

# S-U-R-V-I-V-A-L-S By Grace Torrey

### The Generation That Strives to Please, Collides With the Generation that Prefers to Shock.

HELENE BIXBY'S monogrammed note paper slipped from the envelope into her old friend's hand. The old friend sighed. For fifteen years the square envelope that flowing script, that monogram had spelled ill omen in the morning mail. Howard Bixby's death, the disentangling of his affairs, unjust landlords, troubles with drainage, with pastors, with rights of way, with Genevieve's tendency to sore throat, with unsatisfactory investments, with neighbors who dog-trampled the four beds all had come heralded by the pale blue of Helene Bixby's stationery. The old friend paused to indulge in forebodings. What would the trouble be this time? Then gallantly, because he had long since accepted Helene as part payment on his inextinguishable debt to Howard, he slit the envelope and read.

After all, it was only an invitation to have a party with her on Thursday. She knew the thousand demands upon his time. But his unflinching generosity made her trespass once again. There was a matter upon which she needed his wisdom.

The old friend looked at his calendar. This was Thursday. He telephoned, and apprised the Swedish visitor inebriatedly responding that he would be by Mrs. Bixby's bedside at five that afternoon. He wrote the engagement into his little red note book, slipped it into his waistcoat pocket, said "Come in" to the knock upon his office door, and temporarily forgot Helene.

The tall sophomore who followed the knock was in trouble. He had been the inspiration behind the painting green of certain lanterns last night. The green paint had gone farther than had been foreseen. Certain steps and a doorway, essential in the morning, had been painted the illegal activities of the night. Helene's old friend was not on a faculty disciplinary committee. The sophomore had merely come in for a friendly talk.

"I guess it's up to me to do something," he ventured, an experiment upon his friend's patience. "You must have a painting. The sophomore lectured, then indicated that there might have been a few others mixed up with it. But it had been his idea. Of course, if the committee once started to investigate they might miss him altogether and penalize the others, which would be unfair.

"Well," counseled his friend, "if you hunted them up first and took all the responsibility, they would probably lose interest in the possible others."

It was a good idea. The sophomore arose, visibly relieved.

"Good-bye, professor," he said. "Thanks very much."

Helene's friend looked after his sleek head as it disappeared. The instincts of these young cubs were all right. He could hear the discussion of the faculty committee. Williams and van Valium a great many times and vote for expulsion. Jefferson, on the other hand, would think it was funny and vote to pay no attention to the affair. Sommer would say it was a matter for the students themselves to handle. Hayes would point out that when the newspapers got hold of it, it would be a bad thing for the state. The state was not sending its young people up here to learn to destroy state property. The state would reflect this act in the next legislative appropriation. He would vote to make all concerned a glaring example.

Helene's friend sighed. He hoped his sophomore would be prompt. Then he said "Come in" to a knock on the door.

The girl who followed the knock was perplexed. She was, she told him, up in the air over her freshman laboratory.

"He tells us to ask ourselves questions and discover the answers," she complained.

"And you want a manual saying, 'Look at this spot. See this object? Write down that you saw it.'"

Yes, that was exactly what she wanted. She beamed at him.

"Well," said Helene's friend, "I can't blame you. It's what is generally called teaching. But, to my mind, and he beamed in return, "It's really forcible feeding. Painful. And in the long run inefficient."

It was the beginning of a half hour's talk. At the end of it the girl's eyes were large with the excitement of a new idea. She had always supposed a teacher was an institution created to drive information into the resistant surface of a student. Here was the revolutionary idea that a student was one who made life stand and deliver itself. The student was the pursuer.

"It's a great game," she told her. "You want to play it for all its worth."

She went away with a quickened step. Helene's friend looked at his watch. He was due at his seminar. The seminar was a group of young creatures very dear to him. They were vividly alert to the excitement of being alive in a world in which the riddle of life was always just beyond analysis. Today there was to be talk about light reactions. Woods, the education man, would be present, his nose in the air. Woods did not exactly deny light reactions. He merely deplored drawing inferences from them. It wouldn't do to make being seem to be mechanical. If you did, what was to become of the soul? It was all right for young people to look into these things. But all he had to say was, "Go slow."

