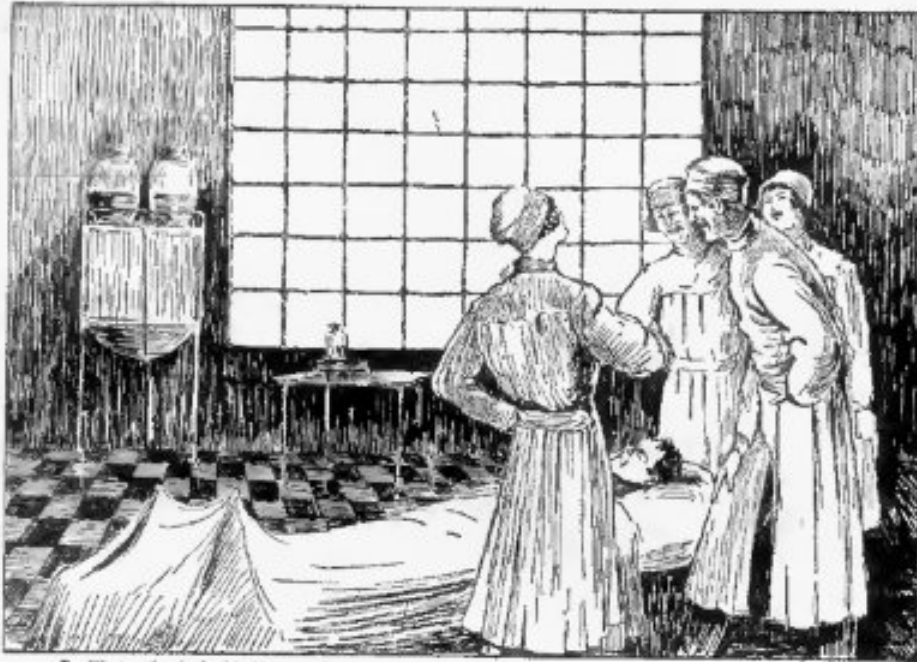


*The* FIGHTING HEART  
*by* W. Alexander  
Author of "New Stomachs for Old"



**T**OM WILSON was a worm, he knew he was a worm, but in spite of the knowledge he seemed unable to remedy the condition. As he walked toward the warehouse, where for the past ten years he had held the position of shipping-clerk, he reflected with bitterness on his down-trodden, browbeaten, hen-pecked existence. Here he was a man of forty in good health, with an inferiority complex so strongly developed, that he was forever cringing and debasing himself before people. It was only day before yesterday that he had said "Yes sir" to the colored porter on the train as he and his wife were returning from the beach. It made her mad and she promised to bounce a rolling pin off his head when she got him home, but fortunately, in the stress of getting supper, she

forgot it.

He was hen-pecked at home by his wife and browbeaten and bullied at the warehouse by every one with whom he came in contact, from the truck drivers to the foreman. Tom was really not a bad sort at all. He was of medium height, with a round, jolly face and a hit of girth around the equator. He would have liked to be friendly with every one, but his advances were usually received with contempt by his associates.

A tremendous piece of luck had befallen him the day before—which was the cause of his unusual introspection and self-contempt on this particular morning. Just before his lunch hour on the previous day, he had received a telephone message asking him to call at once on a certain firm of lawyers.

Hurrying through his lunch, he repaired to their offices and was informed that he was heir to the estate of an uncle, who had recently died in Alaska. They stated that the estate approximated one million dollars, and while it would take a few mouths to comply with legal formalities before the estate could be turned over to him, they would be happy to be allowed to advance him any sums he might require.

On the impulse of the moment he “touched” them for five thousand dollars, not because he had any particular use for such a sum, but just to convince himself that he was awake and listening to a true story. He swore the lawyers to secrecy for no very well defined reason, except that he feared to have it become known that he was rich until he had time to adjust himself to the idea.

During the afternoon, after returning from his meeting with the lawyers, whenever Jim Lang, the foreman, scorched him with an extra nasty bit of sarcasm, he would slip a hand into his pocket and finger the crisp certified check for five thousand dollars, and wonder what fat Jim would say if he flashed it before his eyes. Then, after supper that night when Ann, his wife, gave him a terrible tongue lashing for breaking one of her blue saucers while wiping the dishes, he almost, but not quite, grinned in her face as he fingered the check in his pocket and he wondered what she would say, if he handed her the check in a nonchalant manner, saying:

“Here, Ann, old girl, take this and buy all of the blue saucers that you want.”

