

# HOW THE TOAD GOT CAUGHT IN THE WHIRLPOOL OF THE SLUMS

By ALICE M. ROYAL,  
Of Parks and Playgrounds Association.

## A Story of a Boy of the Tenements and How the Parks and Playgrounds Association Is Working Out the Salvation of Others of His Kind

THE TOAD was barely ten years old when the whirlpool first gripped him. There are many such whirlpools in the tenement districts of New York city, but the particular whirlpool which engulfed the Toad is located over toward North River in that unsavory region familiarly known to the police and newspaper reporters as Hell's Kitchen. Worthy people live there; boys and girls are born there who become worthy men and women, as good citizens as any. But Hell's Kitchen's human speciality is the material of which thugs, thieves and gunmen are made. It brews their broth of life, its smells are sweet in their nostrils.

They called him Toad because his figure was squat and ungainly and because of his odd, hopping gait as he ran on neighborhood errands for the pennies which made him welcome among the older, already more vicious boys engaged in their favorite employment—playing craps on the sidewalk, and always on the alert for the cop on the beat. The Toad had an honest, hard working longshoreman for a father and he was still a fairly good boy, but craps had him fascinated. Yet it was his well meaning father who pushed him fairly into the whirlpool, and in that fact lies the moral of this tale.

Here is where a few words are not amiss regarding the city's greatest charity. The Parks and Playgrounds Association is working out a virtual salvation for the poor children. The Toad did not go to any of these places for the simple reason that in the neighborhood where he lived none was in evidence. It is for the establishment of these clean and healthy surroundings that boys like the Toad grow up in an atmosphere of normal environment. It is for the benefit of these city health spots that the famous bandmaster, Lieut. Henry Liff has volunteered his magnificent band of 100 musicians for the series of novel band concerts, week of May 17, at the Twelfth Regiment Armory.

On one of the narrow, dirty side streets with their rows of dilapidated tenements, three boys, one of them the Toad, with his sunken cheeks on which the pallor of the tenements hung, are engaged in a game of craps. The other two, older, stronger, larger, scuff at the little fellow when he accuses them of "fixing" the "come 7-come 11" dice so that they won his four coppers from him, but he is not afraid of them. He is not going to have his pennies filched from him without a protest. He's willing to "take a chance," he tells them, but it's got to be an honest chance. They only laugh at him, but the Toad will not be laughed at. He gives way to his anger, he calls them "cheats." The older boys rise to their feet and threaten the little fellow. One of them doubles his fist and makes a pass at him, and knowing well he is not their equal he leaves the disputed pennies on the sidewalk, and in the parlance of Hell's Kitchen region "beats it" down the street. The other two gather up the pennies, but it is only a second before they are racing after him, hurling such epithets as "coward," "liar," after his retreating form. They gained on him at every step, and no doubt they would have given the Toad a good beating, but at that moment a rough looking bulk of a man turned the corner and swung into the street. The Toad ran up to him and seized him by the legs, begging for his protection.

"They're tryin' to lick me, dad," he whimpered, and the big fellow scowled at the boys, who stopped at the sight of him, thus bringing the impromptu marathon to an end.

"We was only playin', we wasn't goin' to hurt youse," said the older of the two boys.

"Youse cheated me outer my pennies and youse called me a coward," retorted the little lad, gaining courage now that he clung to the leg of his father.

"Aw, we was only foolin'," persisted the other two, quaking under the scowl of the big, loose jointed man, who had a "reputation" in the neighborhood; for

hadn't he beaten up the corner "cop," when the latter got "fresh" and told him to move on, once when there was a row on the corner, and the neighborhood habitues were thronging around to see what was going on. True enough, the Judge sent big Tim Lynch to the workhouse for thirty days, but the sentence made Tim a hero in the neighborhood, and there was not a man, leave alone a boy, would get into an argument with him. The boys slunk away, glad to escape the iron blows from his fist, but

where the Toad lived, he kept repeating his father's words: "You got to fight your way or you'll go under," looking the while at the clenched little hand. And the words left their impression. Little Pete Lynch decided that no one would ever call him a coward again. He would redeem himself in his father's eyes. Timidly he followed him into the apartment, where the mother, a thin, prematurely aged woman, was bending over a smoky coal range trying to coax a fire into it, and several younger children, happy enough in their igno-

and shook it at some imaginary foe, as he went on.

