

O. Henry Short Story Winner

'Don't Walk' By Elizabeth Morrah

That morning had been crisp and clear, but by afternoon it had begun to rain with that dull, cold, numbing drizzle that is not really rain at all, but rather a moist, dense fog that varnishes everything with its icy lacquer. It was just dusk, and all along the street the yellow lights and neon signs were beginning to spread their fuzzy glow through the mist. There were people, too, gray, anonymous hordes of people that surged as one huge, drab body along the sidewalk. Every day it was this way with these people; every day they would push and jostle one another to get away from the city as soon as possible. It was a little colder than usual for November, or

perhaps the rain made it seem so. The boots and shoes and high heels clicked and squished on the wet cement as the tired feet rushed toward the distant, dull roar of the subway.

Crushed in this mass of people was a gray, nondescript little man, rather appealing in his drabness. He walked with his head bent down and stared at the jungle of feet on the pavement, but it was not the variety of shoes he was studying; it was the cracks in the sidewalk. They were the same cracks he saw every day as he trudged along, looking down, but he never tired of them. He counted them over and over again as he had many years ago in a green, tree-filled world he could scarcely

remember. "Step on a crack, you'll break your mother's back," a distant, childish voice repeated over and over again in his mind.

The cold rain soaked through his gray coat and chilled him, breaking into thoughts. The little man did not like his thoughts being disturbed; they were all the color he had left in his gray life. Twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, yes, just twenty-nine cracks, and then there was the intersection. The man glanced up momentarily. "Don't Walk," blared the sign on the opposite corner. The man did not walk. He wanted to; he resented this sign giving him orders, but he remained on the corner with the rest of the people. "Walk!" exclaimed the sign in a cheery, green voice, and the man crossed the street. It was darker now, and there were more fuzzy lights and headlights of cars that made red pools in the shiny, black streets.

The little, gray man peered around nervously at the thinning crowd. He had not given it much thought before, but he did not know any of these people. Yet, there they all were, pushing him and shoving him and running to get home. Now there were fewer people than there had been, and he took time to look at them. The faces whirled by him—the old negro's wrinkled frown, the sharp, dark eyes of the Puerto Rican youth, the tired, painted visage of the office girl, the face of the harried executive, so plainly showing his ulcers. The man saw all these, but it seemed to him that the boy noticed him, also. The man smiled weakly at the boy, who only gazed coldly back with a slight look of astonishment in his piercing eyes. In the mist the man quickened his pace ever so slightly, while it seemed to him the boy did the same. The man was walking much faster now, and the rain was falling harder. The cracks slipped unnoticed un-

der his feet, while the faces blurred before his eyes. He could hear the wet feet behind him and around him. He ran, too, now, ran to get away. He had heard of the things that happened to people right there on his own sidewalk, and he knew there was no one in the crowd who would help him.

"Don't Walk!" screamed the red sign on the corner, but the man hurried across, hardly noticing the screeching tires. Would the boy follow him? He heard steps behind him, and his heart sank as he rushed blindly ahead until he was suddenly in darkness and facing a cold, moist brick wall. The man was breathing hard, not daring to look back for fear he might see the boy's evil, leering face, his gleaming teeth, his poised knife. From the alley there rose an agonized scream as the little, gray man felt the sharp, stabbing pain. He fell on his knees and collapsed, and the rain poured down in torrents, soaking into his coat and wetting him.

"Poor little fellow; it was his heart," said the white-coated doctor at the hospital. "Nobody seems to know who he was." The boy just stood there for a moment, then began to cry softly. "I didn't even know him, but I knew there was something wrong. I was just going home when I saw him run that "Don't Walk" sign. And then he just kept running until he came to that

alley, and he screamed. That poor, little man screamed, and no one cares, and no one knows who he was. No one cares, do you hear me?" He lowered his flashing, dark eyes and slowly walked out of the room and down the stairs and out of the hospital.

It was quite late now, and the rain was turning to an icy glaze as it fell on the sidewalks, coating the forgotten cracks and holes in the cement. The people were all gone now. None of them had known the little man and tomorrow, when they returned, none of them would miss him. The dark boy went slowly down the street toward the subway, not thinking of the little, gray man, but rather of the crowded tenement where he lived because right then, that was a happier thought.

On an empty corner, somewhere in the city, a sign flashed a brilliant "Don't Walk," and no one walked. "Walk," said the sign, but still no one walked. Tomorrow it would still be raining. Tomorrow they would walk.

Health Misconceptions Common Among Teens

The nation-wide School Health Education Study recently discovered that upwards of 70 percent of senior high school students believe the following half-right or false statements:

- Commercial medicines may be used safely if dose and content are clearly indicated on label, or if recommended by a pharmacist.
- Use of "pep" pills or sleeping pills does not require medical supervision.
- Legislation guarantees the reliability of any advertised medicine.
- Popular brands of toothpaste are effective in killing germs in the mouth and in preventing cavities and loss of teeth.
- Fluoridation is done to purify water for drinking purposes.
- Unrefrigerated chicken salad is not a potential source of food poisoning.
- Food should never be stored in an open can, even in the refrigerator.
- A high school girl who was once underweight should regularly take vitamin pills or take low-calorie diet preparations if she begins to gain weight.
- Chronic diseases are contagious.
- Although venereal disease is on the increase, it has never been a major social problem.
- The World Health Organization is part of the International Red Cross.
- The best source of help for a persistent skin inflammation is a nonmedical health advisor or pharmacist; for a persistent

cough, a pharmacist; for a painful back injury, a chiropractor.

Also high on the list of misconceptions were many about nutrition and community health. Many teens think that voluntary health agencies are supported by public funds and have the power to enforce community health regulations. They also think that public health departments provide complete medical diagnosis and treatment for any citizen.

One of the study's findings was that more teens know good health practices than practice them. This will probably surprise no one and will add a ray of hope to the lives of the headshakers and I-told-you-so'ers.

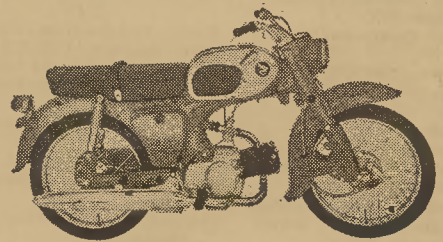
The study, sponsored by the Samuel Bronfman Foundation of New York City, was carried out in 359 secondary schools enrolling over 311,000 students (another part of the study surveyed 1,101 elementary schools, with equally dismaying results). The National Education Association, United States Office of Education, American Medical Association, United States Public Health Service, and National Congress of Parents and Teachers cooperated in the study.

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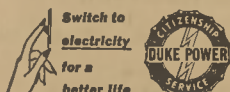
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