make a quarrel. There is needed a peacemaker"—giving Myra the insight she needs to fix the problem her neighbors created.

**Ambulance Attendants**

**Story:** "Seven-Day Terror"
**Character Arc:** These attendants are presented as a collective, functional character representing cynical, overworked civil servants. They begin the story bewildered by the flood and annoyed by Clarissa's chanting. They populate the scene of chaos caused by Clarence's invention and highlight the absurdity of the situation. They experience the escalating weirdness of the "seven-day terror" but undergo no personal change.

**Arpad Arkabaranan, Dr.**

**Story:** "Seven-Day Terror"
**Character Arc:** One of the three "eminent scientists," Dr. Arkabaranan is a static archetype of an academic whose intellectualism is useless against true mystery. He offers a comically verbose and meaningless diagnosis of the phenomenon ("The contingence of the intransigence is the most mystifying aspect"). His arc is one of intellectual defeat; he starts as an expert and ends as an irrelevant spectator, unable to comprehend or solve the problem, which an eight-year-old girl ultimately handles.

**Blanche Manners**

**Stories:** "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Blanche is a recurring secondary character who is a catalyst for conflict.

- In "Bridlegoose," she is a past victim of Bridlegoose's litigiousness, having been forced to cut down her apple tree.
- In "Seven-Day Terror," her cat is the first victim of Clarence's "disappearer," initiating the central plot.
- In "Three for a Quarrel," she is the primary "peacemaker" who misinterprets Tom and Myra's playful roughhousing as domestic abuse. Her interference directly leads to the couple's forced separation.
- Her arc is that of a static antagonist or "agent of misfortune." She does not change or grow; rather, she consistently embodies the role of the meddling, trouble-making neighbor. Her character remains fixed, and her function is to create the external problems that the protagonists must overcome.

**Blanche Manners' Cat**

**Stories:** "Seven-Day Terror," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** A non-sentient plot device. In "Seven-Day Terror," its arc is a literal journey through non-existence: it begins as a normal cat, is made to

disappear, and returns exactly seven days later, serving as the proof-of-concept for both the disappearance and reappearance. In "Three for a Quarrel," its suspicion of the screaming within the Willoughby house prompts Blanche Manners to investigate, thus kicking off the main conflict. It has a situational arc, not a developmental one.

**Bridlegoose, Benjamin**

**Story:** "Bridlegoose"
**Character Arc:** Bridlegoose has a reversal arc. He is introduced as a supremely confident and arrogant "perpetual plaintiff," a man who has built his wealth by terrorizing his neighbors with frivolous lawsuits. He begins the story as the clear aggressor, holding all the power. His arc turns when Myra Willoughby brilliantly uses his own tactics against him, burying him in a flurry of counter-suits. He transforms from a smug predator into a panicked, howling victim who flees the courtroom in terror. His arc is a classic tale of the biter bit, an inversion of his initial status and demeanor.

**Buckle, Mr.**

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "Seven-Day Terror"
**Character Arc:** Mr. Buckle is a static character who is a catalyst for the initial conflict and later as a victim.

- In "The Saving Grace," he is the irritated grocer who, after a confrontation with Clarence, dishonestly inflates the cost of a broken window, adding significantly to Mrs. Willoughby's stress.
- In "Seven-Day Terror," he becomes the first human to be made to disappear by Clarence's device, escalating the crisis from a neighborhood nuisance to a serious event.
- His arc is purely situational: he goes from being an antagonist (of sorts) to a victim, his state changing due to external forces rather than internal growth.

**Carla**
(Carla < Italian/Spanish feminine of *Carl*, from Germanic *karl* “man, free man”).

**Story:** "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** A minor, static character at Tom's office. She represents the trivializing nature of office gossip. When Tom calls in due to "emotional shock," she is unimpressed and flippantly calls him a "slugger." She experiences no change and demonstrates how the false narrative of Tom's "abuse" has spread and been received by the wider world.

**Clarence Willoughby**
(Clarence < Latin *Clarentia* place-name, from *clarus* “bright, clear”).

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "The Vanquished," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror," "Handful of Fire," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** As the eldest Willoughby son, Clarence is a consistent agent of chaos whose arc in each story revolves around initiating a problem that others must solve.

- In "The Saving Grace," he breaks a window and sets off his mother's bad day.
- In "The Vanquished," his third-grade homework question ("What does vanquished mean?") initiates the entire plot, leading to his father's confrontation with Duke Lucas.
- In "Bridlegoose," his "joint suit" against Bridlegoose is part of Myra's legal counter-attack.
- His most significant arc is in "Seven-Day Terror." He begins as the proud, if ignorant, creator of a "disappearer," wielding immense power without understanding its consequences. His arc is one of being upstaged and humbled; he creates the terror but has no idea how to end it, only to have his younger sister Clarissa reveal she is the true mastermind and that he stole the idea from her diary. He starts as the story's prime mover and ends as a chastened, secondary figure.
- Overall, Clarence is largely a static character in terms of personality (impulsive, mischievous, not overly bright), but his actions create dynamic situations, and he often ends stories having learned a small, situational lesson or having been outsmarted.

**Clarissa Willoughby**
(Clarissa < Latin *Clarus* "bright, clear, illustrious" + feminine/diminutive suffix *-issa*).

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "The Vanquished," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Clarissa is consistently portrayed as the most intelligent, perceptive, and enigmatic of the Willoughby children. Her arc is one of progressive revelation, where each appearance unveils more of her uncanny wisdom and capability.

- In "The Saving Grace," she is the source of the cut-up velvet gown, demonstrating a blithe disregard for consequences.
- In "The Vanquished," she offers a surprisingly accurate, if cynical, definition of "vanquished" and later defines "protagonist" and "antagonist," establishing her intellectual superiority.
- Her primary arc is in "Seven-Day Terror." She begins as a cryptic observer of the chaos her brother has unleashed. She then masterfully takes center stage, timing her performance to the objects' scheduled return. The story reveals she was the original inventor of the "disappearer," and she ends the story as a figure of immense, slightly terrifying power, calmly explaining the principles of multi-day and

multi-year disappearances. She transforms from a supporting character into the story's true prime mover and hero.
- In "Three for a Quarrel," she again shows her sharp, cynical perception by referencing "stories about widows" to her mother and using her "broken home" status to excuse her behavior at school.
- Clarissa does not change internally; rather, the reader's understanding of her deepens, revealing her static state of being preternaturally intelligent and in control.

**Clementine Willoughby**
(Clementine < French feminine diminutive of *Clément*, from Latin *Clemens* "merciful, gentle").

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Clementine is a younger Willoughby child, characterized by emotional outbursts and simple observations. She is a static character who contributes to the overall chaos of the household. In "The Saving Grace," she bloodies her knees, howls, and insults her mother. In "Bridlegoose," she is a plaintiff in the lawsuit against Bridlegoose for causing her to fall. In "Seven-Day Terror," she offers a simple, unhelpful explanation for the missing fireplug ("There was a man around yesterday"). She does not develop but is a consistent part of the chaotic family dynamic.

**Conchita**
(Conchita < Spanish diminutive of *Concepción*, from Latin *conceptio* "conception, act of conceiving").

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "The Vanquished," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror"
**Character Arc:** Conchita is a recurring barfly at the Plugged Nickel, initially presented as a "floozy" and an object of Myra's jealousy. Her arc is not one of internal change, but a change in how she is perceived by the protagonists and the narrative.
- In "The Saving Grace," she is the target of Myra's angry warnings to Tom. However, by the end of the story, after the "saving grace" of the rain, Myra warmly calls her "the nicest girl in the neighborhood." This reflects a change in Myra, not Conchita.
- In "The Vanquished," she is part of the "Greek Chorus," observing Tom's fight and delivering the insightful closing line about a wife who misunderstands her husband.
- In "Bridlegoose" and "Seven-Day Terror," she is a past victim of the stories' respective calamities (sued by Bridlegoose for cooking with garlic, losing her earrings to the disappearer).

- Conchita remains a constant presence in the community, moving from a figure of suspicion to an accepted, even sympathetic, member of the neighborhood ensemble.

**Corine Willoughby**
(Corine < French/Latin *Corinna*, from Greek *Korinna* diminutive of *kórē* "maiden, girl").

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "Seven-Day Terror," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** A minor Willoughby child. She is a static character who adds to the initial chaos. In "The Saving Grace," she bites a lamp cord and blows a fuse. In "Seven-Day Terror," she offers a sassy, unhelpful response to Officer Comstock. She does not change.

**Cyril Willoughby**

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "Seven-Day Terror," "Handful of Fire," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** The youngest Willoughby child, Cyril is an "unspeakable monster" who is nonetheless loved. He is a static character whose defining trait is his ability to create extreme exasperation.

- His most significant role is in "Handful of Fire." He begins as the object of his mother's mock death-wish, gets "kidnapped" in a game, and is revealed to be an active participant, advising his captors on how to be more menacing. His arc is a farce; he goes from apparent victim back to being the same unnerving, intelligent, and manipulative child he was at the start, entirely unfazed by the staged threat.
- In other stories, he runs away, bites Wally Waldorf, and contributes to the general mayhem. His character does not evolve.

**Desperate Danny**

**Story:** "Handful of Fire"
**Character Arc:** Desperate Danny undergoes a significant transformation. He is introduced as the story's antagonist, a fearsome nine-year-old tough who stages a kidnapping. He begins the story projecting menace, cruelty, and a "dark soul." His arc pivots when Myra Willoughby brutally spanks him and then scolds him. His terror at the spanking gives way to admiration for her performance. He transforms from a wannabe villain into an awestruck admirer of the Willoughby family's chaotic energy, ending the story entranced and asking, "do you carry on like that every day?" He is vanquished by a domestic power he has never witnessed and deeply respects.

**Duke Lucas (Luke the Duke)**

**Story:** "The Vanquished"
**Character Arc:** Duke Lucas is the antagonist who experiences a psychological, rather than physical, defeat. He starts as a classic bully: arrogant, insulting, and physically dominant. He easily knocks Tom Willoughby down multiple times. However, Tom's refusal to stay down, combined with Myra's bizarre encouragement, derails his confidence. He cannot process the situation. His arc is one of diminishing certainty; he goes from a state of total control to one of utter puzzlement and psychological surrender. He is not beaten, but he is "vanquished" by the sheer absurdity of the event, finally walking away because he "couldn't hit him again."

**Fodorko, Freddy**
(Fodorko < Hungarian *Fodor* "curly(-haired)" + diminutive suffix *-ko*) + (Freddy < diminutive of Germanic *Frederick*, from *frid* "peace" + *rīc* "ruler").

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "The Vanquished," "Bridlegoose"
**Character Arc:** A member of the recurring ensemble of bar patrons at the Plugged Nickel. He is a static character who reflects the prevailing mood of the scene. In "The Saving Grace," he is part of the grumpy crowd but is greeted warmly at the end. In "The Vanquished," he watches Tom's fight with contempt. In "Bridlegoose," he is mentioned as a past victim of Bridlegoose's lawsuits. He does not have a personal arc but contributes to the texture of the community.

**George Mullendore**

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror"
**Character Arc:** Another static background character from the neighborhood. In "The Saving Grace," his being pickpocketed adds to the "everybody's having a bad day" theme. In "Bridlegoose," he was sued by Bridlegoose over trash burner fumes. In "Seven-Day Terror," his dog Pete disappears mid-leap. His arc is purely situational; he is a perpetual victim of the strange happenings in the neighborhood but does not change as a person.

**Growley, Monsignor**

**Story:** "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Monsignor Growley is a classic "wise advisor" archetype and is therefore a static character. He does not change but facilitates change in the protagonist. Myra comes to him for a solution to the forced separation from her husband. He uses his characteristic circumlocution to deliver the key insight:

the problem is not the quarrel between two people, but the interference of a third party, the "peacemaker." By providing this analysis, he empowers Myra to solve her own problem. His role is to provide the story's central thesis and resolution path.