"Wait 'till I git me mitts on Bill Kelly, he won't never call me a coward no more. Him an' me and Mickey Grogan was playin' craps and they swipes four cents offen' me, and when I klicks they's wantin' to lick me."

And now the mother turned to him with a worried look in her eyes.

"I wish you wouldn't be after playin' craps, Pete," she said. "You'll be gittin' yourself into trouble."

"Aw, don't you care, ma," was the reply. "All the kids on the block do it, and they ain't never one of them goin' to lick me again."

And then the father returned with his "can o' suds" and sat down to a coarse supper that was laid before him. The children got their "bit" any way at all, much like so many young dogs, but they didn't starve, for like so many dogs, they ate and drank whenever they got a chance at anything in the way of



The favorite pastime of the boys of the slums—the street game of craps.

no sooner had they gone when he turned furiously upon his son and said:

"So, they took your pennies and called ye a coward and ye run away? You're no son of your father, no boy."

He seized the Toad's fingers and doubled the frail little hand into a fist.

"What ye got that for anyhow?" he growled, holding up the thin little arm.

"That's all ye've got to fight your way through the world with, me boy, or you'll go under sure enough. Don't ye ever let me hear them callin' ye a coward agin or I'll be after teachin' ye a lesson myself."

He threw the child from him with the final warning:

"Mind ye now, no more runnin' away; stick and fight it out."

Half fearful, the child slunk along at his father's side, from time to time eyeing that poor little fist and doubling first one hand and then the other as if he would test their strength. And all the way home, up the four dark, creaking flights of stairs to the top floor rear,

and innocence, were playing on the floor.

"Gimme the can," was the husband's and father's greeting, and the woman handed it to him without a word.

"Damn such a law that makes a man go down four flights for a can o' suds when he's got four kids could go get it for him," he muttered as he slammed the door after him, and those within heard his heavy tread on the stairs. The children never even looked up as their father came in or went out, the mother turned to her cooking and her stove and the Toad slunk over to the window and looked out upon a dozen washlines filled with the clothes of the neighborhood tenements, and still thought over his father's words. Such was the atmosphere in which the Toad lived, could he be other than a Toad?

"No one ain't ever goin' to lick me agin, ma," he blurted out, but the woman did not even hear him or turn from his work, and he never lost, for no one ever got into an argument with the Toad. And so at least the pinch of poverty was removed from the family, and with the Toad's two brothers working and earning \$4 and \$6 a week respectively, the Lynches were able to move into a better apartment in a better locality, but the tenement habit clings and he moved a little up the street where the rooms had rollers in them and where there were letter boxes in the vestibule.

Right across from their new home lived Mary O'Callahan with her parents and sisters and brothers. O'Callahan's Mame they called her, and undisputed she reigned, belle of the neighborhood. All the lads in the vicinity paid court to her and took her for trolley rides and to "movies" and on Sundays they considered themselves fortunate if Mame could go with any one of them to Coney Island or any of the dozens of places of amusement that the great city afforded. A popular girl indeed was Mame! Old Pat Leahy, who kept a little stationery store on the ground floor of the house she lived in, used to say that her eyes had "a bit of the blue skies of Erin" in them and that her hair had "a glint of the sun that hung over the hills of Killarney," and he knew, for he had seen them come and go and many were the tales he might have told.

Mame worked in a shirtwaist factory and earned from \$8 to \$10 a week, but her father had a "city job," so that

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she could spend most of her salary on finery, and she did it too, and there wasn't a new style that came out that Mame wasn't the first one on the street to wear, and she wore it well, much to the envy of the other girls. Every one felt sure that Mame would make a good match, and why shouldn't she? She gathered the youth of the neighborhood around her and sent them away at will, but that was her privilege, that was why she was the reigning queen!