A few even rigs later, when he had finished wiping the supper dishes, he told Ann that he was going to step across the street to Dr. Wentworth’s home, to consult him about a pain he was having in his side.

“Pain, fiddlesticks,” snorted Ann, “You’ve been stuffing yourself with pie for lunch again, I suppose. Now don’t you stay over there gossiping with that doctor, because

I want you to scrub this kitchen tonight.”

“Yes, my love,” answered Tom meekly, “I won’t be long.”

“Doc,” said Tom, when he was seated in Dr. Wentworth’s library, “I ran over to have a little talk with you, as my friend rather than as my doctor. I told my wife that I was coming over to consult you about a pain in my side, but that was a lie, for I never felt better in my life. I don’t want you to mention it to any one for the present, but I have just fallen heir to one million dollars from an uncle’s estate. Here is a check for five thousand the lawyers gave me and they said I could have more if I wanted it while they were attending to the legal requirements preliminary to turning the estate over to me. I never before worried much about my ‘inferiority complex’ as you have called it, but now when people find out that I am rich, they will jump on me harder than ever, trying to brow-beat money out of me. I thought perhaps you could suggest something to help me.”

“Well, Tom,” said the doctor, “I am glad to hear that you have fallen heir to a fortune. Now about your condition; as I have told you many times, it is largely mental. You are in good health and a rather strong man for your size. In a matter of fisticuffs, you could give a very good account of yourself, if you would fight. Do I understand that you have told no one of your inheritance, not even your wife?”

“No, you and the lawyers are the only ones who know. Doc, you have an international reputation for performing unusual operations, like those stomach exchanges, for instance. Can’t you do something for me—change something in me, that will rid me of this craven fear of everyone who says ‘boo’ to me?”

“If you are to be cured by an operation,” said Dr. Wentworth, as he looked fondly at him, “there is only one that I know of that would fit your case, namely, an

exchange of hearts—the exchange being made with a man possessed of what is usually referred to as a ‘fighting heart.’”

“**B**UT my goodness, Doc, you couldn’t exchange my heart with another man’s without killing us both, could you?”

“Oh, yes,” said the doctor with a smile; “that operation is not at all uncommon now. You see, in theory, we surgeons have always been able to perform that operation successfully, but in actual practice, the patients always died. This was true up to a couple of years ago, when Doctor Zambi, the noted French scientist, invented, or discovered, *Xerolla*. This chemical is a very powerful anesthetic, which enables us to place a patient in a state of complete suspended animation, for a period of forty-eight hours, with no deleterious reaction.

“Dr. Zambi also invented, or discovered, *Coliodiansy*, a combination of chemicals which, when applied to the lips of an incision, causes it to commence healing rapidly at once—is almost healed in twelve hours, entirely healed in twenty-four hours and in thirty-six hours the scars are almost invisible. With those two agents, *Xerolla* and *Coliodiansy*, it has become such a simple operation that we no longer consider it in the major class. In thirty-six hours the veins and arteries, where we have made the connection with the new heart, are completely healed and in forty-eight hours, when the patient comes out of his deep sleep, it is almost impossible to find even the cicatrix of the incision in the chest.”

“That sounds fine, but could you find a man with what you call a ‘fighting heart’ that would be willing to make the exchange? Then, too, I wouldn’t want any one to know that I had undergone such an operation.”

“Yes, I could find a man willing to make the exchange for a price. That is where your new wealth will come in handy. The

exact nature of your operation need not be known. It could be given out that you had undergone an operation for the removal of your appendix.”

“Doc,” said Torn earnestly, “above all things, my wife must not know the nature of this operation.”

“That can be arranged. Tomorrow morning do not go to work. Complain, to her of pains in your abdomen and have her call me in. I will advise your removal to the hospital. Later she can be informed that an operation for appendicitis is necessary.”

The following day these plans were carried out and from the hospital Tom sent for his lawyers and secured a further advance of funds. The next three days were spent by Dr. Wentworth, so he informed Tom, in finding just the right man for the exchange operation. During these three, days Ann showed a solicitude for Tom’s welfare that surprised and touched him. She called at the hospital three times each day, but by the doctor’s orders was only allowed to remain a few minutes.

On the morning of the operation the doctor said to Tom:

“In these exchange operations we think it best that the patients do not meet, as it might be a source of embarrassment later, but I am going to give you a sight of the man from whom you will acquire the ‘fighting heart’ because he is such a fine specimen of young manhood.”