**Harold Willoughby**

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "Seven-Day Terror," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** A younger Willoughby son, Harold is a static character whose primary traits are defensiveness and a touch of cowardice. In "The Saving Grace," he wets his pants and blames others. In "Seven-Day Terror," he claims to not even remember a fireplug being there. In "Three for a Quarrel," he plaintively begs not to be left alone with his "fiendish father." He does not develop.

**Heller, Mrs.**

**Story:** "The Saving Grace"
**Character Arc:** A mentioned-only character. Jimmy throws dust on her sheets, contributing to the list of Willoughby transgressions. She is a static plot device, existing only to be wronged.

**Hodl Oskanian**
(Hodl < Germanic given name, diminutive of *Hudel/Hudelda*, from *hōd-* "hood, covering" or *hruod-* "fame") + (Oskanian < Armenian *Oskan* personal name + suffix *-ian* "descendant of, belonging to").

**Stories:** "The Vanquished," "Handful of Fire"
**Character Arc:** Hodl is presented as an expert—"the best handwriting analyst in the world"—and a worldly man who understands darkness. He analyzes the kidnapper's note and helps Myra find Cyril. In the garage he says, "Might as well throw in the torch," and the syrup fails to burn. Myra accuses him of knowing the threat was a game. He turns away with a shudder from Danny's spanking, then alone recognizes the boy's new expression as admiration.

**Jimmy Willoughby**

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "Seven-Day Terror"
**Character Arc:** A minor Willoughby child. Static character. In "The Saving Grace," he throws dust on Mrs. Heller's sheets as revenge. In "Seven-Day Terror," he gives a defiant, unhelpful answer to Officer Comstock.

**The Judge**

**Story:** "Bridlegoose"
**Character Arc:** The judge is a static, functional character. His arc is one of mood rather than development. He begins the story "tired and full of dread" at the prospect of another "Bridlegoose Morning." He experiences a moment of surprise and perhaps relief when the tables are turned on Bridlegoose. He presides over the story's resolution and shows a flicker of amused curiosity about Myra's legal knowledge, but he does not undergo any fundamental change.

**The Mayor**

**Story:** "Seven-Day Terror"

**Character Arc:** The Mayor represents the highest level of civic authority and its ultimate powerlessness in the face of the inexplicable. He begins as a "mean-looking" investigator, hardened by a week of terror. As the situation proves beyond any conventional solution, he becomes dependent on an eight-year-old girl. His arc is a descent from authority to helplessness to bewildered gratitude. He ends the story asking Clarissa simple, child-like questions ("Why did you want the chemicals?"), his status as the city's leader rendered meaningless.

**McGilly, Willy**

**Story:** "Seven-Day Terror"
**Character Arc:** One of the three eminent scientists, McGilly grounds the absurd in the mundane. While his colleagues speak in jargon, he provides the simple, shocking truth: "Who would have thought that you could do it with a beer can and two pieces of cardboard?"

**Murphy, Ozzie**

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "The Vanquished," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror," "Handful of Fire," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Ozzie is a key member of the barroom ensemble and a friend to Tom. He is largely a static character, a reliable fixture in the neighborhood.

- He is a sounding board and cautious advisor to Tom in "The Vanquished," warning him that Duke Lucas is tough.
- He is a past victim of Bridlegoose and the "disappearer."
- His most active role is in "Three for a Quarrel," where he provides shelter for the exiled Tom, making his home the neighborhood's substitute "club."

- His character remains consistent: a friendly, slightly philosophical, but ultimately passive observer of the Willoughby family's various crises.

**Murphy, Ramona**

**Stories:** "Bridlegoose," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Ramona is a static character who embodies the role of the concerned, gossiping, and subtly undermining "peacemaker." She takes Tom in but uses the opportunity to pry into his marital problems, subtly criticize Myra, and portray Tom as a long-suffering victim. Her actions, while perhaps well-intentioned, worsen the situation by reinforcing the false narrative of abuse. She is an antagonist who does not change.

**Myra Willoughby**
(Myra < Greek *myrrha* "myrrh, fragrant resin")

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "The Vanquished," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror," "Handful of Fire," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** As the matriarch, Myra is the emotional core of the series and has the most varied arcs, adapting to each new crisis with an unexpected reservoir of talent and fury.

- In "The Saving Grace," she undergoes a classic emotional arc from being at the absolute breaking point (contemplating murder, tearing her hair out) to a state of peace and generosity after the cooling rain. It is a journey from extreme stress to cathartic relief.
- In "The Vanquished," her arc is one of perception. Her misunderstanding of her husband's cowardice transforms him, through sheer force of her belief, into a hero. She doesn't learn the truth; instead, her false belief reshapes reality.
- In "Bridlegoose," she has a triumphant "underdog" arc. Starting as a helpless victim facing a lawsuit, she transforms into a brilliant, self-taught legal strategist who demolishes her opponent with his own tactics.
- In "Handful of Fire," her arc moves from maternal exasperation (wishing her son gone) to primal terror and finally to righteous, terrifying fury. She spanks Danny and then scolds him, finally winning his admiration.

- In "Three for a Quarrel," she is cast as a victim of neighborhood gossip but refuses to remain one. Her arc is one of agency, as she seeks counsel and presumably finds a clever way to undo the damage caused by the "peacemakers."
- Overall, Myra's character is defined by its dynamic resilience. While her core personality (fiery, dramatic, loving) is static, she demonstrates a boundless capacity to evolve her skills and response to meet any

challenge, becoming a lawyer, a hero's inspiration, and a terrifying domestic deity as circumstances require.

**Nokomis Talvi**
(Ojibwe *nookomis* "my grandmother") + (Finnish *talvi* "winter").

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "The Vanquished," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror," "Handful of Fire," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Nokomis, the bartender at the Plugged Nickel, is the philosophical center and narrator-surrogate of the neighborhood. He is a fundamentally static character, an anchor of stability and observation around whom the chaos of the stories swirls.

- In "The Saving Grace," he introduces the central theme of the "film of saving grace."
- In "The Vanquished," he is the official arbiter who confirms that Tom did, in fact, vanquish the Duke.
- In "Bridlegoose," he is the historian who recounts Bridlegoose's past legal battles.
- He does not change, but his commentary provides context, theme, and a sense of weary wisdom. He envies the family life of others but remains a perpetual, lonely observer on "the wrong side of the bar."

**Officer Comstock**

**Stories:** "Seven-Day Terror," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Comstock represents the limits of law and order.

- In "Seven-Day Terror," he begins as a suspicious, by-the-book policeman who correctly identifies that a Willoughby child is responsible for the missing fireplug. His arc is one of professional collapse; he moves from suspicion to discouragement to utter irrelevance as the problem escalates far beyond his capacity.
- In "Three for a Quarrel," he is the official "peacemaker" who, acting on Blanche Manners' complaint, enforces Tom and Myra's separation. He is portrayed as a misguided bureaucrat, applying a clumsy, official "solution" to a problem he doesn't understand.
- He is a static character whose function is to show the failure of conventional authority in the face of both the supernatural and complex domestic situations.

**The Pickpocket**

**Story:** "The Saving Grace"
**Character Arc:** A minor, unseen character who exists for a single ironic vignette. In a "savage mood," he pickpockets George Mullendore, finds only two dollars, and angrily throws the wallet into an incinerator, unaware of the four

twenty-dollar bills hidden in a concealed part. He is a static character whose brief story reinforces the theme that "everyone was having a bad day," even the criminals.

**Susanna Shooks**

**Story:** "Handful of Fire"
**Character Arc:** A neighborhood child who is an unreliable witness. She tells Myra that Cyril was taken away by gangsters who "killed him and threw him to the ducks." She is a static character whose function is to provide the initial, frightening (and false) information about Cyril's disappearance.

**Tass**

**Story:** "Seven-Day Terror"
**Character Arc:** A little round man who represents the press (likely an allusion to the Soviet news agency, TASS). He appears briefly to state that the press is aware of the story ("Tass has it"). He is a static, one-note character signifying that the neighborhood's bizarre crisis has escalated to the level of national or international news.

**Tom (Thomas) Willoughby**

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "The Vanquished," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror," "Handful of Fire," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Tom is the patriarch of the Willoughby family, often acting as a foil to Myra's more dynamic reactions. His arcs are typically reactions to the chaos surrounding him.

- In "The Saving Grace," he is a catalyst for the second half of the story. His anger over the mishandled cement delivery sends him to the bar, where he becomes the recipient of Myra's escalatingly hostile messages. His arc mirrors Myra's: he begins in a state of anger and frustration and ends by accepting his wife's invitation to a peaceful family dinner.
- His most significant arc is in "The Vanquished." He begins as a self-admitted coward, terrified of the tough Duke Lucas. He is transformed into a relentless, unstoppable fighter, not by an inner change of heart, but by his wife's profound misunderstanding of his character. He becomes a hero by accident, his arc a testament to the power of external perception.
- In "Three for a Quarrel," he is the victim of a misinterpretation. His playful tickling of his wife is seen as abuse, and he is exiled from his home. His arc is one of suffering and misery due to the meddling of others, leading him from a happy husband to a glum, unwilling bachelor who desperately wants to return home.

- Overall, Tom is less of an agent of change than Myra. He is often the one to whom things happen, and his development is frequently the result of external pressures rather than his own initiative.

**Vonk, Dr. Velikof**

**Story:** "Seven-Day Terror"
Character Arc: The lead "eminent scientist." Like Arkabaranan, he is a static archetype of failed intellectualism. He describes the events in incomprehensible jargon ("This transcends the metaphysical. It impinges on the quantum continuum.") and is incapable of understanding Willy McGilly's simple explanation. His arc is one of total intellectual failure, a journey from presumed expertise to demonstrated impotence.

**Waldorf, Wally**

**Stories:** "The Saving Grace," "The Vanquished," "Bridlegoose," "Seven-Day Terror," "Three for a Quarrel"
**Character Arc:** Tom's boss and a recurring background character.

- In most appearances, he is a static member of the barroom crowd.
- His main role is in "Three for a Quarrel." Childless and "terrified of small children," his visit to the Willoughby home is a disaster. Myra's comforting kiss to him at the door is witnessed and becomes a piece of the "evidence" used against her. Later, he becomes a frosty, unsympathetic boss to the "emotionally shocked" Tom. He functions as an unwitting catalyst for the central conflict and a representative of the unsympathetic outside world. He does not change.



# “The Saving Grace”

On a hot and trying day, Mrs. Willoughby is having trouble with her seven urchins. Her son Clarence had a misfortune with the grocer, Mr. Buckle, who nearly slapped him for dismantling a pyramid of salad oil and breaking a dozen bottles. Clarence, who is eight, retaliated by breaking the grocer's window with a rock. Mr. Buckle then phoned Mrs. Willoughby, claiming it was a large plate window that would cost $165, when it was actually a small window worth only three dollars. Mrs. Willoughby sighed and tore out handfuls of her red hair. She then noticed her daughter Clarissa playing with pieces of black velvet cut from her only evening gown. Clarissa defended herself by saying she was never told not to cut it up. Another daughter, Clementine, fell down, bloodied her knees, and howled. Mrs. Willoughby told her not to be noisy and not to get blood on the sofa. Clementine called her mother a "black-hearted miserable cranky dirty wrinkled-up mean old woman" and got blood on the sofa on purpose. The story then lists other transgressions. Harold wet his pants and blamed others.

Corine bit a lamp cord, burning her mouth and blowing a fuse. Jimmy threw dust on Mrs. Heller's sheets, saying it would teach her not to talk to him that way. Mrs. Willoughby, noting that accounted for six of the children, said she hoped Cyril would do something "damnable" so she could punish them all at once, as she lacked the energy to do it individually. When she asked where Cyril was, she was told he had run away again. She replied, "Good," and said she would "make it do" so she could punish them all for something.
The narrative then takes a turn, stating that she murdered all seven children in the kitchen. When Mr. Willoughby came home, he was not surprised to see the seven corpses and was glad he was not the one who did it. He asked about the cement delivery, and his wife confirmed it arrived but she forgot to spread it or call him. The three cubic yards of concrete were now a hard, useless pile in the garage. In a fit of passion, Mr. Willoughby slew his wife and went to the corner for a drink.

