Before and After

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By Richard Trump

Mr. Evans Takes Steps to Correct
A Flat Chest, Pleasing Himself
Immensely Thereby.

Young, married and flat chested, Mr. Gerald Evans stood before the bedroom mirror and surveyed his doubtful image. He flexed his biceps—and frowned. Then he looked down at a pair of home-made dumb-bells lying on the floor. He frowned again.

There was no question about it—what he needed was a good automatic outfit and a systematic course. This home-made stuff simply wasn't turning the trick. If he could only make Elinore see how important it was! Yes, he needed the real thing—the training that had made men like Sandow and Sansone. Look what it had done for them! Why, even the ancient Milo was weak to start with, but he secured a young bull calf and carried it around the stadium every morning before break-
fast; as the bull got larger, Milo got stronger, until finally he was lugging a full-grown bull around on his shoulders. That was the way, by heck! But no, there wasn’t any place to keep the bull; besides, people would think he was crazy.

Well, anyhow, the Man-Power course was based on the same principle; and it was more scientific. . . Elinore ought to stop reading those silly classics long enough to listen to reason. . . And there was the Muscle-Might course too. The founder of that system had gone into the jungles of India and studied the ferocious Bengal tigers to see how they lived. He had learned from them how to grow muscles of steel. Wasn’t nature the greatest teacher, after all? . . . Gerald could almost hear himself growling. He picked up the dumb-bells and swung them madly until he was out of breath.

AFTER his shower, Evans gathered together some letters and pamphlets and went down stairs. His wife was engrossed in a book. Probably Shakespeare again! She looked up as he entered.

“Gerald, you’ve been wearing yourself out with those awful sitting-down exercises again, haven’t you? No wonder you’re always nervous and tired.”

“Yes, dearie,” he said automatically as he seated himself near her and began thumbing through his papers. It was a good plan, he thought, to review one’s correspondence occasionally. Ah, here was the first letter.

“Dear Friend: In requesting information about my unique system of physical culture, you have come to a turning point in your life. A turning point, man—that is what I must say, for no moment is more crucial than the time when a man decides whether he is going to live or whether he is going to continue merely to exist. Friend, you have come to that moment . . .” And so on. “All this, my friend, for only forty dollars. Is your life worth forty dollars?”

EVANS glanced hurriedly through the next letter: “Dear Friend, you are the most fortunate man in the world! You have called for my advice at exactly the right time. The confi-
dential questionnaire which you filled out has revealed startling facts—facts which you yourself have undoubtedly overlooked. Man, what you do now about your physical welfare will determine your whole future! You have come to the cross-roads and are about to choose your way. One road leads to fears, vain hopes, misery. The other is a road to vigor, happiness, life. . . This, my friend, all this, is yours for a paltry thirty-five dollars, a special price if you act promptly."

Gerald's brow contracted, and he looked off into nowhere for a while. Perfectly obvious; but why couldn't she see it?

Then number three: "Dear Friend: In all humanity nothing is sadder than a man's refusal to face the facts. His conscience is thrusting questions at him continually, but he is afraid to answer them. They are vital questions. . . How do you look in a bathing suit? Is your neck ungainly? Does your Adam's apple bulge? Do people bully you, pick on you, because you are weak? Is your will-power slipping? . . ." Come to think about it, people were bullying him; they were sneering at him. By heck, he'd show them!

Mrs. Evans looked up from her book. "Gerald, are you mumbling?"

"Yes, dearie," and he was into the next letter:

". . . Perhaps, my friend, you are hesitating for financial reasons. When you are sick, do you hesitate to call the doctor? Man, you cannot afford to hesitate! I am deeply concerned about your future, and knowing that you are the kind of fellow who would give his last dime to a man in need, I make this extra-special, personal offer—only thirty dollars!"

Evans gazed into nowhere again. Then he picked out a booklet containing actual unretouched photographs of famous strong men. Didn't they all testify that the marvel-course pays? There was Zbyszko bursting a mighty chain shackle fastened about his chest; Hackenschmidt—perfect specimen of manhood; and here was the ferocious Cyr bending a great iron bar with his bare hands. . .

"Gerald! You're mumbling again."

"Yes, dearie."
He turned a page, and there a contrast drawing glared at him. There were two men, scantily clad, standing on opposite sides of a balance. One was a frail, scrawny creature with dim eyes; the other a veritable Hercules looking as if he were about to devour several dozen railroad spikes or swallow a few swords. Below the drawing were the bold words, “The choice is yours!”

“Gerald—Gerald Evans! You’re bothering me!”

“Yes, dea—no! No, of course I’m not mumbling.”

“You are so, Gerald. What are you reading?” She got up and glanced at the booklet. “Oh, those horrible sitting-down exercises again! Gerald, if you get a neck like that I shall be afraid of you. Do you hear me, Gerald?”

“Yes, dearie.”

Let’s see now, where was that last letter? He dug out another typewritten sheet. “My Dear Friend: Please regard this correspondence as strictly confidential. My friend, do you know what has driven more men to their graves than any other one thing? Of course you do—it is indecision, the arch-enemy of happiness. Man comes to the crossways and is afraid to make the decision. . . And there he stands, waiting for gnawing disease to eat out his vitality. It is a horrible thought, my friend; yet it is a fact. . . And when the suffering is over, a stone will be inscribed with these words: ‘Here lies Gerald Evans, who died young because he was afraid to make his own decisions.’ . . . The choice is yours, my friend!”

All for twenty-five dollars.

“Gerald—Gerald Evans! Do you hear me, Gerald?”

A determined expression on his face, Evans rose from his chair. “Elinore, I’ve made the choice. I’m going to buy that course—”

“Do you mean to tell me you’re going to do some more of those awful sitting exercises? Your intellectual—”

“Yes, my dear, but you don’t understand—”

“Don’t interrupt me, Gerald. You are neglecting your mind for those terrible sitting—”

“Yes, Elinore, but you don’t understand. I’ve come to the cross-roads. Our whole future—”

“Gerald!”
SEVERAL weeks later, Gerald Evans—young, married, and flat-chested—laid down his special, automatic, adjustable, muscle-making outfit and looked into the mirror. He flexed his skinny arm, forcing a fierce scowl on his face—a scowl just like Cyr's. Then he smiled. He had made the choice.

I Ask So Little for Happiness

By Edna L. Shultz

I ask so little for happiness:
   A sonnet sequence, a soft-sung tune,
The lilt of living, a murmuring moon,
The sharpened sickle of crescent moon,

A lisp and whisper of rustling silk,
The mellow sheen of polished brass,
To read of pixies and youth and fate,
A silver tinkle of rare old glass,

The whirl of wings, a waltz of Brahms,
Light through old bottles, a thin-drawn line,
The pulse of loneliness, hands and eyes,
The subtle grace of a listening pine—

So sweet the ecstasy born today
   Of little things! Oh, if one could stay!