The doctor led him down the corridor and into a room in which was a door leading into the next room. The upper part of this door was of glass covered with a lace curtain.

“Look through the curtain,” said the doctor. “The man with whom you are to make the exchange is standing in the next room.”

Tom looked through the curtain and saw a fine looking young man, apparently an athlete. He seemed almost like a composite picture of Firpo, Dempsey and Tunney.

As they walked back up the corridor Tom said:

‘That sure is a fine looking young fellow. I’ll bet he can whip his weight in wild-cats. But say, Doc, when he acquires this heart of mine, how will it affect him?’

“It will have no effect whatever on his actions. There is nothing organically wrong with your heart, as I have often told you. Your trouble is largely mental. This man has the fighting mental attitude and will carry on just as he has before and your heart will function perfectly for him.”

**W**HEN Tom came out of his deep sleep and Dr. Wentworth informed him that the operation was a complete success, he was as happy as a lark. A week later the doctor said to him:

“Tom, my conduct in the matter of, your operation has been most unethical, not letting your wife know, and so on, but out of friendship to you, I am going to continue on the same lines. I am going to take a month’s vacation and you and I are going to Bermuda, without your wife. When we return in a month you will be in top-hole form. We leave tomorrow, so make whatever explanations you think best to your wife.”

Tom found unexpected difficulty in persuading Ann that the trip to Bermuda without her was the proper thing, but finally, with the doctor to back him up, he convinced her.

The month at Bermuda with Dr Wentworth was a revelation to Tom, who had found little time for play in his life. The doctor taught him to play golf and they put in their days golfing, swimming and fishing.

On the morning of their return to the city Tom said to the doctor:

“Doc, the man from whom I got this heart must have been a fighting fool, for I am never so happy as when I am about to get into a scrap. Sure different from the way I used to

be.”

“Use a little discretion, Tom,” Dr. Wentworth answered, smiling quizzically at him. “If you don’t, one of these days some little fellow will come along and half kill you.”

**T**OM went at once to his home, greeted his wife rather casually, changed to his working clothes and reported to the warehouse for work.

As soon as Jim Lang, the foreman, found a moment of leisure, he approached Tom, who was seated on his high stool at the billing desk, and took up his usual line of bickering and brow-beating.

“Say, runt,” said Lang, “do you think we are going to wait all day for those bills-of-lading?”

“Now Fatty,” said Tom, looking the foreman over with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, “if you think you can make these bills out faster, climb on this stool and go to it.”

“Why you insignificant pencil pusher,” roared the surprised Lang, for never before had this worm dared to give him a sharp answer, “if you give me any of your lip, I’ll knock you for a row of ash cans.”

“Atta boy Fatty,” said Tom with a grin, as he climbed down from the high stool, “that’s the talk I’ve been waiting for. Now just for that, I’m going to give you a smack.”

Tom slapped him with his open hand, but so forcibly, that the unprepared Lang sat down with a bounce.

“You will notice, my dear Fatty,” said Tom, as he stood over him, “that I merely patted you with my open hand.”

“When I get up,” said the fat foreman, as he struggled to get his feet under him, “I am going to tear you apart.”

“Oh no you are not,” answered Tom, laughing happily, “because I am next going to lay my fist carefully on the side of your jaw, to help pay for all these years of misery you

have caused me.

When Lane finally succeeded in regaining his feet, he made a rush at Tom, swinging his arms wildly, but missed him and received a resounding whack on the jaw, that dropped him as though he had been shot.

“Now you truck-hogs,” yelled Tom, at the truck drivers who were looking on in amazement at this unexpected conduct of the heretofore worm of a shipping-clerk, “carry this carrion over to that corner out of the way and then snap into getting these goods for the depot on your trucks. Lively now.”

The truck men went to work with a will, loading the packing cases on their trucks, casting side-long glances of bewilderment at the belligerent shipping-clerk.

“Here you, Jones,” called Tom to one of the men, who had paused for a moment to rest, “what do you think this is, a picnic?”

The man looked at him insolently, spat on the floor, hitched up his pants, but made no move to resume work.

“I was just hoping that you would give me an excuse,” said Tom, with a happy laugh as he walked toward him. “It’s many years you have been stepping on the worm. Now the worm has turned.”

With that he struck the fellow a clout on the ear, that caused his head to rock and made him see stars.

“Get busy,” chortled Tom, with huge enjoyment, “or I’ll give you the other barrel.”