The narrator then clarifies that the "foregoing is not entirely untrue." The mother did not kill her children but thought of it and was sorry she hadn't. Mr. Willoughby did not kill his wife but did something she considered worse by saying, "Only a damned

fool makes a damned fool mistake" after she explained she knew nothing about cement. However, it is documented that he did go to the corner to get drunk. A bartender named Nokomis Talvi explains his theory that on hot days, the "film of saving grace over the world" evaporates, letting the "old beast" rise up, which can only be subdued by another film he mixes at the bar. Mr. Willoughby agrees, though he hesitates to make his children into drunkards.

Clarence arrives at the bar with a message from his mother to give him all the money except five dollars. Clarissa arrives next, sent to get two bottles of cold beer. Clementine follows with a warning for her father not to talk to "that floozy Conchita." Conchita, present at the bar, sends a dismissive message back with Clementine. George Mullendore enters, claiming his pocket was picked on the bus. Nokomis is angry, thinking it's an excuse to avoid a bar bill, and a few other patrons—Freddy Fodorko, Wally Waldorf, and Ozzie Murphy—also distrust him. Tom Willoughby feels sympathy but is low on funds. It is revealed that George was indeed pickpocketed, but the thief missed the four twenties in a concealed pocket.

Jimmy arrives to tell his father he no longer lives at home and his belongings will be in the garbage. Thomas Willoughby tells Jimmy to relay that the message was received. Corine arrives to say their mother is taking him to court for desertion and non-support if he is not home in five minutes, also complaining about the coffee, the laundry, and asking if Conchita is still there. He replies that he will neither be home in five minutes nor in court tomorrow. The patrons complain about the heat and their own troubles. Harold arrives with the final message: their mother says it's over, she is taking everything, and his lawyer should contact hers. He tells Harold he doesn't have a lawyer and neither does she. Lastly, Cyril appears, having run away again. Tom says he would like to run away too, but Cyril rejects him. Nokomis laments that he also ran away as a child and now feels trapped at the "end of the world."

Then, it rains hard for twenty minutes, cooling the air and clearing tempers. The "film of saving grace" returns. Myra Willoughby (Mrs. Willoughby) arrives with all seven children, clean and shining. She cheerfully invites Tom to join them for a spaghetti feast at La Scala. She compliments Conchita's appearance and Nokomis's bar, expresses pride in her family, and bids good evening to Mr. Fodorko, Mr. Waldorf, and Mr. Murphy. The family leaves for supper, leaving a "pleasant glow" behind them.

(Clarence), (Clarissa), (Clementine), (Conchita), (Corine), (Cyril), (Freddy Fodorko), (George Mullendore), (Harold), (Jimmy), (La Scala), (Mr. Buckle), (Mrs. Heller), (Myra Willoughby), (Nokomis Talvi), (Ozzie Murphy), (Pope), (Thomas Willoughby), (Wally Waldorf)

I. A Hot and Trying Day

1. Atmosphere: People began to “blow their tops like a popper full of corn starting to work.”
2. The Troubles of the Seven Willoughby Urchins:
   A. Clarence:
      a. The Misfortune: Had an incident with the grocer, Mr. Buckle.
      b. Initial Act: Dismantled a pyramid of salad oil bottles, breaking a dozen.
      c. Grocer’s Reaction: Mr. Buckle “nearly slapped his head off.”
      d. Clarence’s Retaliation: The eight-year-old, described as “self-reliant,” broke one of the grocer’s windows with a rock “no bigger than a large man’s fist.”
      e. The Phone Call: Mr. Buckle, “hot and irritated,” phoned Mrs. Willoughby.
         i. He claimed it was a large plate window that would cost one hundred and sixty-five dollars.
         ii. In reality, it was a “little plain window” that would only cost three dollars.
      f. Mrs. Willoughby’s Reaction: Sighed and “tore out small handfuls of her red hair.”
   B. Clarissa:
      a. The Discovery: Found playing on the floor with square-cut pieces of fine black velvet.
      b. The Source: The velvet could only have come from Mrs. Willoughby’s “best, worst, only evening gown.”
      c. Clarissa’s Defense: “You never told me not to cut it up, you never did, you know you never did, you never even mentioned me not cutting it up.”
   C. Clementine:
      a. The Incident: Fell down, bloodied her knees, and howled as if it were a “great misfortune.”
      b. Mother’s Response: “O, don't be so noisy... I'll patch you up in a minute. And don't get that blood all over the sofa."
      c. Clementine’s Retort: “Why, mama, you're mean. You're a black-hearted miserable cranky dirty wrinkled-up mean old woman.”
      d. Further Defiance: Howled some more and got blood on the sofa “on purpose.”
   D. Harold:
      a. The Incident: Wet his pants.
      b. His Defense: Claimed it was not his fault, stating, “You blame it on me, you always blame it on me, you'd think I was the only one that ever did it.”
   E. Corine:
      a. The Incident: Bit through a lamp cord.
      b. The Consequences: “scared herself silly,” burned her mouth, and, “worse blew out a fuse.”
   F. Jimmy:
      a. The Incident: Threw handfuls of dust at Mrs. Heller’s sheets on the line.
      b. His Justification: "She made such a fuss with just a little bit of dust, I bet

she really has one when she sees that. That'll teach her she hadn't better talk to me that way."

G. Mrs. Willoughby's Plan for Group Punishment:
   a. The Tally: Notes that the actions of six children have been accounted for.
   b. A Hope for Cyril: "Let's hope Cyril does something damnable so I can punish you all at once. I don't have the energy to do it individually."
   c. Cyril's Whereabouts: In response to "Where is he?" the children state, "He runned away again."

II. An Unreliable Account of the Aftermath

1. The Fictional Escalation:
   A. Mrs. Willoughby on Cyril's Absence: "Good. That isn't very bad but I'll make it do. Go get him. I can't be partial. I have to punish you all for something."
   B. The Murders: She collected the children in the kitchen and "murdered them all brutally."
      a. Narrator's Aside: "It was a shame, as they were good children and brightened up the neighborhood."
   C. Mr. Willoughby's Arrival Home:
      a. His Reaction: Was "not too surprised to see the seven little corpses."
      b. His Commentary: "O well, it had to happen sooner or later. I'm glad it was you and not I who did it. I might have felt a little compunction later..."
      c. A Practical Matter: He asks, "I guess the ready-mix men didn't bring the cement?"
   D. The Cement Mishap:
      a. Mrs. Willoughby's Negligence: She forgot to spread the cement, assuming it would "flatten out by itself after a while."
      b. The Result: Three cubic yards of concrete hardened into a pile "like a big ice cream cone," making a slab floor impossible.
   E. Mr. Willoughby's Response: He "slew Mrs. Willoughby in a fit of passion" and went to the corner for a drink.
2. The Clarification of Events:
   A. Narrator's Hedge: "The foregoing is not entirely untrue."
   B. The Mother's Actual Thoughts:
      a. She did not actually slay her seven children.
      b. However, "she thought of it for a moment, and for a second moment she was sorry that she hadn't done it."
   C. The Husband's Actual Actions:
      a. He did not really kill his wife, but did "something worse. Or she said it was worse."
      b. The Verbal Attack:
         i. Her reaction: "I'd rather you killed me than talked to me like that...

Everybody makes mistakes."

ii. His retort: "Only a damned fool makes a damned fool mistake."

c. The Departure: He did go down to the corner "with the announced intention of getting drunk."

d. Corroboration: "There is documentation on this. The wife and all seven children heard him say that was what he was going to do."

III. Mr. Willoughby at the Corner Bar

1. The Bartender's Philosophy:
   A. Nokomis Talvi explains the day's meanness: on ordinary days, there is a "film of saving grace over the world," but on very hot days, "it evaporates."
   B. The Consequence: "Then the old beast rises up."
   C. The Remedy: "The only way to subdue it is to spread over the spirit another film which I mix here."
2. Mr. Willoughby's Moral Quandary:
   A. Approves of the drink for himself and "halfway" for his wife.
   B. Hesitates to "make drunkards of my children," fearing they might become the "monstrosity, the controlled drinker."
   C. Rejects laudanum as an alternative because he "can't afford it for them."
3. Messages from Home, Delivered by Children:
   A. Clarence Arrives: "Mama says to give me all your money for her except five dollars. She says that's enough for you to drink up. She says to tell the big ape that."
   B. Clarissa Arrives: "Mama says to send her two bottles of cold beer post-haste."
   C. Nokomis's Envy:
      a. To Mr. Willoughby: "You should be a happy man... We who are not married always envy such as you who have wife and children."
      b. Laments being childless, which is "to be worse than useless," like an old, fruitless tree. He feels he sees the world "from the wrong side of the bar."
   D. Clementine Arrives:
      a. The Warning: "Mama says if that floozy Conchita is here don't you even talk to her."
      b. Mrs. Willoughby's Opinion of Conchita: She is a "no good chippy" an Mrs. Willoughby "could look twice as good as you do if she didn't have seven kids to take care of."
      c. Conchita's Rebuttal (relayed to Clementine): "You tell your mama I have bad days too... I can pick up better stuff than him in the alley."
4. Escalating Tensions in the Bar:
   A. George Mullendore's Plight:
      a. The Story: Claims his pocket was picked on the bus.
      b. The Bartender's Suspicion: Nokomis is angry, believing it a "dodge to keep from paying his bar bill," and refuses him another drink.
      c. Other Patrons' Indifference: Freddy Fodorko, Wally Waldorf, and Ozzie

Murphy offer no help, as “none of them liked him.” Tom Willoughby, though sympathetic, has limited funds.

d. The Reality: His pocket was indeed picked, but the “savage” pickpocket found only two dollars and threw the billfold into an incinerator, missing four concealed twenty-dollar bills.

B. Jimmy Arrives:

a. The Ultimatum: “Mama says to tell you... you don't even live there anymore... if you want any of your stuff you can go down the alley in the morning and pick it up, it'll all be in the garbage can. She says you can go to hell in a handbasket.”

b. The Permission: She says to “go ahead and talk to Conchita. She doesn't care what you do.”

c. Thomas Willoughby’s Reply: “Tell your mother that you have told me.”

C. Corine Arrives:

a. The Threat: Mrs. Willoughby will have him in court the next day for “desertion and non-support” if he is not home in five minutes.

b. The Complaints: He bought the wrong coffee, and because it was too hot to wash, he has no shirt for the next day.

c. The Query: She is to “see if Conchita is still here.”

d. Conchita’s Response: “I am still here, doll.”

e. Tom’s Response: “And tell your mother I will neither be home in five minutes nor in court tomorrow.”

D. Harold Arrives:

a. The Message: “Mama says it's all over with you. She says nine years of her life wasted just like that. She says no hard feelings only she's going to take you for everything you've got.”

b. The Instruction: “She says to have your lawyer get in touch with her lawyer.”

c. Tom’s Reply: “Tell your mother I don't even know the name of a lawyer and she doesn't either.”

E. Cyril Arrives:

a. The Non-Message: “Nothing. I runned away again.”

b. Tom’s Proposal: “Where are you going? I'd kind of like to run away too.”

c. Cyril’s Rejection: "No. I don't want you. You run away by yourself. I don't even like you anymore.”

d. Tom’s Counter-Rejection: "You go back home then. If I can't run away with you you can't run away at all. Go right back home.”

5. Barroom Commentary:

A. Ozzie Murphy on the Weather: “The Lord goes to extremes in his weather. It is the only fault I have ever discovered in him, but it is a fault and he should try to correct it.”

