

“PAY-DAY—SOME DAY”

With Other Sketches From Life and Messages From The Word

by

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CHAPTER TWO

A CHILD AGAIN, JUST FOR A DAY

Ever since I became a man I had longed for an opportunity to go back to the place of my childhood and relive a day as a little boy; not as a little five or six-year-old, but the age when a real “he-boy” has his greatest thrills and enjoyment. To me that was about the age of ten.

This was my unusual and happy experience when I was forty-five. In fact, it was just twelve years ago. (Now please don’t ask me how old I am). When I first heard that poem: *Make me a child again, just for tonight*, it rang in my ears and found a response in my heart, “Make me a boy again, just for a day.” Strange as it seems, I have lived over again an entire day as a ten-year-old boy. Dream? No, it was real. Naturally I could not live such a day in Chicago, Wisconsin, or even Sweden-like Minnesota. It had to be where I lived and played as a boy. And that is where this took place.

No little “greenhorn” immigrant boy could have been more lonesome for the little red log house with its typical white-painted porch and windows than I was. I literally cried myself to sleep time and again, especially at springtime and Christmas. Not because the home was beautifully furnished or had overstuffed mattresses. O yes, they were overstuffed all right, but with straw, and the carpets that covered the rough flooring—in spots—when company came, were plenty good enough even if woven and sewed together out of rags. Even if it represented the ordinary poorer homes, it was clean and everybody was contented. My cousins and I were happy if, after we returned from nearly an hour’s walk from school and had finished carrying wood, carrying water for the cattle, doing the chores and what not, we were allowed to go sleigh-riding down the steep hill, or, in the summertime go bathing. No, the reason for my longing was not because it was a place of plenty— *It was my home!*

This eventful and never-to-be-forgotten day came. I left the home of my former schoolmate up in the village in the early hours of the morning and started my tramp down the hill and into the woods where my home was. When I came to the main country road that led in my direction, I was afraid I’d meet someone, so I left the highway and found my way along the narrow wooded paths. In fact, that was the natural course anyway; I was a boy again and no boy would walk the main highway if he knew the old trails. To me it awakened sweet boyhood memories when along these trails I used to follow the cows and sheep as I took them to pasture, when again and again I would stop and pick a few blueberries.

They hadn't changed location since the last time, thirty-three years ago, that I walked the same path.

I had walked half an hour when I judged that just about this distance in the open should be my home and I guessed it right because I could discern through the thick pine and hemlocks that homestead from which my heartstrings never were loosened. When I reached the open space I leaned against a big pine tree and . . . cried. Why? I guess because I was human.

I walked slowly up the path along the barley field and up to the house. I sort of hesitated because I was afraid someone would open the door that would be a stranger to me. I didn't even know who owned the home now, since it had been sold twice. But my fears were soon dispelled. A girl came running towards the house and me.

"Are you Bernhard Hedstrom?" "Yes, that's me."

"We heard you were coming to your old home today, so they all went away for the day. The folks wanted you to be all by yourself and I was left at home to tell you."

"Thanks, girly, and good-bye," was my answer, half-choking from the emotions that had controlled and taken complete possession of me.

I walked up the two worn steps, so familiar, since I often stubbed my toes and tripped on them as a little boy. I sat down on the time-worn bench and looked out over the yard and before me came visions of childhood days with their games and happy hours. Right at my side on the back rest was the C. B. H. that I had carved with my first penknife. I felt like pinching myself to see if this was real or only a dream.

At last, after these many years, here I was. The only change after these many years was the currant bushes that had grown bigger, and one large tree by the gate was no more. Otherwise barns, building and woodshed, even the old fire-ladder on the side of the house, were still in the same place and only showed the effects from the storms of time. I arose to go into the house. The same time-worn doorknob and the door with the big hinges.

Here again met my eyes the same old room with the big built-in stove in the corner. The triangular pantry on the opposite side had the same old wooden handle on it. The big cellar door in the center of the room had not been nailed shut. I lifted the heavy cover and walked down the little steps, and potatoes, carrots and onions still were kept in their accustomed places. A guitar hung on the same nail that we boys nailed into the wall when we received the first guitar as a gift from an uncle. I took it down and tuned it and sang (that is, I tried to sing):

Thanks to God for my Redeemer;
Thanks for all Thou dost provide;
Thanks for times now but a memory;
Thanks for Jesus by my side.

Thanks for pleasant balmy springtime;
Thanks for dark and dreary fall.
Thanks for tears by now forgotten;
Thanks for peace within my soul.

I came into the room where I used to sleep, and the same bed stood on the same side and on the side of it a little square table with a white cloth on it, and the windows were adorned with plants, some with white, yellow, and others with red flowers.

As I sat on the chair my mind wandered back to the time mother or grandma used to put me to sleep. Those cold nights when mother or “mormor” would take the cold quilts and hold them before the warm open fireplace in the corner until they got good and warm, then hurriedly tuck them around me, love me a little bit and kiss me goodnight.

