

Norman A. Rubin

The Hoop - Norman A. Rubin

Early one morning with the warmth of Spring sun shining pleasantly, there walked a lady and a boy of seven. The boy was rosy and happy in youth; the lady was young, handsome in features, and dressed in the fashion of the times.

The boy was laughing gaily as he was bowling a hoop, a rather large one coloured in stripes of green, blue and red. He ran after it through the green of the park, showing his bare knees, and waving his wooden decorated stick. What joy in the mother's eyes as she watched her son in play. She tittered gaily as the boy had no hoop as it rolled into a flowered bush; now there it was with her son rolling the hoop and waving the stick. And everything was jolly and peaceful in the scenic beauty of the day.

The memories of the past years entered the thoughts of a shabbily dressed old man as he stood near the empty debris filled lot in a deserted section of the busy metropolis. He stood under the canopy of grey clouds deep in reverie. The winds were stilled to a temperate breeze that caused discarded pieces of paper to dance in the air like a child in play. The tramp just stood there and stared at the flighty scraps and continued in his reverie.

He shuffled within the grounds with no purpose in mind. Suddenly the tramp's dimming eyes brightened as he spied broken wooden barrel staves and rusty iron hoops. He stopped, bent his aging body, and took hold of one of the hoops.

He straightened his gross rheumy form and let his mind revert from the thoughts of the gaiety of his youth to the miseries of the present. His coarse, dirt encrusted fingers fondled the large rusty barrel hoop found amongst the rubble. The old man's features partially hidden by the straggle of a greying white beard and greasy unkept locks showed the strain of memories. His grey eyes centered in greyish bushy brows were moist with tears.

There was something that he could not understand, something seemed strange to him. It was the magic of the moment that let his imagination run its course. Smiling with the rattling of his dentures it was easy to remember the boy running and laughing, chasing the hoop. How well dressed and beautiful was the woman that watched over him, and how peaceful and content she behaved towards her son.

And it seemed only yesterday that he was again the little boy and his mother was a beautiful lady tittering gaily as she watched her son in play. That he had a gaily-coloured hoop and decorated stick with which he was playing in the green of the park. He was dressed in a light blue shirt with matching shorts, and his knees were bare.

When the old man grew older in years he had a miserable dog's life. Failure, drink and divorce were the seeming causes to his fall to a tramp-like existence. In these later days he went hungry, groveling in the garbage containers for a bit to eat; he was cold and shelter was found in cold and dirty hovels; he was prodded by the slight blows of a truncheon as he was chased from park

benches. His whole life passed in the bitterness of poverty and homelessness; there was no joy, only memories, both pleasant and bitter, in the endless drudgery of the passing days.

The old tramp looked about the vacant lot and his only companion was a scrawny alley cat, who looked at him cautiously with the yellow of her eyes. With a harsh cough echoing from his throat the old man shuffled on a scuffed mixed pair of broken brogues towards the center of the grounds; the feline startled by his movements scurried away. His dirt-stained hands were holding the rusty barrel hoop and a thin iron rod.

The old tramp gripped the iron rod and put it through the barrel hoop. Suddenly a field, bright and green, not a rubble-strewn lot lay before him; the early morning dew shone on the newly cut grass. The elder then struck the hoop with the metal and set it rolling along the ground; the hoop rolled over the field softly. The old man laughed with joy and ran after the hoop like a boy. His tattered dirt-stained coat flapped as he chased after the rolling hoop. The tramp skipped clumsily on his veined legs, caught the hoop with the metal rod, and raised the stick high above his head as he had done as a boy.

It seemed to him that in his deep imagination he was a little boy once more, full of vigour and gait. The scrawny cat, alert on the wooden fence, was his mother following him and watching him a fond smile. Like a child he felt chilly at first under the shadow of the trees, but the warmth of his mother's smile comforted him.

The gray straggly beard on his worn features shook, and laughter and harsh coughs rushed together from his opened thick lips. No one saw him, only the grey alley cat watched as he chased after the rolling barrel hoop. And after playing with the hoop and stick as much as he like, he dropped his toy, shuffled from the lot and walked bent with dejection to his miseries into the cold, non-caring city.

But, he was comforted by the thought that he, for a pleasurable hour or so, had been a young boy again, and laughed gaily under the shady trees while his mother looked on.