B. Freddy on Running a Bar: If he were rich, he would run a better, more pleasant place, and would not even let in bums, girls like Conchita, or

himself, as he'd be the "ruination of a nice place."
C. Wally Waldorf's Loneliness: His wife is in the country and he quarreled with everyone at his office. States, "I'm a good man who has mean days."
D. Nokomis's Despair: He ran away as a child and ended up in "the worst bar on the worst street in the worst town in the worst country in the world... I've been everywhere, this is the end of the world."

IV. The Return of the Saving Grace

1. A Change in Atmosphere:
   A. The Rain: It "came down hard for twenty minutes and cooled the air."
   B. The Effect: "Tempers cleared and the invisible serpents slithered away from the gleaming streets."
   C. The Restoration: A "thin film of saving grace" spread over the world once more.
2. The Family Reunited:
   A. Myra Willoughby's Arrival: Appears with all seven children, who are in "clean clothes and shining."
   B. The Invitation: "Come along, Tom. I'm going to take all the children out to eat tonight and I'm going to take you too."
      a. The Destination: La Scala, for a "spaghetti feast."
   C. Her Compliments to the Bar Patrons:
      a. To Conchita: "you look wonderful. I always say you're the nicest girl in the neighborhood."
      b. To Nokomis: "This is a splendid place you have here... I never worry when Tom is here. I always know he is in good company."
   D. Her Pride: "Haven't I a nice family? They're all so pretty when they're dressed up."
   E. The Departure: After wishing good evening to Mr. Fodorko, Mr. Waldorf, and Mr. Murphy, the family goes to supper, "leaving a pleasant glow in their wake."



# “The Vanquished”

Clarence asks his mother, Myra, what "vanquished" means and whether it means to win or lose. Myra guesses it means winning and losing part of the time and tells him to ask his father. Clarence retorts that his father is as "dumb" as she is and complains about having two dumb parents. When Myra wonders why such words are in a book "For Little Boys," Clarence corrects her, stating it is a "Third Grade Reader!" Clarissa, aged seven, claims "vanquished" means to "go away and not be there anymore." Myra tells her husband, Tom, to define the word for their nine-year-old son. Tom admits he doesn't know, recalling only that the Bearcats once got vanquished, which he thinks has to do with "rushing the passer." Myra insists he find out, and Tom leaves. Clarissa announces that her father has "vanquished down to the bar on the corner."

Tom Willoughby goes to the Plugged Nickel and asks what "vanquished" means, explaining his son is in the third grade. Conchita provides an illustration, stating she "vanquished four Cuba Libres." Nokomis, the barman, says it means to bar someone from a place, like when he "vanquished Punchy McGonigal." Ozzie Murphy suggests it's like having "an a-vanquish over him." A stranger in a black hat declares that it means they are "all a crowd of dummies." This angers Tom. The stranger is identified as Duke Lucas, also known as Luke the Duke, who is part of a tough group from the Silver Dollar Bar. The Plugged Nickel is a modest bar, unlike the Silver Dollar. The only tough man who usually came in was a quiet con man named Hodl Oskanian from Wreckville. Tom asks Duke Lucas to repeat his remark, and the man insults Tom's ears. Tom insists that Lucas cannot call him or his friends dummies.

Tom quietly asks Ozzie Murphy if Lucas is tough; Ozzie replies that Tom isn't and should leave him alone. Tom then asks Nokomis how big the man is, and Nokomis says he is a head taller and could teach Tom what the word means. Feeling everyone watching him with contempt, including Nokomis, Conchita, Ozzie Murphy, Freddy Fodorko, and Wally Waldorf, Tom tells the stranger, "I don't like your looks." Duke Lucas threatens to unhinge Tom's jaw if he speaks again. Tom is cowed until he sees his wife Myra at the tavern door. She tells him to hit the man so they can go home and help the children with their homework. Tom, having been married to Myra for ten

years, is shocked that she believes him brave and has never realized he is a "sniveling coward."

Spurred on, Tom hits the Duke, who immediately unhinges Tom's jaw as promised, knocking him flat. Myra snaps his jaw back into place, calls the punch hard, and tells him to hit the Duke again and "put him away." Tom gets up and hits the Duke again, who flattens him once more. Myra encourages him to get up and stop "playing with him." Raised by an "invisible angel," Tom lands a soft fist on the Duke's face. The Duke, puzzled, asks Myra if Tom belongs to her. She confirms he is her husband and asks the Duke if he has had enough. The Duke concedes, saying he couldn't hit Tom again and would have to "turn in my license in the human race." He shakes his head and walks out of the Plugged Nickel.

Myra proudly states, "They don't fool around with my Tom very long," but chides him for getting his shirt bloody. Tom asks if he vanquished him, and Nokomis confirms that he did. Myra says good night and takes Tom home. Conchita remarks that Tom's wife misunderstands him and he is glad of it. Back home, Myra tells Clarence, "When you vanquish someone you whip them." Clarence understands and then asks what a "protagonist" is. Clarissa interjects, telling him not to ask their parents, defining a protagonist as "a man that's married to an antagonist," and adds that if he had asked her first, they could have all saved time.

(Bearcats), (Clarence), (Clarissa), (Conchita), (Cuba Libres), (Duke Lucas), (For Little Boys), (Freddy Fodorko), (Hodl Oskanian), (Luke the Duke), (Myra), (Nokomis), (Ozzie Murphy), (Plugged Nickel), (Punchy McGonigal), (Silver Dollar Bar), (Third Grade Reader), (Tom Willoughby), (Wally Waldorf), (Wreckville)

I. The Initial Query

1. Clarence’s Question: Asks, “Which ones were the vanquished?... Did they win or lose?"
   A. Context: The word appears in his “Third Grade Reader!”
   B. Myra’s (His Mother’s) Response:
      a. Guesses they “won part of the time and lost part of the time.”
      b. Defers to his father.
   C. Clarence’s Frustration: “He's as dumb as you are. I bet I'm the only boy in the class that has a dumb father and mother both.”
2. Family’s Collective Ignorance:
   A. Clarissa (age seven) Offers a Definition: “It means go away and not be there anymore.”
   B. Clarence’s Frustration: “I guess we'll all be dumb if no one knows anything in this family.”
   C. Tom’s Attempted Definition:
      a. Admits, “I don't know what it means.”
      b. Recalls a football context: “one afternoon the Bearcats got vanquished.

They couldn't run and they couldn't pass. It has something to do with rushing the passer, I think."

D. Clarence's Correction: "This is about soldiers. It must be a different word."

3. The Quest Begins:
   A. Myra's Directive to Tom: "Find out, Tom, you don't want your children to grow up ignorant."
   B. Tom's Departure: He leaves, not to be heard from for a while.
   C. Clarissa's Observation: "Mama, he vanquished down to the bar on the corner... I tried to tell you that's what it meant."

II. Seeking Answers at the Plugged Nickel

1. Tom Willoughby's Arrival: Goes to the Plugged Nickel bar.
2. Tom's Inquiry: "Since my oldest boy's in the third grade I have an awful time keeping up. What does vanquished mean?"
3. The Patrons' Definitions:
   A. Conchita: "I just vanquished four Cuba Libres... But the next one is likely to vanquish me. That's an illustration." Tom does not "get it."
   B. Nokomis the Barman: Defines it as not letting someone come into a place.
      a. Example: "Like I vanquished Punchy McGonigal from the bar and now he can't come in anymore unless he stops punching the people."
   C. Ozzie Murphy: "is like you have the hop on a fellow, you have an a-vanquish over him."
   D. The Stranger in the Black Hat: "is that you are all a crowd of dummies."

III. The Confrontation

1. Tom's Reaction: Becomes mad, but doesn't know "how mad to get because he didn't know the stranger very well."
2. The Stranger Identified:
   A. Name: Duke Lucas.
   B. Nickname (on the next street): Luke the Duke.
   C. Reputation: One of the "tough-looking bunch of men" from the Silver Dollar Bar.
   D. Contrast of Bars: The Plugged Nickel is "only a block from the Silver Dollar, but spiritually they are worlds apart." Nokomis ran a "modest bar for modest men."
3. The Escalation:
   A. Tom's Challenge: "Would you please repeat that remark."
   B. Duke's Taunt: "I said you were all a crowd of dummies. What's the matter? Is there something wrong with your ears besides their looking like a pair of wings?"
   C. Tom's Principled Stand: "You can't call me a dummy... And you can't call my friends dummies. We can call each other that if we want to, but you can't call

us that."
D. Duke's Retort: "Since when you need a license to call a dummy a dummy?"

4. Tom's Private Consultations:
   A. To Ozzie Murphy: "Is that man really tough?"
      a. Ozzie's Assessment: "I don't know if he is or not, Tom. I know you're not. Be better you leave him alone."
   B. To Nokomis the Barman: "How big is he when he stands up?"
      a. Nokomis's Warning: He is about a head taller, and, "If you really want to find out what that word means he can teach you."
5. Tom's Internal State:
   A. Feels everyone watching him with contempt.
   B. Experiences physiological effects of being "scared and mad at the same time," including a trembling-inducing gland, a spleen turning green, unstrung limbs, and an itchy nose.
   C. Duke's Threat: After Tom says, "I don't like your looks," Duke replies, "If you open your mouth once more I'll unhinge your jaw for you and you won't be able to close it."
   D. The Low Point: Tom is cowed, his teeth rattling. "A red flush spread over him like a tent and he hid inside it. This was the bottom."

IV. The Misunderstanding and the Fight

1. Myra's Arrival: She appears at the tavern door; Tom "always knew when his wife was looking at him."
2. Myra's Encouragement: "Well hit him, Tom, and let's go home. You know we've got to help the children with their homework."
3. Tom's Realization:
   A. His wife of ten years did not know he was afraid of his own shadow.
   B. She perceived him not as a "sniveling coward" but as someone who was about to hit the Duke.
4. The First Blow: Tom hits the Duke.
   A. The Retaliation: The Duke unhinges Tom's jaw as promised, and Tom is "stretched out flat as a dead man."
   B. Myra's Reaction:
      a. Observes, "My you look funny with your jaw out of place, Tom."
      b. Snaps his jaw back into place.
      c. Encourages him: "Well, hit him again, Tom, and put him away, and let's go home."
5. The Second Blow:
   A. Tom gets up "wobbly" and hits the Duke again.
   B. Myra is a "red flame" and her misunderstanding as his "perpetual triumph."
   C. The Retaliation: The Duke flattens him again.
   D. Myra's Continued Prodding: "You shouldn't let him keep knocking you

down... and stop playing with him. We have to help the children with their homework."

6. The Final Blow and the Duke's Surrender:
   A. Tom's Ascent: "must have been raised up by an invisible angel."
   B. The Action: He "thudded a soft fist into the face of the Duke."
   C. The Duke's Puzzlement: Shakes his head and asks Myra, "Lady, does this whelp belong to you?"
   D. Myra's Reply: "My husband Tom. Have you had enough?"
   E. The Duke's Concession: "Lady, I've had enough. I couldn't hit him again. I'd have to turn in my license in the human race." He walks out.

V. The Aftermath and Final Definitions

1. Immediate Reactions:
   A. Myra's Pride: "They don't fool around with my Tom very long."
   B. Myra's Critique: "But Tom you should have hit him real hard the first time and not fooled around and got your shirt all bloody."
   C. Tom's Question: "Did I vanquish him?"
   D. Nokomis's Confirmation: "Yes, Tom, you did... It was a little odd the way you did it, but you vanquished him."
   E. Conchita's Observation: "There's one man whose wife really misunderstands him... and is he ever glad of it!"
2. Resolution at Home:
   A. Myra Informs Clarence: "We found out what that word means, Clarence... When you vanquish someone you whip them."
   B. Clarence's Next Question: "But what's a protagonist? Is he a good people or a bad people?"
   C. Clarissa's Interjection:
      a. Warns Clarence: "Don't ask them, they don't know."
      b. Her Definition: A protagonist "doesn't have to be either of those things. He's a man that's married to an antagonist."
      c. Her Final Word: "If you'd ask me these things first you'd be a lot smarter and we could all save time."