After the seminar, in which Woods was unusually deprecatory, and in which Helene's two-hour laboratory, these were not in his own territory. He gave the best of himself, leaving, fairly fagged, at 4 to attend a faculty committee discussing problems of university organization. On the whole, faculty committees worked with an intelligence that compared favorably with that of committees of business men with whom Helene's friend often sat. They deliberated more, acted less impetuously. When they acted it tended to be from knowledge. Yet, as all things are relative, and faculty committees, like all others, composed of human beings, all these qualities produced in their own degree their own weaknesses. The faculty committee, strongly deliberative, had not acted at all when Helene's friend looked at his watch and saw that in fifteen minutes she would be waiting for him.

He let her wait an extra quarter of an hour, in order to hear through an impassioned debate over democratic versus autocratic organization of departments. At a little after 5 he sat by Helene's fire and saw her delicate hands playing over the teacups.

As he sat, he recognized that he was tired. It had been a little day. He was supposed to be a physiologist. Popular fancy pictured him one of the fortunate, sequestered from the maddening throng, buried among his reagents and his small experiments, happily dreaming scholarly dreams, while the wicked and ignorant old world roared and raged beyond the sound-proof walls of his laboratory. In reality he had not known three consecutive solitary moments since 2 o'clock. His 1 o'clock lecture lay upon his conscience. It was all right in a way. But the subject was moving by him. While he ran other people's errands the great forces of living truth were marshalling themselves far in advance of him. He sat back weary, not with work, but with the centrifugal-pulls dragging him in a thousand directions. Helene's hands, meanwhile, delicately pretty and glitteringly ringed, hovered over the cups, dotting their beautiful shavings at him.

"You are such a dear, Austen," she said, "There isn't any one but you to help me. No-

body else would understand. Two lumps, isn't it?"

"And make it strong," he added. Helene's eyebrows went up.

"That means you're tired out. And here I am, asking something more of you."

"Genevieve?" he smiled at her over an excellent piece of toast. After all, Helene made things wonderfully comfortable. Her eyes paid him astonished tribute.

"How could you guess it? I think you are marvelous."

"I saw her at the concert last night with a new captive."

"That poet," said Helene, with infinite distaste. "Isn't he dreadful? His finger nails are beyond belief."

"Is Cameron depressed?" Cameron was the last year's football star. Genevieve had worn him, as it were, on her ruff ever since his remarkable eighty-yard run.

"O, poor Dick! She's been treating him like a dog for three months. Austen, I hate to ask anything of you. I know you are up to your ears. But I do wish you would speak to Genevieve's friend."

Helene's friend sighed. Then he laughed. "What shall I say to her?"

Helene laid her hands in her lap and fixed on him troubled eyes. They were beautiful eyes, set in a face deservedly famous for its charm. Helene made a delightful picture, all silver and soft gray in her big blue chair. She looked at him appealingly.

"Austen, I wish I knew. There isn't anything I can say. I'm sure I don't know what anybody can say to her. Perhaps what I really want, is to have you hear what she has to say to you. Of course, I am an old woman." She paused imperceptibly.

"Never!" He roused himself to protest.

Helene dimpled. She could not resist even a tardy compliment.

"Well—you are very sweet. But I am, if you were modern, you know. Suffrage, or anything like that, I've tried to be a mother and keep Genevieve nicely dressed, and I'm sure I tried to have her properly educated—thanks, of course, always, to you. But Austen, you know, really, she seems to be quite beyond me. It isn't that I mind her being a decorator. The war made me see that the young woman of today must have her own life. I don't object at all to that. And I think her studio is nice, and lovely for tea. She has talent, too."

"Genevieve is a clever girl."

"Do you think she—do you suppose there is such a thing as being too clever? Of course, she is cleverer than I am. Every one is. I am not clever at all."

"That is why," he said, with a certain degree of sincerity, "you are so irresistible." Helene dropped her eyelashes. She conveyed, without blushing, the effect of having blushed.

