

A very slight mistake

BY AMOS ARTHUR HOLMES

I am one of those people whose every gesture germinates into disaster. If I cough there will be an influenza epidemic. I told a lady the other day (and I was very polite about it) that she had a run in her hose and I'll be darned if her husband didn't punch me in the mouth. Claimed I was looking at his wife's legs.

I was on a train one time and this old man fainted. Wanting to help, I threw open the window. The resulting draft pulled off his toupee and deposited it somewhere in an Ohio cornfield. The old man regained consciousness long enough to scream, "You idiot! There goes my six hundred dollar toupee." Then he fainted again.

Everything I do somehow turns into misfortune but nothing I have done lately could ever equal the catastrophe that struck me when I was 12 years old. It almost caused my death and I would like to tell you about it.

The episode concerned my father, my brother, a spirit of revenge, and this bad luck I've been telling you about.

My father was the biggest, toughest man I have ever known. He didn't talk, he growled, and when his friends remarked facetiously that he could chew nails I never doubted it for a

minute. My mother claimed my father was a gentle man but I never discovered this quality in him. The thing I do remember was his temper which resembled a roaring volcano and an unerring right hand that never failed to find my head. He expected great things from a young boy, and I always failed to live up to his expectations.

He was also terribly unfair and punished me for mistakes that were quite unintentional. I remember how livid he got when I shaved the dog with his electric razor. I got smacked good for that. And when I put the cat in the washing machine he almost dissolved. Are you beginning to get an idea as to how unjust my father was?

Gosh! I remember the time I put salt in the sugar bowl and how father (without a trial or without considering the possibility that my mother might have done it) took me and broke every bone in my body. Well, almost every bone. I lived in terror of upsetting my father because this always changed him into a furious, uncontrollable monster.

And then there was Charlie. He was, much to my regret, my brother. He was 16 years old and a compulsive bookworm. He was a worm in other ways too. Charlie was just about the perfect son. He was gentlemanly and mannerly

and never gave my father a second's trouble. I heartily disliked his perfection, as it made me look just awful by comparison. I built up a gigantic dislike for Charlie and I prayed for the day that I could humble him. It was this dislike that led to my most colossal blunder.

There was an old man living down the street named Makombo. He was from some country in Africa and I often listened to him tell about how he trapped wild animals. He was a patient man and these talks were thrilling and exciting. He told me about the snares he made to catch animals and he asked if I knew what a snare was. I told him I did and that I had caught rabbits with snares. He laughed, and said, "Boy, I mean BIG snares. Snares that will catch things that weight over 200 pounds."

"No sir" I answered, "I've never seen a snare that could do that. Would you show me how to make one?"

He got this huge rope and he built a snare. He then told me to walk into it. I put my foot in the middle of the snare and . . . whoossh . . . I was dangling, upside down, about 10 feet above the ground. The old man lowered me and when I was released he spent the next hour showing me how to build a snare that would catch things that weighed



over 200 pounds.

I immediately connected 200 pounds with my brother Charlie. That's exactly what Charlie weighed.

I ran home and got some rope from the garage and I laid a snare in front of the house. Charlie would be home from school in 15 minutes and once and for all I was going to teach him a lesson. When I had the snare well camouflaged I ran behind the house. I waited with great expectation. Yes sir, Charlie was going to get it.

After hiding just a short time I heard this terrible scream. I began to laugh. Great gales of laughter. How very funny this was. Old Charlie trapped. Dear Charlie snared. I ran to the front of the house where I stood in absolute disbelief and terror.

The snare had worked perfectly. The body was hanging upside down about 10 feet above the ground. The only trouble was that the body dangling helplessly above the ground wasn't Charlie.

It was my father.