# “Bridlegoose”

Old Benjamin Bridlegoose decides to sue the Willoughbys for five hundred dollars, claiming their puppy kept him awake for five nights. A scared Tom Willoughby asks his wife, Myra, if they have that much money. She reminds him they don't even have the dollar and eighty cents to pay the paperboy and pointedly suggests he ask his boss, Wally Waldorf, for another raise. Wally, who is Tom's boss, grins and tells Tom to go ahead, remarking on the futility of it. Wally explains that Bridlegoose enjoys suing people, has won over a thousand suits in his life, and has an electronic counter and a decibel recorder on his porch to document the puppy's barking. He warns that even if they settle, Bridlegoose will just sue them for something else.

Myra tells Tom to watch the kids and goes to the Plugged Nickel. She tells Nokomis, the barman, that Bridlegoose is suing them. Nokomis lists Bridlegoose's previous successful lawsuits: he sued Ozzie Murphy because Mrs. Murphy's sunbathing raised his blood pressure; he sued Freddy Fodorko for crab grass spreading to his yard; he sued George Mullendorf because trash burner fumes made his tropical fish ill; he sued Conchita because cooking with garlic debased the scent of his African violets; he sued Blanche Manners because her apple tree cross-pollinated with his; and he sued Vera Verble for putting fish bones in her garbage, which were a danger to his cat. Nokomis adds that Bridlegoose was once inspired by a Conan Doyle story and successfully sued universities for exhuming a prehistoric man without the next of kin's consent, winning cases in several states and in Yucatan.

When Myra asks how she could get a thousand dollars, Nokomis gives grim suggestions. Myra then asks how long it takes to be a lawyer, and when Nokomis says five or six years but faster for smart people, she replies, "It shouldn't take me very long." Myra gets a three-dollar loan and goes to Duffy's second-hand book store. There, she buys the entire "Handy Andy Home Library" because Duffy wouldn't break the set, though she only wanted the "Home Legal Advisor" book. The set cost a dollar and twenty cents, leaving her enough money for the paperboy.

On Friday morning, "Bridlegoose Morning" at Preliminary Hearing Court, a tired judge reads the day's listings. He reads a long list of suits filed by Bridlegoose against various defendants, including Archer, Baily, Castlereigh, Gay, Erskine and Evans, Herrington, Johnson and Johnson, Langtry and Obershaw, and finally, Willoughby. The judge then takes a deep breath and reads a new list: "Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose A, Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose B, Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose C sub one and sub two, provisional alternate suits, Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose D." A shocked Bridlegoose asks, "What, What, What?" The judge continues with more suits, including a joint suit from the Willoughby minors: Clarence (aged nine), Clarissa (aged eight), and Clementine (aged seven).

The minors' suit seeks one thousand dollars each for physical and mental damages from being chased from Bridlegoose's yard. The damages include Clementine skinning her knee, Clarissa receiving a spanking due to the incident, and Clarence being "campused for an entire afternoon and denied movie-going rights." The judge notes that the briefs are well-prepared and cite pertinent parallels, such as "Bridlegoose vs. Wimbish," involving a parrot's lost tail feathers, and "Bridlegoose vs. Fiederwischlappen." He adds that there are now thirty-three cases running, with an aggregate claim of over a quarter of a million dollars. Bridlegoose howls, "No. No. No," asks for a change of venue, and runs out of the courtroom. The judge asks Mrs. Willoughby when she learned law. She replies, "Wednesday night," explaining she didn't even finish the book because she got distracted by the "Ready Reckoner and Arithmetic Made Easy" section and offers to show him how to divide any number by nine.

(African violets), (Archer), (Baily), (Benjamin Bridlegoose), (Blanche Manners), (Bridlegoose), (Castlereigh), (Clarence Willoughby), (Clarissa Willoughby), (Clementine Willoughby), (Conan Doyle), (Conchita), (Duffy), (Erskine), (Evans), (Fiederwischlappen), (Freddy Fodorko), (Gay), (George Mullendorf), (Handy Andy Home Library), (Herrington), (Johnson and Johnson), (Langtry), (Mrs. Murphy), (Myra), (Nokomis), (Obershaw), (Ozzie Murphy), (Plugged Nickel), (Preliminary Hearing Court), (Tom Willoughby), (Vera Verble), (Wally Waldorf), (Willoughby), (Wimbish), (Yucatan)

I. The Lawsuit

1. The Plaintiff: Old Benjamin Bridlegoose was going to sue the Willoughbys.
   A. The Grounds: Their puppy kept him awake for five nights.
   B. The Damages Sought: Five hundred dollars.
2. The Defendants' Reaction:
   A. Tom Willoughby: Was scared.
   B. Myra Willoughby:
      a. Financial Status: "You know we don't. We don't even have a dollar and eighty cents to pay the paperboy."
      b. A Pointed Suggestion: Asks Tom why he doesn't ask his boss for a raise

again.

3. Commentary from the Boss:
   A. Identity: Wally Waldorf, who grinned at Myra's comment.
   B. His Assessment: Mocks Tom's attempts to get a raise and predicts the lawsuit will cost "a thousand dollars at least."
4. Exploring Legal Options:
   A. Myra suggests settling out of court for the five hundred.
   B. Wally's Rebuttal: "No. He likes to sue people. It makes him mad when people settle out of court. He'll just think up something else to sue you for."
5. Questioning the Lawsuit's Merits:
   A. Myra's Doubt: "But can he really collect? The puppy doesn't bark very often."
      a. Wally's Counterpoint: Bridlegoose has an electronic counter on his back porch.
   B. Tom's Doubt: "Well, he didn't bark very loud."
      a. Wally's Counterpoint: "He also has a decibel recorder."
   C. Tom's Observation: "If his sleep's worth a hundred dollars a night he ought to sleep all the time."
6. Bridlegoose's Legal History:
   A. Wally explains that it does not matter if Bridlegoose wins or loses, as he will just sue again.
   B. He has won over a thousand suits in his life, building a "pretty big house and a pretty big bank account" from suing people.
7. Myra Takes Action:
   A. She tells Tom to watch the kids, leaves the men, and goes down to the Plugged Nickel.

II. Counsel at the Plugged Nickel

1. Myra's Announcement: Tells Nokomis, the barman, "Bridlegoose is going to sue us."
2. Nokomis's Response: "Why should you be any exception." He then provides a list of Bridlegoose's past lawsuits.
   A. Ozzie Murphy: Sued because Mrs. Murphy's sunbathing raised Bridlegoose's blood pressure "beyond the danger point." He collected.
   B. Freddy Fodorko: Sued because crab grass spread from his yard to Bridlegoose's.
   C. George Mullendorf: Sued because fumes from his trash burner made Bridlegoose's tropical fish ill.
   D. Conchita: Sued for cooking with garlic, which "debased the scent of his African violets."
   E. Blanche Manners: Sued because her apple tree "mated" with his, destroying the quality. She had to pay damages, cut down the tree, and "post bond that she would never replant."
   F. Vera Verble: Sued for throwing fish bones in her garbage, which were a

danger to his cat. He collected.
a. Vera's question to the judge: "'What am I supposed to do?... Eat the bones myself?'"
b. The judge's reply: "'I guess you'd better... It looks like your best bet.'"

3. The Judicial System and Bridlegoose:
   A. Myra asks why judges favor him.
   B. Nokomis's Theory: "They figure they'll live longer that way," as Bridlegoose frequently sues for "debarment, mistrial or juridical prejudice."
   C. The Conan Doyle Anecdote:
      a. Nokomis once told Bridlegoose a story about a man suing an archaeologist for exhuming a prehistoric man without the consent of the next of kin.
      b. Bridlegoose's eyes "jumped clear out of his head." His reaction: "'Why didn't I think of that before?... By golly, I'll do it too.'"
      c. The Result: He instituted suits against Universities, Foundations, and Scientific Societies, winning "in several states and in Yucatan."
4. Myra's Financial Desperation:
   A. Asks Nokomis, "How could I get a thousand dollars?"
   B. Nokomis's Suggestions: Sell children to medical school for dissection, sell the car and wedding ring, hock Tom's overcoat, and auction the furniture, which would still leave a deficit of about nine hundred dollars.

III. A Crash Course in Law

1. Myra's New Line of Inquiry:
   A. Asks how long it takes to learn to be a lawyer; Nokomis says five or six years.
   B. Asks if there is a quicker way; Nokomis replies, "Oh yes, the smarter you are the faster you can learn it."
   C. Myra's Conclusion: "It shouldn't take me very long."
2. Acquiring Legal Texts:
   A. Myra "floated a three dollar loan."
   B. Went to Duffy's second-hand book store and bought the entire Handy Andy Home Library.
      a. Duffy would not break the set, though Myra only wanted the last book.
   b. The four volumes were: Proverbs and Epigrams and One Hundred After-Dinner Speeches for the Busy Executive; New Speller and Word Guide with Letter Writer and Book of Etiquette; Household Ready Reckoner and Arithmetic Made Easy for the Average Man; and Home Legal Advisor with Road Atlas and First Aid Book: What to Do till the Doctor Comes.

   C. The cost was one dollar and twenty cents, leaving her with a dollar eighty "left for the paperboy."

IV. The Day in Court

1. The Setting: Friday morning, Preliminary Hearing Court, also known as "Bridlegoose Morning."
   A. The Mood: The judge is tired and full of "dread of the perpetual Bridlegoose business"; Bridlegoose is "in his glory."
2. The Case Listings:
   A. The judge reads a list of suits: "Bridlegoose vs. Archer, Bridlegoose vs. Baily..." ending with "Bridlegoose vs. Willoughby."
   B. After a deep breath, the judge begins again with a new list.
      a. "Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose A, Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose B, Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose C sub one and sub two, provisional alternate suits, Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose D."
   C. Bridlegoose's Reaction: "What, What, What?"

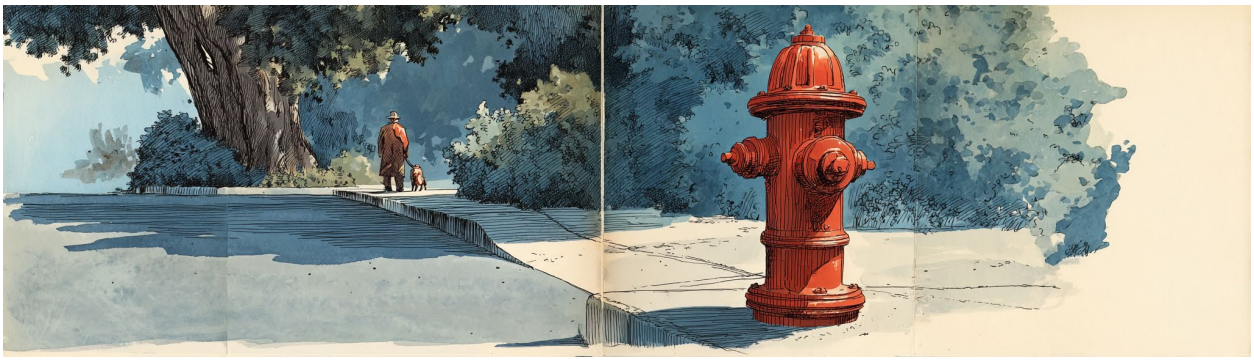
V. Myra's Counter-Offensive

1. The Judge Continues the List:
   A. "Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose E, F, & G, three closely connected by separate suits."
   B. "Willoughby, Willoughby, and Willoughby, as being minors undertaken by Willoughby and Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose."
2. Bridlegoose's Confusion: "What is that last one? I want to know why they are suing me. Nobody ever sues me."
3. The Children's Lawsuit Explained:
   A. It is a joint suit from Clarence (age nine), Clarissa (age eight), and Clementine (age seven).
   B. They seek one thousand dollars each for physical and mental damages.
   C. The Grounds: Being chased from Benjamin Bridlegoose's yard.
      a. Clementine's injury: Falling on the sidewalk and skinning her knee(s), with the scab "clearly visible four days later."
      b. Clarissa's injury: Being "subjected to parental displeasure, trepidation of mind... and physical abridgement known colloquially as a spanking."
      c. Clarence's injury: Being "campused for an entire afternoon and denied movie-going rights."
4. Bridlegoose's Protest and the Judge's Rebuttal:
   A. Bridlegoose insists, "But this is nonsense, they cannot sue for an incident like that."
   B. The judge counters that the briefs are well-prepared and cite intelligent parallels.
      a. The aggregate claim of all cases is now over a quarter of a million dollars.
      b. Precedent Cited: *Bridlegoose vs. Wimbish*, in which a plaintiff's parrot was awarded damages for lost tail feathers after a "broom-handle eviction."
      c. Precedent Cited for *Willoughby vs. Bridlegoose C sub one*: *Bridlegoose vs. Fiederwischlappen*, a "celebrated case in its day."

