



Mothers Day Cards

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

One of my favorite short stories is “Mothers Day” by Octavus Roy Cohen. It was Saturday night, the eve of Mothers Day. Dan Clancy “neither knew nor cared.” He was a police detective, “square-shouldered” who “thought only of himself.” But on this particular night his thoughts were on a “narrow-shouldered and furtive” drifter, “a sneak-thief” hiding under the freight cars.

Of course, Dan could have picked him up willy-nilly as a vagrant and seen to it that the man received sixty or ninety days in the workhouse. But there was little pleasure in that. It amused Dan to play with his quarry as a cat plays with a mouse, when already the feline has partaken of a full meal. Perhaps desperation or hunger or the need of shelter for the frail body might drive the stranger to commit some petty offense. Time enough then to place the heavy hand of the law upon the narrow shoulders.

The detective stalked his prey until the derelict headed for the low-class business district and disappeared into a little store with a “shabby sign over the doorway” that read “Post-Card Exchange.” Dan Clancy was puzzled as he peered through the outside window. Why would a drifter be browsing through the post-card racks, studying each one intently? It made no sense. But the dirty little man finally made his selection and dug into his pocket for a nickel to make the purchase. He then walked out the door and crossed the street to the telegraph office. There he made a transaction and disappeared into the night.

Dan Clancy let the worthless transient go, but his curiosity was piqued. He strolled across the street and into the office, showing his badge and demanding to know what the “little rat” was up to. The clerk reached into the drawer and pulled out the card, telling the detective that he had wired the message on a post-card and signed the drifter’s name.

The message read:

*Mrs. Katie Clancy
819 Arcade Street, Portland*

To my Mother: My help and my inspiration, the one who has had faith in me always and who has stood by me in brightest day and darkest night. To my only sweetheart—my mother.

Your loving son—Shamus

The detective stared at the card as he read it over and over. He gave it back to the clerk and started out the door but then turned back. He walked over to the rack and reached for a blank telegram form and sat down at a table and began to write:

*Mrs. Katie Clancy
819 Arcade Street, Portland*

Lots of love to the best Mother in the world on Mothers’ Day. I saw Shamus today, and he is doing fine.

Your loving son—Daniel

Two brothers, Daniel and Shamus. We learn nothing about their mother except for a name and address. Was she a good mother whose heart had been broken—one son a failure, the other a success who cared nothing for her? Was she a negligent mother addicted to alcohol—one son escaping, the other following her down the path of indigence? We can only wonder. But it was a tender mercy from the son who had failed that made his brother realize that he, too, had failed.

As a mother, I still cherish a card that came from my then wayward son. Following the touching message is his scrawled handwriting: “Thanks for *everything* Mom. Sorry I’m not always the best but thanks for sticking with me. I love you tons.” It was a card, a tender mercy, that buoyed my spirits as it surely did for Katie Clancy. □

—Ruth A. Tucker

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