"You always say such nice things, Austen. But, seriously, it seems to me that Genevieve is getting so clever she is actually—well—over."

Helene brought out the word in a desperate climax. Her friend suppressed his smile. "That would be equal to a bad thing. No crime, no crime, no crime in Helene's lovely eyes the crime of being queer. She went on.

"Austen, I am afraid she is going to get herself—well—talked about. And there isn't one thing I can say. She tells me I am of a past generation. Of course, that is perfectly true in a way. I was born before her."

"Beauty," said her friend, "is eternal."

Helene accepted this, with a fletching look of acknowledgment.

"At any rate, Austen, it's perfectly useless to tell her that in my day nice girls did not do such things."

"O, of course," Austen held out his cup for replenishment. Helene looked at him.

"Do you mean that? Don't you think a girl ought to be guided by the advice of her mother?"

Austen watched the two lumps dissolving in his best cup.

"Has she asked for it?"

"Mercy, Austen! If I waited till she asked for it—"

"Well," he said slowly, "isn't it a practical question? What a girl ought to be guided by, he knows, is what she is asked for. The things sometimes differ, in spite of what we might desire."

Unexpectedly, Helene's eyes filled.

"It's rather hard, Austen, when I've always had so much deference. I suppose I have been spoiled."

Her friend looked at her. What she said was quite true. Her world paid Helene extraordinary deference. It was not entirely Howard's money that bought it. Howard, too, had always been at her feet.

"I pay her extraordinary deference myself," he admitted, amused at the admission. He had always thought Helene a goose, a remarkably pretty goose, but a goose. Yet, he paid her extravagant compliments, and in effect threw his mantle before her feet at every middy crossing. Every one, as he thought it over, did the same thing. Women long since had paid her "the marked deference of electing her czarina of local society. Mrs. Howard Bixby's name was the magic by which every dance, Red Cross drive, debutante reception or college festivity hoped to gain itself prestige. He had it, on authority of his wife, Agnes, that her name was all Helene Bixby ever gave to these things.

"O, a cheque, of course. But when they want hard work done," she said, candidly, "they come to women in ground girders, like me."

He looked at Helene thoughtfully. He knew she had not fought for this deference. She had kept remarkably the air of letting it come of itself. As she sat, now, carefully, harmonious, in her big blue chair, her blue eyes, wet with tears, her little foot in its gray suede shoe upon its too-stool of blue velvet, he said to himself, that, goose or not, Helene staged herself wonderfully. It must have shocked her beyond measure to have deference refused her by Genevieve, of all people.

"Our children," he smiled at her, "are too close to us, aren't they? We look pretty fine from the gallery seats. But the people in the parquet see the crow's feet under the grease paint."

Helene's eyes gave him a horrified look.

"Crow's feet," she gasped. Then she laughed slightly. "O, I see. You're talking in metaphors, or whatever you call them. Well, it seems to me that makes it all the worse. Her corner, a little angrily, and the small foot tapped its footstool. Her friend knew that he had blundered. He looked at his watch and got hastily to his feet.

"Wretched man that I am," he said. "I am about to be late to dinner." Helene looked appealingly up at him.

"You mustn't hate me! I am always making you late to dinner." The idea gave her, he could see, profound consolation.

"No one could ever hate you," he brought out, he hoped, quickly enough. Helene smiled upon him and rose.

"And you will help me about Genevieve," she pleaded. "You are so analytical. You know, Austen, I can't analyze. But," her lips trembled, as she brought out, "I can't help feeling things."

"I'll do what I can," he promised.

"You will talk to her?"

"Well," he hesitated—"I'll see that she talks to me."

"O, of course, that is much better. And you will do it soon, won't you? I have a feeling that Genevieve has some horrid idea in her mind just now."

Helene shrugged her beautiful shoulders. The ideas were much too horrid, she conveyed, for her to phrase. But Genevieve would phrase them in a minute.

The two stood with the air of conspirators as the door flew open, the hallway banged and a boyish whistle came nearer, in advance of

the figure that in a moment waved a hand to them from the archway.