5. The Retreat:
   A. Bridlegoose howls, “No. No. No.”
   B. He declares, “I'll ask for a change of venue.”
   C. He then runs out of the courtroom and into the street.

VI. The Aftermath

1. The Judge’s Inquiry: Asks Mrs. Willoughby when she learned law.
2. Myra’s Response:
   A. States she learned on “Wednesday night.”
   B. Explains she would have learned more but “didn't get the book finished,” as she got distracted by the *Ready Reckoner and Arithmetic Made Easy*.
   C. Her parting offer: “Do you know a real easy way to divide any number by nine? Give me a piece of paper and I'll show you how.”



# “Seven-Day Terror”

Clarence Willoughby asks his mother, Myra, if she wants anything to disappear, explaining that he built a "disappearer" by cutting the ends out of a beer can and fitting it with two pieces of red cardboard with peepholes. Myra suggests the sink full of dishes, but Clarence points out that they cost money and might not come back. She then suggests Blanche Manners' cat outside. Clarence puts the device to his eye, blinks, and the cat disappears. His mother, interested but disturbed, sends him outside to play.

Clarence goes to the Plugged Nickel, a local pothouse, and asks the barman, Nokomis, if he wants anything to disappear. Nokomis jokes about his paunch, but Clarence warns it would leave a hole and cause him to bleed to death. Nokomis then suggests he try it on the fireplug outside. This leads to one of the happiest afternoons for the local children, who play in the flooded streets. Fire engines, policemen, and ambulance men wander around, bewildered. Clarissa Willoughby chants, "Resuscitator, resuscitator, anybody wanna resuscitator," annoying the ambulance attendants. Nokomis calls Clarence inside and advises him not to tell anyone what happened.

Officer Comstock arrives, suspicious that one of the seven Willoughby children is responsible. He first questions Clarissa, who gives him a cryptic response about having an "uncanny suspicion." The five younger children, Clementine, Harold, Corinne, Jimmy, and Cyril, then give evasive or nonsensical answers.
Finally, he questions Clarence, who gulps but then says he doesn't know where the fireplug went. The water department shuts off the water and caps the pipe. Comstock tells Miss Manners he can't find her cat or the fireplug, and Clarissa remarks that when one is found, the other will be in the same place.

The seven-day terror begins. Ozzie Murphy's hat disappears from his head, leaving a trickle of blood. Trees and lampposts vanish. Wally Waldorf's car disappears right after he slams the door. George Mullendorf's dog Pete vanishes in mid-air while jumping into his arms. The fireplugs are the worst problem. A second one, installed the next morning, is gone in eight minutes. A third is gone in three minutes. A fourth

is installed before a crowd including the water commissioner, city engineer, police chief and a riot squad, the president of the Parent-Teachers Association, the president of the university, the mayor, three gentlemen of the FBI, a newsreel photographer, and eminent scientists. The plug disappears, along with the photographer's camera. The commissioner orders the water capped, stating it was the last plug in the warehouse.

The mayor wonders why the news agency Tass hasn't covered the story, and a small round man identifies himself as Tass. Business at the Plugged Nickel is phenomenal, with Nokomis inventing a new drink called the "Fire Hydrant Highball." Clarissa tells her father, Tom Willoughby, a plan to get rich by buying the houses people are abandoning. Meanwhile, three eminent scientists—Dr. Velikof Vonk, Arpad Arkabaranan, and Willy McGilly—discuss the phenomenon. Willy McGilly reveals he used an oatmeal box and red crayola as a boy. The terror escalates when Mr. Buckle, the grocery man, disappears before witnesses.

Mean-looking investigators, including the mayor, come to the Willoughby house. Clarissa admits to starting the "cryptic" rumors and says she can make everything come back. She requests a gold watch, a hammer, a list of chemicals, a yard of black velvet, and a pound of rock candy, which the mayor provides. Clarence complains about her getting all the attention, and Clarissa cries with "hate" that she knew he was the one who did it, having read how to make a disappearer in her diary. She poises the hammer over the mayor's gold watch on the floor. After a few seconds, she smashes it and announces that everyone's troubles are over, pointing to Blanche Manners' cat, which has reappeared on the sidewalk.

The cat is back. They go to the Plugged Nickel and watch the fireplug reappear. Clarissa predicts that every object will return exactly seven days from its disappearance. The terror ends. The mayor asks how she knew it would be a seven-day return. She explains that Clarence made a "seven-day disappearer" and that she knows how to make others, but her proposed thirteen-year version needs blood from a little boy's heart, and Cyril cried whenever she tried to cut him. When asked why she wanted the various items, she explains the chemicals were for her chemistry set and the velvet for doll dresses. As for the rock candy, she chides the mayor for asking. The smashed gold watch, she says, "was for dramatic effect."

(Arpad Arkabaranan), (Blanche Manners), (Boff), (City Hall), (Clarence Willoughby), (Clarissa), (Clarissa Willoughby), (Clementine), (Conchita), (Corinne), (Crayola), (Cyril), (Dr. Velikof Vonk), (FBI), (Fire Hydrant Highballs), (George Mullendorf), (Harold), (Jimmy), (Miss Manners), (Mr. Buckle), (Myra Willoughby), (Nokomis), (Officer C.), (Officer Comstock), (Ozzie Murphy), (Parent-Teachers Association), (Pete), (Plugged Nickel), (Tass), (Tom Willoughby), (Wally Waldorf), (Willy McGilly)

I. The Invention of the Disappearer

1. Clarence Willoughby's Offer:
   A. Asks his mother, "Is there anything you want to make disappear?"
   B. She suggests a sink full of dishes.
2. The Device Explained:
   A. Construction: Cut both ends out of a beer can, then fit two pieces of red cardboard with peepholes in the ends.
   B. Operation: "You look through the peepholes and blink. Whatever you look at will disappear."
3. A Test Subject is Chosen:
   A. Clarence's Caution: "But I don't know if I can make them come back. We'd better try it on something else. Dishes cost money."
   B. Myra's Admiration: She would not have had Clarence's foresight herself.
   C. Myra's Suggestion: "You can try it on Blanche Manners' cat outside there. Nobody will care if it disappears except Blanche Manners."
   D. The Result: Clarence puts the disappearer to his eye, blinks, and the cat disappears from the sidewalk.
4. Myra's Reaction:
   A. She is interested in how it works; Clarence repeats the simple instructions.
   B. She tells him to play outside and not make anything else disappear in the house until she thinks about it.
   C. Her internal monologue: "I wonder if I have a precocious child... I wonder if Blanche Manners will miss her cat very much?"

II. The Fireplug Incident

1. Clarence at the Plugged Nickel:
   A. Asks Nokomis, the barman, if he has anything he wants to make disappear.
   B. Nokomis suggests, "Only my paunch."
   C. Clarence's Warning: "If I make it disappear it'll leave a hole in you and you'll bleed to death."
   D. Nokomis's Counter-Suggestion: "Why don't you try it on the fireplug outside?"
2. The Aftermath of the Fireplug's Disappearance:
   A. The Neighborhood Reaction: The afternoon is "one of the happiest ever," as children played in the flooded streets.
      a. Narrator's Aside: "if some of them drowned (and we don't say that they did drown) in the flood (and brother! it was a flood), why you have to expect things like that."
   B. Emergency Response: Fire engines, policemen, and ambulance men wander around "wet and bewildered."
   C. Clarissa Willoughby's Chant: "Resuscitator, resuscitator, anybody wanna resuscitator."

3. The Unofficial Investigation of Officer Comstock:
   A. Nokomis's Advice to Clarence: "I don't believe, just for the moment, I'd tell anyone what happened to that fireplug."
   B. Comstock's Suspicion: Believes one of the seven Willoughby kids is responsible.
      a. His Talent: He had a knack for "getting near the truth of dark matters," which is why he was "walking a beat out here in the boondocks instead of sitting in a chair downtown."
   C. Interrogation of the Willoughby Children:
      a. Clarissa (age eight): "I have an uncanny suspicion. As yet it is no more than that. When I am better informed I will advise you."
      b. Clementine: "There was a man around yesterday. I bet he took it."
      c. Harold: "I don't even remember a fireplug there. I think you're making a fuss about nothing."
      d. Corinne: "City Hall's going to hear about this."
      e. Jimmy: "Pretty dommed sure... but I won't tell."
      f. Cyril (age three, after being yelled at): "Great green bananas... I don't see how it's even my responsibility."
      g. Clarence (after gulping): "No, sir. I don't know where it went."

III. The Beginning of the Seven-Day Terror

1. Initial Containment Fails:
   A. The water department shuts off the water and caps the pipe. One worker notes, "This sure is going to be a funny-sounding report."
   B. Officer Comstock, discouraged, tells Miss Manners he knows neither where to look for her cat nor the fireplug.
   C. Clarissa's Idea: "when you find the cat you will find the fireplug in the same place. As yet it's only an idea."
2. The Terror Escalates:
   A. Ozzie Murphy's Hat: Clarence points his weapon and winks; the hat disappears, leaving "a little trickle of blood running down the pate."
      a. Nokomis's advice: "I don't believe I'd play with that anymore."
      b. Clarence's reply: "Who's playing?... This is for real."
   B. Other Disappearances: Trees from parks, lampposts.
   C. Wally Waldorf's Car: Vanishes after he gets out and slams the door.
   D. George Mullendorf's Dog: His dog Pete disappears mid-leap, with "only a bark lingered for a moment in the puzzled air."

IV. The Official Response

1. The Fireplug Saga Continues:
   A. The Second Plug: Installed the next morning, it is gone in eight minutes, and

the flood returns.

B. The Third Plug: Installed by twelve o'clock, it vanishes within three minutes.

C. The Fourth Plug: Installed the following morning before a crowd of dignitaries.

a. The Observers: The water commissioner, city engineer, police chief with a riot squad, president of the Parent-Teachers Association, university president, the mayor, three FBI agents, a newsreel photographer, eminent scientists, and "a crowd of honest citizens."

D. The Result: The plug disappears, and "everybody was very wet."

2. The Investigation Intensifies:
   A. The Photographer: Claims to have "the picture sequence of the year," at which point his camera and apparatus disappear.
   B. The Commissioner's Order: "Shut off the water and cap it... And don't put in another plug yet. That was the last plug in the warehouse."
   C. The Mayor's Despair: "This is too big for me," he says, wondering why Tass (a news agency) doesn't have the story yet. A little round man identifies himself as Tass.
3. The Community Reacts:
   A. The Plugged Nickel: Nokomis invents "Fire Hydrant Highballs" made of corn whiskey, brown sugar, and "hydrant water from this very gutter." Business is "phenomenal."
   B. Clarissa's Financial Scheme: Tells her father to buy all the houses being sold for nothing, then sell them back when they reappear. He refuses.
   C. The Scientists' Conclave: Three eminent scientists—Dr. Velikof Vonk, Arpad Arkabaranan, and Willy McGilly—discuss the phenomenon.
      a. Dr. Vonk: "This transcends the metaphysical. It impinges on the quantum continuum."
      b. Willy McGilly: "Who would have thought that you could do it with a beer can and two pieces of cardboard? When I was a boy I used an oatmeal box and red Crayola."
4. The Terror Claims a Human Victim:
   A. The Toll So Far: Minor injuries to Ozzie Murphy and Conchita, a clipped finger, and a lost toe, totaling "not more than a pint of blood and three or four ounces of flesh all together."
   B. The New Victim: Mr. Buckle, the grocery man, disappears before witnesses.

