

## **The Devils of Indecision**

Robert H. Sutherland  
Woodsville High School  
Senior Year 1915 – 1916

On the eastern bank of the oldest river in the world, there is a little town named Groveland Heights. Walled in by the mountains, it lies in the hollow of the hills, quiet, serene, lonesome. When the Creator built that little cup in the highlands, He sent a river rolling down from the north to furnish the water for its future life. For two centuries or more that river has been chained by Man, but only a saw-mill and a power-station stand there to-day to change the face of the valley.

Into that Land of Filled Desires I was sent, one Indian summer morning, as the river had been sent before me; and eighteen Indian summers in that valley found no change in me. The graded school, the village church, and all the rest of country life were a part of my existence; and I passed the happy days of childhood without any desire for or idea of another life.

Major Blandon was one of the great host which had crossed the ocean to fight, and he was one of the more fortunate ones who came away alive. The stories of France and Belgium, which he told as he sat on his white porch, thrilled me, and I came often to hear the old cripple narrate.

As I sat one afternoon on his piazza, I wondered at the old man's tenacious hold on life. Tho he was virtually a helpless man, and could distinguish only the coming and going of the day, he clung to life in the hope that his years of usefulness and his power to cheer and serve were not at an end. Before the thread of his life should be drawn from the box of predestined Things, recorded in the Golden Book, and rewound upon the Spool of Past Events, he wished to do more. And, in the meantime, his eager spirit awaited the day when Gabriel should blow the charge, and all things march to God.

For over an hour I had said nothing, and he, too, was silent. Then suddenly, his face took a look of interest, and he turned to me to say:

“Boy, what do you want to be? Surely you want to do something besides have a good time.”

“I haven't thought it over much,” I answered. “I never thought it was a necessity to be great.”

“And do you only do what you must?” came the next question.

“Oh, I play ball and go to the movies and earn my spending money.”

“That is what I feared,” said he. “I am afraid, my boy, that you’re like a lot of young lads today. Don’t misunderstand me. I don’t wish to criticize the modern boy, but I want you to see that you are wrong. In the first place, you have no ambition. You are content to let the world go on without helping to make it yourself or others any better. That is not right. You should seek to do good to something or somebody. If you don’t do this, your life is wasted, your time is lost.”

“Major,” I said, with all effort to hide my impatience, “I can’t see the reasoning back of your statements. What good, to me or the world, does it do if I am great? I strive all my life and work with all my energy to get honors and wealth and respect, and I die. I leave it all behind, others reap the reward that should be mine, and I am forgotten. Why not waste my time one way as another?”

“Just this. You live and die and are forgotten anyway. No one is a hero for eternity, except God. If we strive and do succeed, we are honored because we have done; if we fail, the world calls us worthy because we have tried to do.”

“But I haven’t any such belief as that,” I remonstrated.

“Boy, didn’t you ever want to be big? When you play ball, didn’t you want to win single handed? Didn’t you ever strive to be the best and the greatest quarter-back or long-distance runner or wrestler?”

“But why should I?” I asked. “I made all the teams, even if I wasn’t captain. I don’t need those things to have a good time. Books are all right, and so are athletics, but a fellow doesn’t have to star to get along. I don’t belong to an orchestra. I don’t care a snap about Shakespeare, but I’m just as well off as if I did.”

“That’s it. You think you are. Your ideas on life are warped and you have no source of enjoyment. You form hasty opinions and scarcely ever consider seriously the big things in life. You should go out into the world and see for yourself. Make friends, tell them your joys and sorrows and hopes. Profit by their experience. Learn to dance and be a musician, join the glee clubs, study the masterpieces, go into other people’s society. Be human, love the girls, and do as other fellows do. And when you’re doing this, feel. Have emotional reactions. Sympathize with others in their sorrow, be glad with them in their moments of joy. And, above all, work. Sell papers, be a farmer or a doctor or a railroad man. But, my boy, whatever

you are, be a good one, be an expert. And when you come to the evening of your life, “the last, for which the first was made,” you can be proud of what you have done. Then the world may say: “This was a man,””

If I had prepared an answer to this, that answer was gone when the Major had finished; all I did was to think. He was right. It wasn't because I was I, it made no difference to others what my faith was, and they did not scorn me because I remained apart from them. It wasn't what I was, that they disliked; it was what I wasn't.

The Major lapsed again into silence, a silence that was not broken until the evening sun had sunk into the west. Then, as there I sat and pondered, came the sound of music to my ears. I knew the musician and the instrument, but the music was strangely unfamiliar. It came to me thru the deepening sunset like a message that has long been on the road and is just being now delivered. It seemed to blend itself into my being and fill a place long vacant and untenanted. The music brought the face of the musician before my mind, and I could see the serious, quiet eyes, small and brown, the even mouth and straight nose. The face faded from my mind and I thought only of the music's meaning.

I was as the God had come with His angels to show me His magnificence and to fill me with awe. The feeling of bigness possessed me and I was dazed at the thought of God's omnipotence. All the joy of Heaven poured from the instrument and wended its way to me.

Suddenly the music grew louder. The strings vibrated more quickly and my heart danced at the merry tones. I was thrilled, and my inner consciousness responded to the ever-quickenning music. At its highest point the music stopped and left me, secure and happy. I turned to the Major. His hand was outstretched, the palm toward mine. And, as I stood there, it seemed to me I was all alone except for that song of love, the Major, and God.

The joy of living filled me and I was Romeo, a Lochinvar, an Alexander in my desire to do. I knew myself and my powers at last! It was then that the Devils of Indecision left me, and I felt the power of Youth. At last I could sympathize with the ambitions of others. I, too, would do; and in the evening of my life, as the Major had said, I would stop to consider the good there is in everything and rejoice. I took the Major's hand and turned to follow a road that for me had no crossings and no turns.

###

RHS note in a letter to Susan Hastings, dated January 21, 1972: *“I wrote it when I was a senior in high school. My headmaster liked it so well he kept it until he died. Ethel [his wife] sent it to me some months ago when she found it among his effects.”*

Transcribed from the original 1916 pages by John Sutherland, 19 Jan 2012.

###