"Hello, people," said Genevieve. "Isn't this nice, Uncle Austen? Staying to dinner."

"I'm sorry," said Helene's friend. "I haven't been asked."

"O, Austen!" wailed Helene. "You are always. You know you are. Do stay. The Woodworths are coming and the Jimmy Davises."

"The Woodworths!" cried Genevieve. "Not those horrible Woodworths?"

"Why, darling! Don't talk so about my friends. The Woodworths are the nicest people in this town."

"Uncle Austen," begged Genevieve; "please ask me to come with you. The Woodworths make me laugh so. They're so dull. Couldn't I come home with you? I don't really care a thing about eating. But I will not live through a dinner with the Woodworths."

She took him home in her small car, which she managed skillfully. Uncle Austen, who dreaded the nervous driving of most women, leaned back, enjoying the control with which she threaded in and out among the traffic, losing the minimum of time, yet staying by a hairsbreadth within legal limitations.

"You drive well," he said presently.

She shot him a quick glance.

"Fraise from the emperor. Think I can let her out a little in this straightaway. You keep an eye out for the cop."

He watched her, covertly keeping the eye out, meanwhile, as directed. Her profile, showing cameo-like against her purple hat and scarf, was well designed by nature in one of her best inspirations. Genevieve had taken a hand, obviously, in later improvements, using a lip stick and, he suspected, having her eyebrows pulled out. Or, perhaps they were shaved. At any rate, he remembered when they had been broad and black, and rather impressive above her big green eyes. Now they were a thin arch above her blue eyes. To Uncle Austen's eye, nature had been the better decorator. Her purple suit, well cut, and expensive, ruffled as she slouched, well down on the end of her backbone. He reflected that Helene, straight-backed and slim, must shudder at her daughter's barrel-like silhouette.

He sensed, several times, throughout the dinner to which Agnes gave them tranquil welcome, that Helene probably shuddered whenever she looked at Genevieve. The purple coat once off, a smock of purple of chiffon was revealed. A good deal of torso was evident, and what little Genevieve wore under the chiffon blouse was low cut in front as well as behind. There were jade pendants in her ears, there was woolsen embroidery in orange and green, and there was a necklace of Chinese jade offering refuge to any eye that sought to evade full verification of anatomical fact.

He could see the eye of Frances, his thirteen-year-old daughter, taking absolute refuge in the green woolen birds and woolen poppies that bloomed upon Genevieve's diaphanous purple bosom. Frances, he reflected, was not as yet intrigued by flesh. Austen Junior, he watched with some covert anxiety, Austen Junior was nineteen. Every moment of his nineteen years had marked in his father's consciousness a fresh epoch in the miracle of himself and Agnes. Even yet the loss habit of married life between them as they faced each other at the candle lighted dinner table, he could not look across at her without a throng of thankfulness and ecstasy. She had been so perfect in him always, the sense of her so unflinchingly had meant restfulness and affection, that no habit could dull for him the wonder of her existence. At Austen Junior, who for nineteen years had lived the patent bond between them, he had never been able to look without at least the memory of that catching of the breath with which he had first seen his face.

"I suppose Austen's just an ordinary boy," he told Agnes often enough as the boy grew before them. "But I do like him most extraordinarily."

As his son sat beside Frances, facing Genevieve's tremulous pendants and green and parrots, Austen caught himself, more than once in the intervals of laugh and talk that went about the table, searching the boy's face. He felt that he could not bear any cloud upon that clear glance of his son's eyes, in which he had always found comfort. No eyes, looking at life with that directness, could conceal anything furtive behind their steadiness. It almost seemed impossible to him, however, that any adolescent boy could face Genevieve without funniness. Yet, as dinner flowed on smoothly, helped to his ease, he realized, by Agnes, perfect as always, no funniness appeared. After dinner Agnes remembered that she was to sit with a neighbor's baby until ten o'clock. And Frances had a paper to write on the early life of the Romans. Austen found himself, as he was awfully sorry there was the glee club tonight.