V. Clarissa's Solution

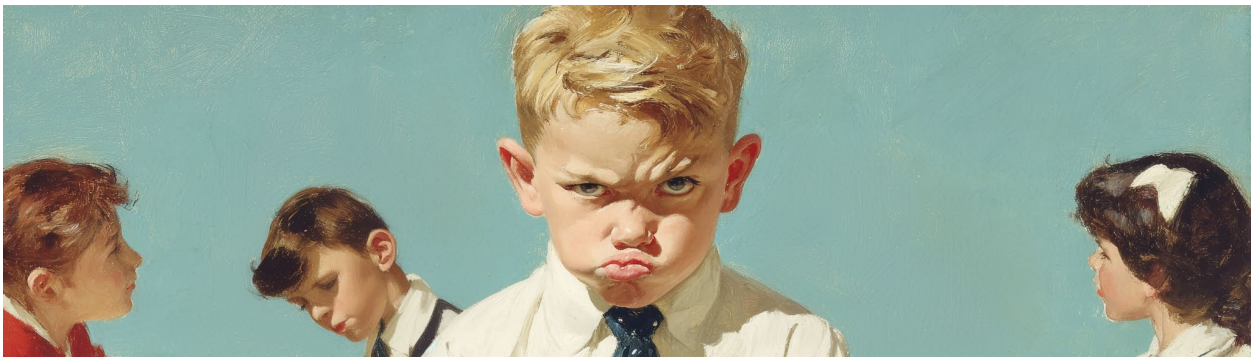
1. The Investigators Arrive: "Mean-looking investigators from downtown" come to the Willoughby house, the "meanest-looking one was the mayor."
2. Clarissa Takes Control:
   A. Admits to starting the rumors, which she considered "Cryptic, rather."
   B. Sidesteps direct questions about making things disappear or knowing where

they went.
C. The Key Question: When asked if she can make them come back, she replies, “Why, of course I can. Anybody can. Can't you?"
D. Her List of Demands: A gold watch, a hammer, a list of chemicals, a yard of black velvet, and a pound of rock candy.
E. The Mayor’s Decree: "Yes... It's our only hope. Get her anything she wants."

3. The Revelation and the Ritual:
A. Clarence’s Outburst: "Why does she get all the attention? I was the one who made all the things disappear.”
B. Clarissa’s Accusation: “I knew it!... He read in my diary how to make a disappearer. If I was his mother I'd whip him for reading his little sister's diary.”
C. The Climax: She poises the hammer over the mayor’s gold watch on the floor. After a few seconds, as the second hand sweeps to a “preordained” point, she smashes the watch.
D. The Result: "That's all," she said. “Your troubles are over. See, there is Blanche Manners' cat on the sidewalk just where she was seven days ago.”

VI. The Explanation

1. The Reappearance: The cat is back, and the group goes to the Plugged Nickel to watch a fireplug return: it “clanged into the street like a sign and a witness.”
2. Clarissa’s Prediction: “every single object will return exactly seven days from the time of its disappearance."
3. The Secret Knowledge:
A. When the mayor asks how she knew, she explains, “Because it was a seven-day disappearer that Clarence made.”
B. She claims to know how to make nine-day, thirteen-day, twenty-seven day, and eleven-year disappearers.
C. The Thirteen-Year Model: Requires one to “color the ends with the blood from a little boy's heart,” but Cyril cried every time she tried to make a good cut.
4. The Final Interrogation:
A. Why the chemicals? “For my chemistry set.”
B. And the black velvet? “For doll dresses.”
C. And the pound of rock candy? “How did you ever get to be mayor of this town if you have to ask questions like that? What do you think I wanted the rock candy for?”
D. Why smash the gold watch? “Oh,” said Clarissa, “that was for dramatic effect.”



# “Handful of Fire”

Myra Willoughby expresses sympathy for Herod, wishing that for one afternoon every male child under three could be slain. Her own son under three, Cyril, is an "unspeakable monster." Soon after, Cyril, who had been unnaturally quiet, lets out a "hair-raising scream." Myra half-seriously wonders if her prayer was answered. She finishes cleaning, then goes to investigate and finds that Cyril has disappeared. She asks a neighbor, Susanna Shooks, who reports that "Desperate Danny and Killer Cohen and Stabber Stuckley" took him away, likely killing him and throwing him to the ducks.

When Myra returns to her house, she finds a tag on the doorknob with a note addressed to "DEAR MISSIS WILLOBEE," stating they have kidnapped Cyril and will kill him. It demands five thousand dollars at "THE VACANT LOT AT THE CORNER" in five minutes. Realizing there is no vacant lot, only the Plugged Nickel bar, she goes there and asks the barman, Nokomis, if he has seen her son. Nokomis has not. Myra then goes to the pond in Cotters' back yard to check Susanna's story; the two ducks in the small pond are still hungry, so she concludes they have not eaten Cyril. She phones her husband, Tom, who tells her not to worry as they still have six more children.

Myra sends her other children to look for Cyril. Clarence says if it was Killer Cohen, then Cyril is dead, and that he lives "Over on Greenstreet Street." Hearing this, Myra becomes scared for the first time. She returns to the Plugged Nickel, where Ozzie Murphy and Hodl Oskanian are present. Ozzie and Hodl tell stories of other recent, gruesome child murders. Hodl, identifying himself as "the best handwriting analyst in the world," examines the ransom note. He describes the author as having vast decision, sardonic humor, formidable cruelty, and a "dark soul," but also "queer compassion." He estimates the author's age to be about nine. Myra asks if he has heard of Desperate Danny. Hodl realizes the nearest vacant lot is on Greenstreet Street, where Desperate Danny lives. Myra asks him to come with her to get Cyril back "dead or alive."

As they walk, Hodl asks Myra why Cyril runs away every day; she explains it's because she screams at him. They hear a terrible scream and rush into a littered garage. Inside, Desperate Danny holds a burning newspaper torch over a tub of "dark viscous goop." Cyril is hanging upside down by his ankles, his head a foot from the tub. Danny threatens to drop the torch, burn Cyril alive, and let himself be caught. Killer Cohen and Stabber Stuckley have already run off. Myra, frantic, asks Hodl what to do, and he replies, "Might as well throw in the torch... We're whipped." Danny flings the fire into the vat. "Boom," says Danny, and "Boom," says Cyril. Myra faints. Cyril, unhurt, tells his mother he had told the boys to use real oil and that the "old syrup stuff won't burn."

Myra realizes it was just a game. She furiously tells Desperate Danny that he worried her and proceeds to spank him brutally. Hodl Oskanian, who has seen the world's dark corners, is so horrified he turns away with a shudder. When it's over, Myra is breathless but then loosens her tongue on both Danny and Hodl, telling Hodl she wishes she could burn all three of them. A "deep mysterious light" appears in Desperate Danny's eyes, which Hodl recognizes as admiration. Danny asks Myra if they have a lot of fun at her house. Cyril tells him, "You come tomorrow. Just before I run away. Boy you just listen." Entranced, Danny says no one at his house ever carries on like that and that Myra puts on "the best show I ever see."

(Clarence), (Cotters), (Cyril), (Desperate Danny), (Greenstreet Street), (Herod), (Hodl Oskanian), (Killer Cohen), (Myra Willoughby), (Nokomis), (Ozzie Murphy), (Plugged Nickel), (Stabber Stuckley), (Susanna Shooks), (Tom)

I. The Disappearance

1. Myra Willoughby’s Dark Musings:
   A. Expresses sympathy with Herod, stating, “It would be wonderful if only for one afternoon every male child under three could be slain.”
   B. The subject of this thought is her only male child under three, Cyril.
2. A Prayer Answered:
   A. Cyril, who had been unnaturally quiet, lets out a “hair-raising scream,” a “real blood-curdler, a heart-stopper.”
   B. Myra’s Reaction: “Then is my prayer answered so soon? I am half-sorry to lose him. He was such a good little boy; an unspeakable monster, but a good little boy for all that.”
   C. The Discovery: After finishing her cleaning, she investigates the “death agonies” and finds he has disappeared.
3. The Initial Investigation:
   A. The Witness: She asks Susanna Shooks if she saw him.
      a. Susanna’s Account: “They took him away. They picked him up and took him away."
      b. The Kidnappers Identified: "Desperate Danny and Killer Cohen and

Stabber Stuckley."
c. Their Origin: They “come from some other block.” Susanna describes them as “Great big people.”
d. Their Supposed Action: “I think they killed him and threw him to the ducks."

B. The Ransom Note: Myra finds a tag on the front doorknob.
a. The Message: “DEAR MISSIS WILLOBEE WE KIDNAPPED CYRIL AND ARE GOING TO KILL HIM. BE DOWN AT THE VACANT LOT AT THE CORNER IN FIVE MINUTES WITH FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS.”

C. The Rendezvous Point: Myra goes to the corner but realizes there has been no vacant lot there for as long as she can remember; only the Plugged Nickel bar.
a. She asks Nokomis, the barman, “Have you seen my littlest boy, Nokomis?"

II. The Search and Rising Fear

1. At the Plugged Nickel:
A. Nokomis’s Report: He has not seen Cyril for half an hour.
B. His Practical Advice: After seeing the note, he observes, “There isn't any vacant lot here. But you can leave the five thousand dollars with me, and if any little boys come by I'll give it to them."
2. Investigating the Duck Theory:
A. Myra goes to the pond in Cotters’ back yard.
B. The pond is very small, no more than eight feet long by four feet wide.
C. The Conclusion: “The ducks had not eaten Cyril. They were still hungry and they would not be hungry so soon if they had eaten him.”
3. Contacting Reinforcements:
A. Myra phones her husband, Tom, to inform him of the kidnapping.
B. Tom’s Unhelpful Response: “Well, just remember, even if anything happens to him you've still got six more.”
C. Myra’s Concern: Cyril has been gone an hour, which is longer than he usually stays away.
D. She sends her other children to look for him, but they are “not hopeful.”
4. A Terrible Realization:
A. Clarence provides information: “If it really was Killer Cohen... then they killed him all right. He kills lots of little boys.”
B. Killer Cohen’s Location: “Over on Greenstreet Street.”
C. Myra’s Reaction: “And when she heard this Myra was scared for the first time. You have no idea how mean the boys are that live on Greenstreet Street.”

5. Grim Tidings at the Bar:
A. Myra returns to the Plugged Nickel.
B. Nokomis shares a local horror story about a boy found under a loading dock,

strangled with piano wire and “almost eaten by the rats.”
C. Ozzie Murphy adds another about a boy chopped into forty-eight pieces.
D. Hodl Oskanian claims he could name “nine cases in as many weeks.”

III. The Expert Analyst

1. Hodl Oskanian’s Examination of the Note:
   A. His Credentials: “As you must know I am the best handwriting analyst in the world.”
   B. His Findings:
      a. The author is a person of “vast decision.”
      b. He detects “sardonic humor in the f's,” “open rebellion” in the ‘g’, “formidable cruelty” in the ‘l’s, and “tortuous perversion in the v's and r's.”
      c. His summary: “There is a dark soul at work here."
   C. Myra’s Question: “You think it someone mean?"
      a. Hodl’s Correction: “Mean is not the word. Would you call the devil mean?”
      b. Further Nuances: He notes a “queer compassion” in the dotting of the first twelve ‘i’s, and the “amazing fact that the thirteenth is not dotted at all.”
   D. The Profile of the Author: An “imaginative, complex, and talented person” with a “strong but twisted intelligence,” aged “About nine.”
2. Connecting the Clues:
   A. Myra asks if Hodl has heard of Desperate Danny; he has.
   B. Hodl deduces the note was prepared in advance and asks about the nearest vacant lot.
   C. Myra names Greenstreet Street. Hodl notes, “And that's where Desperate Danny lives.”
3. The Journey to Greenstreet Street:
   A. Myra implores Hodl to come with her.
   B. Hodl’s Interrogation:
      a. Asks why Cyril runs away every day. Myra replies it is because she screams at him.
      b. Asks why she screams at him. Myra replies, “because he exasperates me. Isn't that normal?”
      c. She clarifies that the hour Cyril is gone each day “is like Heaven.”

