

The Reformation: A Dream

Robert Ervin Howard

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Some days ago, passing the Yellow Jacket Nest, I was astonished to note various celebrities, viz: Harvey Stanford, Geeo, and other constellations equally scintillant in the college sky, risking their lives, limbs, manners and morals in a dare-devil game which has begun to find favor in the eyes of the students, and which is known as pitchin' horseshoes. To the uninitiated, I might say that this game consists in securing a metal article of clothing which at one time adorned the pedal extremity of an equine quadruped, first; next, the deluded victim of this vice, firmly clutching said implement, brandishes it in a most reckless manner and having whirled it above his head a few times, shuts his eyes and hurls it in the general direction of a small peg or stake set in the grass for that purpose. Having exhausted all the horseshoes in the neighbourhood in that manner, the gamesters recollect them from the stake, from the trees and the ankles of passersby, and continue in the same manner. The science of the game consists in making rash statements, disallowing your antagonist's claims, and arguing at the top of your voice.

Naturally, afterwards, as I took my siesta, I dreamed, and was wafted into the future several years. Just what part of the world was the scene, I do not know, but I found myself stealing stealthily along a deserted street, somewhere, glancing askancely anon and ever, there and here. Then from a dusky side street, a man emerged and approached me. As he drew near I was astonished to recognize a former schoolmate, Travis Curtis by name. There was a sly and furtive look upon his somewhat haggard countenance and I observed to my surprise that he had grown older in the twenty years that had elapsed since he had fled to Europe with the Republican campaign funds. Approaching me, he fixed me with a shifty eye and hissed the magic word, cautiously, "Limeade!"

I started, naturally, for the 98th Amendment had made it illegal to even think about such depraved beverages. However, my friend had turned and was gliding down another street, evidently expecting me to follow, so I did so, and after traversing a number of dingy side streets, he stopped at a disreputable looking tenement house. There he whistled a jazz tune outlawed by the 74th Amendment, and the door swung slowly back. A face I recognized as belonging to Lloyd Nixon peered out warily: "Give me the pass word!" he hissed.

"Dancing Lessons" came the blood curdling and entirely illegal reply. (See Amendment No. 29) The door keeper stepped back and we entered.

We passed through a shadowy hallway, and then to my amazement entered such a place as I had never dreamed existed in the modern world. Carefully curtained so no light would betray its being, a great hallway flaunted the vice of a bygone age before my scandalized vision. Upon one side a cold drink fountain ran the full length of the house, and there leering youths served smuggled coco cola, lemon phosphate and cream sodas to the debauched mob that swarmed about it like lost souls. Turning from this sodden and shameful scene, I saw various couples engaged in games long ago forbidden. Ah, it was a harrowing sight. Just as if the world had been transported back to those days of vice and sin some twenty years ago before the Prevention of Everything League made the world safe for Democracy by abolishing golf, soft drinks and hair nets.

Here and there I saw acquaintances of mine: Honk Irving was drinking a lemon milkshake in a most abandoned manner; Driscoll Smith was eating candy; and as I looked a bar-tender set a rare bottle of hair tonic upon the bar and Carl Macon with a hideous leer, seized it and applied it to his beard, laughing fiendishly. There in a corner sat Harvey Stanford and Vic Urban engaged in a game of — I shudder to repeat it — Checkers! Vice was free, brazen and unchecked, and I thought of how some of them had appeared twenty years ago, proud, strong handsome young men, just launching their ships upon the seas of Destiny — and now, depraved slaves of chocolates, sodas and tiddlywinks, followers of secret sins and forbidden vices! Just then somebody sprang upon the bar, and shouted something, whereupon the inhabitants of that Unknown Temple of iniquity rushed to the center of the house with yowls and yells of depraved delight — the crowning Vice was about to be perpetrated — a horseshoe tournament was taking place. That was too much. Swiftly I fled through the window, wondering if my immortal soul had become contaminated. Then I awoke, firmly resolved to vote a wet ballot next year.

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