“But I’m a child again,” I said to myself. I knelt down at the old bedside and again repeated the old childhood prayer: “Gud som haver barnen kar, se till mig, som liten ar” (Something like the English, “Now I lay me down to sleep,” but with a deeper sentiment). This time, however, the usual touch of mother’s hand on my head was absent, but as I remained in prayer (I do not know how long), thanking God for His guidance, blessings and the peace in my soul, a joy came over my soul that I dare not describe. Heaven’s joy simply filled me to overflowing and an unseen hand touched me. “**I have blessed you and shall make you a blessing,**” came the voice. My friends, I had a meeting with Jesus in the old prayer-room.

There was not a room that I did not visit in the old home. I even enjoyed the old attic. I climbed the steep ladder that led up to the hayloft; I even climbed up the ladder that led to the top of the house. I had to “look over the world” from the old roof. Wasn’t I a boy again?

Down the hill I ran to the old well, dipped down with the old oaken bucket and drank from it, even though in my excitement I spilled water all over myself. On the hillside I picked wild strawberries, ate to my heart’s content from the currant and gooseberry bushes. Now down to the old river and riverside, among those beautiful flowery meadows. I started down the old familiar lane. We never walked here when we were boys, so of course I most naturally ran, and when I came to the gate I jumped the fence. Why, we boys never took time to open and shut gates, we vaulted them.

Down along that crystal-clear river I walked, visited every bend and deep pool to see if any fish were to be found. The sun was smiling down on me, in fact that was the only living thing around. If anybody had come along it would have spoiled my fun. Here was the old swimming-hole. Off went my clothes which I hurriedly threw on the rose bushes, and into the old swimming hole I jumped and splashed. I was a boy again. A threatening rain made me rush and dress, and I started up a lane through a thickly wooded tract to be protected by the large trees in case of a heavy rain.

I stood under a heavy thick fir-tree when in the distance I heard an automobile. Here I had stood before and hurriedly rushed to open a nearby gate for those who came driving by, and as customary, the driver threw down a few pennies to the gate boy . . .

No time to lose, I was a boy again, and on I hurried and in time to open the gate, so the driver could continue without himself having to open and shut the gate. I held my head low, so as not to be seen and with the correct politeness lifted my cap and . . . the driver threw a nickel into it (fern ore).

I was still tramping through the woods and over fields, at last nearing the old church-yard.

As it again began to rain I hurried for cover and stood on the porch of a fine residence. Presently the door opened and an elderly lady came out and urged me to step inside while the rain “goes over.”

“No, thank you, madam, I prefer to stand here and reflect,” was my reply. “But why?” she added. “Because when I was a little boy I used to stand right here when I ran errands and delivered some bakery goods to this house.”

With astonishment she asked, “You aren’t Louisa’s boy, are you?”

“Yes, that happens to be me,” was my reply.

With that I was ushered into her parlor and in a few seconds she set before me “hallonsaft” and cookies. I excused myself, just as I would have done, if I had been a boy, but this was to me even too sacred to eat, and I told her of my wanderings. She understood me perfectly. I wanted to be all by myself. After answering this dear eighty-year-old refined lady’s numerous questions about mother and uncles and cousins, and promising to visit her again, I bid good-bye in the way it behooves a boy from the poorer classes.

As she opened the door to let me out she “unconsciously” slipped some cookies and candy in my pocket, just as was her custom when we came to her house as little errand boys.

The rain had stopped and the evening sun was setting, but the sunbeams made the raindrops on the shrubbery sparkle like so many diamonds as I approached the churchyard. I had walked myself tired and I wanted to rest a few minutes at grandma’s grave. At last I found her grave. I remember the day she was laid to rest. She was such a good grandma. How often she had hushed me to sleep.

How many times she let me go with her to the neighbors. How she kissed away the hurt from my baby fingers. It was her smile that let me dip a piece of stale bread into the broth when she was cooking. I wanted to spend the evening of this eventful day at her last resting place. The bells in the church steeple slowly tolled seven o’clock. Everything was so quiet, except for the fluttering leaves and the murmur of the soft breezes through the tree tops. The golden rays of the sun over the waves as they came to a soft slumber on the shore of Lake Siljan gave a beautiful setting to this last hour and tuned my heart to sing, though with a quivering, hushed voice:

“Shall we meet beyond the river,
where the surges cease to roll?

Shall we meet in that blest harbor,
when our stormy voyage is o'er?

Shall we meet and cast the anchor
by the fair, celestial shore?"

Tired, but satisfied, I slowly walked through the woods and up the big hill to the home of my schoolmate, Axel. The night shadows had enveloped the woods and territory where I had spent most of this day as a boy again, and when I reached the gate I paused a few moments to take another glance towards "home sweet home," and, wiping the tears from my eyes, I thanked God for the sweet memories of boyhood days and that I could be a boy again—just for a day!

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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