And then came Pete Lynch. He saw Mame from the windows of his mother's parlor; he saw her from the shop, he purchased his cartridges from the stationery store across the street so that he could see her nearer and to better advantage. It was not long before he began to bid her the time of the day, and then it was easy to stand in front of the store and exchange a few words with her, and soon he extended an invitation for a trolley ride, which was accepted; and after that, well—the boys began to keep away from Mame, for Pete soon became known as her "steady," and his reputation was too well known in the neighborhood for any one to attempt to take the prize from him. A chance came into the Toad's life. He began to stay away from the poolrooms so that he might have more time to spend with Mame. He missed the extra dollars he made there, still he was unwilling to give Mame up for them, and the consequence was that he applied himself to his work with renewed vigor and was soon getting \$15 a week and was as steady and decent as though he had never belonged to one of the toughest gangs in the city that teens with them.

It wasn't the first time that love, creeping into a hard and cold heart, wrought a reformation where all else had failed.

Fifteen dollars a week, Pete reasoned, ought to be enough to live on—his mother had raised a family on less—so he put the question to Mame, and she said "yes." She didn't know whether she loved him or not, but the other boys had all dropped away and it seemed the thing that she should marry him. Such is the ethics of the tenements. And so they were married, and all might have gone well but the Toad lost his job, and though he trudged the streets looking for another one he could not find one. There was Mame to support. He didn't think about the matter long—he knew the old gang would welcome him back with open arms and without a question, so back to the gang he went and quickly assumed the leadership. It was not long before he was set up in a corner saloon, and though his reputation was far from savory the police had "nothing on him" or it until one night, during an election brawl, a man was shot in the place. Then the trouble began. The Toad's past reputation was taken into account; his license was revoked and he found himself out looking for a job again. And now there are several lads, Lynches to support. Jobs were not lying around idle; besides, no one seemed to want to hire the ex-gangman. He picked up odd jobs along the riverfront and worked much as his father had worked before him, and he soon found himself in the same kind of a top floor rear flat with a smoky stove and dirty walls and creaking floors, just like the ones in which he had spent his childhood. The Toad was far from satisfied, but he said nothing—and Mame never complained. The light had faded from her eyes and her hair had lost its glint of gold and the Toad saw it and it hurt him, but Mame gave no sign. Once he asked her to get the "kids" ready and she went with him for a walk in the park, but she turned to him and said with a weary and weary smile that he often saw in her eyes whenever she spoke to him:

"You take the kids, Pete; I can't go."

"Why not?"

"I ain't got nothin' fit to wear," was the reply.

That was the last straw. He strode down to the corner, where he chanced to meet an old acquaintance. They stood there chatting and a policeman came up and told them to move on, tested and the Toad went off with a grudge. All his old time hatred for the blue coated guardians of the peace returned to him. He began to abuse the officer, who threatened him with arrest. A crowd gathered. The Toad never knew just how it all happened, but he struck the officer across the face and the next morning the Judge sent him to the Island for thirty days.

Mame said nothing. When the thirty days were up and Pete came back he found that Mame had gone back to work in a shirtwaist factory, sending the two younger children to a day nursery, while the elder ones went to school.

If Pete had found it hard to get work before he found it harder now, with his thirty days on the Island against him. It seemed to him that every officer he passed sneered at him; he imagined they all knew his record and were trying to "get something on him."

"They're tryin' to get a frameup and railroad me," he told Mame more than once, but she laughed at him.

"They'd be havin' a lot to do, just tryin' to get you," she told him, and continued her work in the factory, but now she left the children at home, for Pete could look after them, and soon it was Mame with the eyes that once had a "bit of the blue skies of old Erin" in them who became the real bread winner of the family. It galled Pete to think that a woman was supporting him, but he could do nothing. He picked up a job when and where he could. He shoveled snow, he hung around the docks waiting for a ship to come in and get work unloading her cargo. And so it might have gone on until the children grew up and went to work and added their mite to the family exchequer, for

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