

IF ONLY
Mary Ann Carr

Life is but a series of consequences of actions taken or not taken, resulting from time to time in the bitter refrain, "If only." If only the ladies in the Happy Homemaker's Club had known that every morning Mildred Bates slipped a silver flask filled with gin into her pocketbook, they wouldn't have appointed her chairman for the club's annual Tasty Bake Contest. If Mildred hadn't been chairman, she wouldn't have been nervous on the day of the contest and taken that one sip too many.

If she hadn't taken that extra sip, Mildred wouldn't have mixed up the name tags for the cherry tart entries. And Gladys Pitt, who couldn't make even a frozen pie edible, wouldn't have won first prize for the cherry tarts that Henrietta Woods, the 1st prize winner for the last ten years, had made early that morning.

If Gladys hadn't won first prize, she wouldn't have abandoned sewing to devote more time to the kitchen and donated her Singer sewing machine to the Happy Homemaker's Club for their annual garage sale.

If Gladys hadn't donated her Singer, Henrietta, distraught that her tarts had not even won honorable mention in the Tasty Bake Contest, wouldn't have sworn off cooking and bought it. And, she wouldn't have sewn a green taffeta dress with purple polka dots for her daughter, Camelia, to wear to the afternoon tea dance at Miss Linda's House of Grace and Charm.

If Henrietta hadn't made the dress, it wouldn't have been ruined at the dance when a boy bit into one of Gladys's cherry tarts, too sour for anyone's taste, and spit the red concoction down the front of Camelia's taffeta skirt. And Camelia, seeing the stain on her new dress, wouldn't have slapped the poor lad, knocking him against the Chippendale table, causing the silver tray of cherry tarts to sail through the air onto Miss Linda's antique oriental rug. And in an attempt to save her prized rug, Miss Linda wouldn't have darted across the room, tripped, and hit her head on the corner of the table, the resulting injury permanently opening the gates to language not befitting a southern lady.

Life is indeed a series of consequences, but what is one person's sad refrain is another's ode to joy. If Miss Linda hadn't sustained a head injury, she wouldn't have closed her House of Grace and Charm. And Henrietta, in a fit of despair because her daughter would no longer need beautiful party dresses, wouldn't have given her Singer sewing machine to her friend, Mildred Bates, and replaced it with a case of gin.

If Mildred hadn't acquired the Singer, she wouldn't have discovered her latent talent for stitching a seam. And, inspired by her ability, she wouldn't have given up her gin and sewn a silk suit to enter in the Happy Homemaker's annual sewing contest, the chairman being, Henrietta Woods, eager after a sip of gin, to judge this year's contest.

If only the cliché "what goes around, comes around" wasn't one of fate's favorite fickle fingers.