But I'll be back in time to get you safely home," he told Genevieve at parting. It was not furtive. Yet his father knew a bad moment, as he found a seat for Genevieve opposite him, beside the hearth.



"Mind if I smoke?" she said, looking about the quiet room. Austen found the cigarettes, and they had smoked for a few moments in silence. Austen waited.

"I'm sorry," said Genevieve, she finally knocking her ash off into the oak embers. "Think of the awful Woodworths!" She sighed and Austen let another silence come between them. Genevieve found a fresh cigarette.

"I suppose," she began at last, "mother wants you to speak to me." Austen laughed.

"What makes you think that?"

"O, I saw the symptoms. Tear wet lashes, air of guilty innocence as I entered. Poor old Uncle Austen!" She smiled at him. "I'm a terrible care to you." In her smile he almost saw a replica of Helene's satisfaction over Agnes. Helene, he thought swiftly, built up a universe about herself in which all women had cause for jealousy. Genevieve, on the other hand, fancied herself an infant terrible.

"Not at all," he said quietly. "Only hope you're enjoying this quiet smoke as well as I am." This was a trifle wicked. Genevieve's smoking, he more than suspected, was somewhat heroic, necessary for her pose, but in itself distasteful. As if to confirm his theory, she let her cigarette die out, gesturing with it gracefully as she talked.

"Well, I'm glad to have a chance to discuss things a little with you if you don't mind. Of course, you know, I get dreadfully on mother's nerves. But I can talk to you. Now I—"

"Just as she does on mine."

Austen, who was determined to be shocked at nothing, gave her a comprehending nod.

"It isn't that mother minds being kissed when the lights are low, as it were. But she doesn't like to be kissed. It's that I admit it. The wave of Genevieve's cigarette was expressive.

"In fact," she went on, "I made up my mind when I got to be a lady. And I am. A good deal."

Austen laughed.

"I like your candor," he said.

"That," said Genevieve, "is just what mother can't abide."

"I wonder," he looked at her doubtfully.

"Fact," said Genevieve, settling more comfortably in her chair. "It isn't at all what I admit. Of course, she brought out with finality, 'mother is of the past generation.'"

Uncle Austen smiled at her.

"Just what do you mean," he asked, "when you say that?"

"O, of course," Genevieve apologized, "I don't just mean that she's fifty. You're fifty, aren't you?"

"Forty-nine," he admitted.

"Well," she tried another cigarette. "I'm not silly enough to think that fifty is old, or anything like that. What I mean is that mother is crystallized into her form. You say you're forty-nine. But I can talk to you. Now mother is sure that anything I say or think that she can't recall that some one else—some one of the right sort, said or thought sometime in her own set, must not be said or thought by me. I shook her to her foundations the other day by throwing out that monogram is no longer smart. Our best people are quite polygamous. You know mother. After she ceased to 'Why, Genevieve,' she began to think. I gave her a list of names offhand, right here in town, and then any number beside. Well! She was so bothered! And it wasn't at all for the reason you might think. Mother could not bear to be out of style."

"How do you feel about that yourself?" asked Uncle Austen. Genevieve gave him a frank stare.

"About being out of style."

Genevieve laughed.

"Well, Uncle Austen! You surely give me pause. I've never thought of myself in those terms."

"Terms of stylishness?"

"Yes. Stylishness, or not stylishness. That's just what I'm trying to say to you. Let's get down to fundamentals. Let's be sincere. What on earth is style, anyway?"

"You surprise me greatly." His eyes, wide and innocent, were upon her.

"Surprise you? How can I surprise you? You surely don't think I'm stylish—conventional—any of that awful nonsense!" Genevieve almost sat erect in her alarm.

"Why, certainly. What else?" Uncle Austen remained tranquil.

Genevieve laughed.

"When mother is sitting around wringing her hands over me and Locksley Fenimore, this minute."

Uncle Austen felt that the important moment of the interview had arrived.

"Is there something about you and Locksley Fenimore about which your mother ought to wring her hands?"

"Well," she said, with effect of reasonableness. "That's as you look at it. You know what we're discussing?"