IV. Confrontation in the Garage

1. The Approach: Half a block away, they hear a “little boy's terrible screaming.”
2. The Scene: They rush into a littered garage.
   A. Desperate Danny snarls, “Back! Back!... One move from either of you and I drop the torch.”
   B. The Setup: A burning newspaper is held menacingly over a tub of “dark

viscous goop."

C. The Threat: Danny claims the goop will "flame like a holy cost" and Cyril will fall "headfirst into the flaming oil."

D. Cyril's Predicament: He is hanging upside down by a rope around his ankles, his head a foot from the tub.

3. The Climax:

A. Myra feels faint and asks Hodl what they should do.

B. Hodl's assessment: "Might as well throw in the torch... We're whipped."

C. The Action: "Like a fiend Danny flung his handful of fire into the devil's vat."

D. The Result:

a. Danny says, "Boom."

b. Cyril, still upside down, says, "Boom."

c. Myra "really did faint."

V. The Aftermath

1. The Deception Revealed:

A. Cyril's Critique: "Mama, I telled them to use real oil. I telled them that old syrup stuff won't burn. I telled them they ought to have long knives sticking up too."

2. Myra's Retribution:

A. She scolds Cyril for just playing a game and announces her intention to spank Desperate Danny.

B. The spanking is "brutal." Even Hodl Oskanian, who had "seen sights so terrible as to make a man wish he had not eyes... turned away with a shudder."

C. She then "loosened her tongue" on Hodl for his part in the drama, telling him, "when you said 'Throw in the Torch' my heart stopped."

3. A New Admirer:

A. A "deep mysterious light" appears in Desperate Danny's eyes, which Hodl recognizes as "admiration."

B. Danny asks Myra, "do you have a lot of fun at your house?"

C. Cyril invites him to come tomorrow, "Just before I run away. Boy you just listen."

D. Danny's concluding remarks: "I never did hear anything like it... At our house nobody ever carries on like that... Lady, I never did hear anything like you. You put on the best show I ever see."



# “Three for a Quarrel”

Tom and Myra Willoughby enjoy a quiet evening screaming at their children to do their homework. Wally Waldorf, Tom's boss, stops by because he is lonesome while his wife is in the country. Being childless, he is terrified of the Willoughby children, who swarm him. They chant that he has a purple nose—which Myra says isn't exactly true, and Clarissa calls "Mauve"—and Cyril bites him. Wally panics and puts on his hat, which has been filled with postum, making him look pathetic. Myra gives him a quick kiss at the door, apologizing. Tom makes a light remark about her being free with her kisses, and she pouts. Tom responds by pushing her onto a bench, sitting on her stomach, and tickling her until she screams, a normal occurrence.

Around eight in the evening, Blanche Manners and her cat are passing by and hear the screams. Blanche knocks, and the eight-year-old Clarissa answers. After initially denying anything is wrong, Clarissa seizes the opportunity for drama and claims her "poor mother" is being abused by an "inhuman monster." Blanche is horrified, and the other children—Clementine, Corine, and Cyril—add to the story. Blanche shrieks at Tom to stop beating his wife. Tom, who had just been kissing Myra, is startled and their heads collide, causing Myra's nose and mouth to bleed. Seeing this, Blanche announces she is calling the police and leaves. The children tell their parents, "We fixed you," for making them do their homework.

Officer Comstock arrives, finding a glum and suspicious scene with Blanche on the porch behind him. He states this is the third complaint in three months, all from Blanche. Myra explains that the "weird hysterical laughter" others have heard is just her being tickled by Tom. Her suggestion that Comstock try it with his wife, Mona, does not improve his mood. Following Miss Manners' suggestion, Comstock orders a temporary separation, with Mrs. Willoughby to stay with Blanche. Myra agrees and tells the children they are all going, but Blanche hisses that the children must stay with their father. After Harold pleads not to be left with their "fiendish father," a compromise is reached where Tom will go stay with Ozzie Murphy.

The separation makes everyone miserable. The next morning, Myra feels like a widow. Tom wakes up glumly in the Murphys' parlor, where Ramona Murphy pries for gossip about Myra and Mr. Waldorf. Tom calls his office to report an "emotional shock" and speaks to a gossipy coworker named Carla. Myra receives a visit from a representative of the "Ladies Auxiliary of the Family Engineering and Emotional Planning Adjustment Committee," who threatens to place the children in institutions. After a third day of calling in sick, Tom's boss, Wally Waldorf, threatens his job. Even Nokomis at the Plugged Nickel bar grows tired of hearing Tom's troubles.

At the end of the week, Myra goes to see Monsignor Growley. The priest notes her "bigger" nose and initially praises Tom's "discipline" before Myra explains the real situation is caused by people trying to "help." After a long, rambling sermon on virtues and sins, Monsignor Growley finally gets to his point, quoting the seventh Beatitude: "Blessed are the Peacemakers," which he calls a "terrifying" precept for the real world. He then quotes the "immortal Chesterton": "It takes three to make a quarrel. There is needed a peacemaker." Myra understands that the meddlers are the problem and thanks the priest, promising to limit any bloodshed. Monsignor Growley wishes her well and blesses her "puffy nose."

(Blanche Manners), (Carla), (Chesterton), (Church), (Clarissa), (Clementine), (Comstock), (Corine), (Cyril), (God), (Harold), (Holy Ghost), (Ladies Auxiliary of the Family Engineering and Emotional Planning Adjustment Committee), (Mauve), (Miss Manners), (Mona), (Monsignor Growley), (Myra Willoughby), (Nokomis), (Officer Comstock), (Ozzie Murphy), (Ozzie Murphys), (Plugged Nickel), (Ramona Murphy), (Saints), (Tom Willoughby), (Wally Waldorf)

I. A Quiet Evening at Home

1. The Setting: Tom and Myra Willoughby are enjoying a peaceful evening by “screaming at the children and forcing them with inhuman cruelty to apply themselves to their homework.”
2. The Visitor: Wally Waldorf, Tom’s boss, stops by.
   A. His Condition: Lonesome, as his wife is in the country.
   B. His Demeanor: He is “terrified of small children.”
   C. The Children’s Reaction: They sense his fear and “swarmed on him.”
      a. They chant about his “purple nose,” which the “bird-like Clarissa” corrects to “Mauve... my favorite color.”
      b. Cyril bites him.
   D. His Departure:
      a. He panics and puts on his hat, which had been filled with postum, making him look “more pathetic.”
      b. Myra kisses him quickly at the door, telling him she was sorry the children were mean.
3. The Inciting Incident:
   A. Tom makes a “light remark about her being free with her kisses.”

B. Myra pouts.
C. Tom's Remedy: "There is only one thing that can be done with a pouting wife," so he pushes her onto a bench, sits on her stomach, and tickles her until she screams.
a. Narrator's Aside: "There was nothing unusual about this. If a pout is allowed to continue it can develop into something more serious."

II. The Misunderstanding

1. The Witnesses: Blanche Manners and her cat are passing by at around eight in the evening.
A. The Sound: The cat hears the screaming and scratches at the door.
B. The Confrontation: Blanche knocks and asks Clarissa, "Is there something wrong?"
a. Clarissa denies it: "and don't you come around here with that fishy look. Of course there's nothing wrong."
2. The Children Seize an Opportunity:
A. The sudden softening of Clarissa indicates she "was not one to miss opportunity."
B. The children collaboratively construct a narrative of abuse.
a. Blanche Manners: "How horrible!"
b. Clementine (age seven): "Frightful."
c. Corine (age five): "Hellish."
d. Cyril (age three): "You can imagine what sort of home-life we have."
3. The Climax of the Scene:
A. Blanche shrieks, "Tom Willoughby, stop beating your wife!"
B. The Collision: Tom, in the act of trying to kiss Myra, is startled; Myra lifts her head in consternation, resulting in a "terrific collision, head to head."
C. The Evidence: The collision produces "some blood from the nose and mouth of Myra, and a trace of tears."
D. Blanche's Declaration: "I will go... I shall return with the police." She and her cat, which voiced its agreement, leave.
4. The Aftermath:
A. The seven children "chortled like a chorus of goats."
B. Clarence explains their motive: "We fixed you... That's what you get for keeping us in to do our homework."

III. The Official Intervention

1. Officer Comstock Arrives:
A. He is "glum and suspicious." On the porch behind him is a "strange being composed entirely of furious whispers" (Blanche Manners).
B. He asks Myra to explain the noises, specifically the "weird hysterical

laughter."

C. Myra's Explanation:
   a. "That is me... when Tom tickles me."
   b. The "broken gasp in the middle of it that startles the hearer and freezes the marrow" is explained with: "Well, you laugh with someone sitting on your stomach and see what you sound like."
   c. She suggests that if Comstock did this to his wife, Mona, he "might not be so henpecked." This does not endear them to him.

2. The Separation Order:
   A. Acting on Blanche's suggestion, Comstock decides the two "should have a little vacation from each other."
   B. The Initial Plan: Myra will stay with Blanche to "rebuild her shattered health."
      a. Blanche hisses from the porch, "Oh, not the children... They'll have to stay with the father."
      b. Harold (age six) objects: "You wouldn't leave us alone with our fiendish father... Spare us that."
   C. The Revised Plan: At the "stern orders of Officer Comstock," Tom is to stay with Ozzie Murphy, "who was the closest thing to a club in the neighborhood."

IV. A Week of Misery

1. Day One:
   A. Myra's Morning: Wakes up glumly, feeling "just like being a widow," and rebukes Clarissa for having an "evil leer."
   B. Tom's Morning: Wakes glumly in the Murphys' parlor, saying, "It's no good sleeping alone."
      a. Ramona Murphy pries for details, asking if he "bloodied her up pretty badly."
      b. Ramona calls Myra to ask how Tom likes his eggs, then hangs up "frostily."
   C. The Office: Tom calls his office to report an "emotional shock." A coworker, Carla, responds, "I hear you boffed your wife last night, slugger."
   D. The Official Visitor: Myra receives a visit from an agent of the "Ladies Auxiliary of the Family Engineering and Emotional Planning Adjustment Committee," who threatens to split the family into institutions.
2. The Unfriendly Week Continues:
   A. The sun is "unfriendly and insincere," the birds sing "tunelessly and tritely," and people's smiles are "wooden, mechanical."
   B. Tom phones in sick for a third day; Wally Waldorf frostily threatens to replace him with a "seven-year-old moron" or an "untrained seal."
   C. Nokomis, the barman, says he will charge by the hour to listen to Tom's troubles.
   D. Tom complains that Ramona Murphy is an "old mother hen" and decides to buy her a clutch of eggs to sit on.

3. Seeking Higher Counsel:
   A. Myra goes to see Monsignor Growley.
   B. His Initial Take: He congratulates her on her bigger nose and says, “There's a notable lack of discipline in the home these days; too many unchastened wives.”
   C. Myra’s Clarification: “Tom and I never have trouble. It's only when people try to help us that we have trouble.”
   D. The Monsignor’s Advice:
      a. He preaches at length about obeying the commandments and considering the Beatitudes.
      b. He makes an exception for the seventh Beatitude: “Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”
      c. His Interpretation: This precept is a “hard saying,” a “terrifying one,” given only to test our faith. Peacemakers are a “sore trial to the children of men.”
      d. The Key Insight: He quotes Chesterton: “‘It takes three to make a quarrel. There is needed a peacemaker.’”