One barrel was evidently enough, for the fellow proceeded at once to load his truck. As Tom returned to the billing desk, he noticed Mr. Davis, the president of the company, standing just back of it with a grin on his face.

When the last truck was loaded, Tom addressed the men:

“You truck-hogs have been taking entirely too much time to make the trip to the depot and back. I am giving you just one hour to make the round trip, one half of the time that you

have been taking. The man that is late in getting back, is going to have a fight and I will add that there are three of you that I am hoping will be late. Now get going “

“Tom,”” said Mr. Davis, the president, as he was climbing back to his stool, “come into my office for a minute I want to talk to you.”

“I noticed how you handled those drivers,” said the president, when they were seated in his office.

“You have been with us for ten years and in appreciation of your faithful service I am going to promote you to foreman, at double your present wages.”

“Oh you are,” said Tom, with a menacing glare, “it’s taken you a damned long time to find out what a faithful fellow I am. You have never raised my wages a nickel since I have been with you. You have never even seen me in the warehouse enough to say ‘Good-morning.’ I don’t like you, I don’t like your face and especially your nose, I have dreamed many times in the past years of pulling it and right now is when I make one dream come true.”

Tom reached across the desk and took a firm grip on the president’s aristocratic nose and gave it several severe tweaks. Then he slowly twisted it until the tears ran down the man’s face and a groan of anguish escaped him.

“Bye, bye, old dear,” said Tom, as he walked to the door. “As Barney Google would say, ‘I hope you dou’t feel hurt.’”

**H**E walked home through a drizzling rain and when he entered the house, he smiled as Ann greeted him with her usual avalanche of abuse.

“Say, do you think you ate coming into a barn?” demanded Ann. “Go right back out on the porch and wipe your dirty feet Do you think I have nothing else to do but clean up after you?”

“Whom do you think you are talking to,” exclaimed Tom, as he took hold of her shoulders and shook her until her teeth rattled. “I’ll teach you to stand around jawing instead of getting my supper. Now get it on the table and make it snappy and after this you had better have it ready when I get home. What’s the idea of a tired man having to wait for his supper when he gets home from work?”

“Sit down dear,” whimpered Ann, as she banged pots and pans around on the stove in mad haste, “I’ll have it on the table in just a jiffy.”

As Tom ate his supper in dignified silence, she hovered around him like an uneasy mother.

“Is the soup hot enough, Tom dear,” she asked. “Wouldn’t you like another piece of this pie? It’s your favorite kind.”

“No more,” said Tom, glancing at her in astonishment, for it had been a long time since she allowed him to have more than one piece of pie at a meal.

“Get these dishes washed and wiped in a hurry,” he told her when he had finished, “then come into the front room, I want to talk to you.”

“All right dear, I’ll be through in a moment.” But she said not a word about his wiping the dishes, which had been his custom for years.

When she came into the front room, she seated herself on the arm of his chair, ran her fingers through his hair, then pressed her cheek against his head. He tilted back his head so that he could see her and began:

“Now Ann—,” but got no further for she stooped swiftly and, pressed her lips to his in a kiss, such as he could not remember receiving since the days of their honeymoon.

Finally she slid into his lap and he proceeded.

“Ann, I am now a wealthy man, an uncle whom I had not heard of for years died in Alaska and left me a fortune. I have engaged passage for you and me on a boat that leaves for Europe in three days. Tomorrow I want you to go to a beauty parlour, get your hair bobbed and your face prettied up like other women do. Then get yourself some proper traveling clothes, you can get more when we reach Paris. You have gotten too careless about your appearance. You are a darned good looking woman and need only fix yourself up properly, which is just what you must do in the future.”

“All right, my love,” cooed Ann with a happy laugh “I’ll get dolled up tomorrow so you won’t know me.”

Three days later they stood by the rail and waved to Dr. Wentworth as their ship glided away from the wharf.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” said Ann, handing Tom a slip of paper, “Dr Wentworth asked me to give this to you after the ship left the wharf.”

Tom took the paper and examined it with a puzzled expression. It was a certified check made out to Dr. Wentworth for the sum of five thousand dollars. Tom had gotten it from his lawyers for the Doctor, to pay for the operation. He turned it over and on the back it was endorsed: “Pay to Tom Wilson” and was signed “Dr. Wentworth.”

Below the signature was written in the doctor’s fine hand: “I can’t accept this, Tom; wouldn’t be ethical, as I have not yet hung out a shingle as a *psychologist*, but the point is, you are cured, even if you still have your own heart—which, by the way, you have proved to be equal to any.”