Uncle Austen smoked in silence for a moment.

"Don't know," he admitted finally. "But I believe I can guess."

rather coldly. "I'll run along, but you don't need to bother. I can manage."

Austen Junior was clear, however, that she could not manage. The purple coat, the purple hat, the purple scarf were brought and arranged with their usual careful consideration, casualness, and wondrously comfortable protective arias, bore her forth, after somewhat reserved good nights were exchanged with Uncle Austen.

He was still smiling into the oak embers over it when Agnes returned. She stood beside him a moment, her wraps about her.

"Did you straiten everybody out?" she asked. He laughed.

"No. I mortally offended everyone. I told Helene that she had crossed. She's hunting for them at this moment. And I told Genevieve that she was a bore."

Agnes looked at him.

"Well, of course she is," she said judiciously. "But she'll never forgive you. Has Austen come in?"

"He's gone home with Genevieve."

There was a moment in which the attempted lightness of his tone sounded hollow against the fear that suddenly bulked itself between them.

"Austen!" Agnes breathed at last in a little voice. "How could you?"

They looked at each other. In Agnes' eyes there was a deadly terror. He kicked angrily at the charred end of the oak log that lay upon the hearth.

"For heaven's sake!" he cried, "why not?" He was irritable because of his own fear. "Junior's not a baby."

Agnes pressed her hands to her eyes.

"O! But she is so—so—so—cruel. It amuses her so to play with the fine young creatures—make them less fine. She degrades them, then she throws them away. She calculates it, all so horribly. And Austen hasn't any weapons against her. He won't understand."

She was waking up and down now twisting her hands about each other. As she passed him once he caught her.

"Don't worry, mother," he said gently. She looked at him with eyes from which tears were starting.

"She's angry with you. You plucked her special vanity. She'll show you whether she's a bore or not. And I cannot bear it." Agnes again sobbed against his shoulder.

As he looked bitterly into the embers he told himself that Junior was all right. He might not understand, but his instincts were decent. After all, he was Agnes' child. And Genevieve's game was so crude, she was so frankly predatory, that even at 19 Agnes' child, and his, would be armed against her.

"Don't worry," he said again, and laughed.

Presently, Agnes found some sewing, and sat under the lamp, beside him, while he read. The clock long wailed in the room there came finally stealthy sounds at the front door. Furtive hands turned the knob, and softly closed the door again. In the tense quiet, while Agnes once again got her sewing and Austen found his chapter, they could hear an overcoat coming off, and careful tiptoeing down the hall. At the door of the living room the tiptoeing paused. As he read, apparently absorbed in his book, Austen could feel his son standing behind him in the doorway. What fevered revelation there might be in Junior's eyes, he could only guess. He could not lift his own.

"Well, of all the humbugs!" remarked the disgusted voice of Austen Junior. "I suppose, of course, you'd gone to bed. And here you sit. One splendidly stealthy entrance wasted!"

He strode in and sat himself on the arm of Agnes' chair.

"Recent women are not abroad at this hour," he said. "It's nearly midnight."

Austen looked at his watch.

"By Jove!" he said with astonishment. "Where has the evening gone?"

"I'll tell you," said Junior, "where an hour and a half of it has gone. After depositing your friend safely, sent myself on a bully night, and why not walk back? Which accordingly took place. The long way around, across the bridge. And there, in the moonlight, on the bridge, at midnight or thereabouts, I had a remarkable idea. We're doing stresses and strains just now, and it sort of came to me to see what I could do for the strength of the human structure."

"I think there's something in it," he said, when Junior paused. "A whole lot in it. You go right after it."

"I'm going right after a few of those doughnuts rumor reports on the pass pantry," said Junior, turning his vivid gaze upon his father, began to expound a theory. Austen, giving outwardly absorbed attention, in reality barely heard. Within, he both laughed and wept. He had hung over abysses of remorse for an hour. As he drew back from the brink, life looked jubilant. He nodded wisely as his son talked of parabolas and strength of materials and drew arcs in the air.

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