

# AN OLD EASTER BONNET

WISH the Easter days were now like those that once I knew, When Jenny wore the bonnet plain, with ribbon-bows of blue;

When we walked to Sunday meetin' o'er the meadows green and sweet, Where lilies waved in welcome, with violets at our feet.

It ain't the fancy fixin' I mind so much—the hills For birds and fluffy feathers—all the fine new-fangled frills; For I know that fashion changes—that it rules the world complete; But the old-time Easter bonnet was no simple and so sweet!

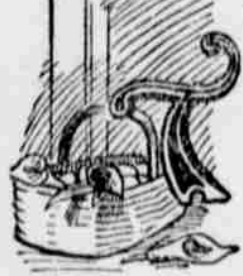
Its ribbons matched the color of the blue sky overhead, An' the lips that smiled beneath it seemed to mean the words they said! The lips that smiled so sweetly—never knowin' any art— An' the eyes whose sunny glances made a light around your heart!

I've nothin' 'gainst the fashions—they've got to have their day; But I love the simple bonnets of the far an' far away; An' thinkin' how she looked in 'em—there, in the long ago,

I sigh, an' praise the Lord from whom all blessin's are used to flow!

—P. L. Stanton, in Atlanta Constitution.

# THUSA HILL'S EASTER BASKET



THUSA HILL had come into the little front yard for a breath of fresh air, before putting on the kettle for tea. Her life was enfolded by such a narrow horizon that this was the chief event of her day. She then took time to look up and down the long village street, to exchange greetings with passers, to inquire about the sick, and to receive the latest bit of village news.

She and her mother lived like two sparrows in the small, weather-brown house with the \$300 mortgage on it. The debt had been incurred in "poor father's" time; and after his death the two patient, toiling women strove vainly to reduce it. Whenever they had saved a few dollars of the principal, sewing would be slack, coal and provisions higher, taxes increased, or Mrs. Hill would have one of her "poor spells," and the money would melt like spring snow, leaving the debt no smaller.

Thusa had tried working in the silk mill in the next village; but she was far past youth, her fingers were too rough and awkward for the delicate winding and spooling, and her apprehension was slow. Her place was wanted for a younger, swifter worker, and with humiliation and secret tears, she took up again the making of sheets and pillow cases, or the fashioning of simple garments for children and unfashionable "help."

Standing at the gate, her faded blue eyes gazing into the perspective of the quiet street, Thusa Hill did not look like a subject for romance. The straight, scant folds of dark blue calico fell stiffly about her thin little figure, the sun of early April cast chilly gleams on the plain bands of ash-colored hair done up in a small knot, her shoulders were curved and her chest was hollow. Yet, in the years gone by, a lover's voice had whispered to her on long, sweet summer evenings, and a tender hand had stroked her brown, abundant hair.

How different life might have been, if Henry Gleason had not misunderstood that ride with Nathan Burnside! True, she had promised Henry that she would be at home that evening; and when he met her driving with Nathan—in answer to a sudden and urgent appeal from Nathan's sister—Henry had given her one swift look, proud and stung, and had turned on his heel, following in the dust of Nathan's wheels.

His look had aroused her defiance, and she would not send a word of self-justification. He might have had more faith in her—she had expected to be home long before it was time for his visit. And so, as young hearts are prone to pride, the note was never written, the word was never spoken—just as Henry was entitled to it—and weeks and months glided into years, till Thusa was 40.

Henry had married his cousin, a feather-brained, selfish creature, whose own folly and vanity brought on her death a few years later. Now he lived in his childless home, with a hired farm boy and a bustling housekeeper. On winter evenings, sitting alone by the fire, the thought of his early love sometimes flitted across his mind, and he felt sorry for her struggles, both before and after the death of her father. But a man's pride is a hard possession—say what you may about the obstinacy of a woman—and Henry Gleason's was like the granite of his native New England hills.

Thusa went into the house, stirred the fire and filled the kettle. Her mother was hemming pillowcases in the tiny sitting-room beyond, and called out, as she heard her daughter's movements:

"There's a few of those stewed prunes in the battery, Thusa. Couldn't we have them for supper instead of a pie? I seem to crave something besides tea and bread and butter. But it's just as you say."

"Of course we will have them for supper, if you want them, mother," said Thusa. "I don't know as I want to spend time to-morrow rolling out a pie, anyway. There's that nightgown of Sally Myers' to be finished, for we need the money right away; and I promised to go and watch with Cynthia Warner to-morrow night. She's very bad, they say."

Her mother looked at her doubtfully.

"You don't look any too well yourself, Thusa. I don't believe you're strong enough to watch with the sick. Folks that work hard's you do can't be broke of their night's rest without paying for it."

"I know it," was the answer, "but Cynthia would come and watch with me, if I was in her place."

She set the table in the little sitting-room—they played at being well-to-do in numberless innocent, childlike ways, these two slim sparrows—and put on the two little brown-flowered plates, the two thin china cups and saucers with the tiny faded rosebuds and the almost invisible line of gilt, and the worn silver spoons, the last of the mother's wedding outfit. Thusa cut the bread and butter, set the tea to draw, then went to the battery for the prunes. The window looked on a side lane, and Thusa was startled to see that it was open, while a white, wolfish, hungry face was framed in the aperture, and a desperate hand was emptying the bowl of prunes, scattering the purple juice recklessly over the snowy shelves.

Thusa suppressed a little scream, that she might not startle her mother, and stared at the intruder. The creature, as if turned to stone, held its hand

how! yet there was a certain frank and independent look about the small, sharp features, despite the stolen prunes. Thusa's starved maternal feelings yearned over the child. She brought her in to sit by the fire, then, softly closing the door between kitchen and sitting-room, she told her mother the pitiful story. Mrs. Hill let the tea grow cold in her cup as she listened.

"I was thinking," said Thusa, as she refilled her mother's cup, "that we might—if you are willing—take this poor child in, to help around the house, and give me a chance to do more sewing."

"If you think it would be best, Thusa, I should hate not to take her, if it wouldn't be flying in the face of Providence—with the interest money to meet, and all."

"The winter's about over. The Lord seemed to put it into my head. I believe He'll open the way for us to afford it. And I don't see how it can be flying in the face of Providence, to follow the verse that says: 'Feed my lambs.'"

"Well, you're the one that keeps things a-going, Thusa. You've the best right to say," and the old lady drank the last of her tea, and ate the remainder of her bread and butter, looking fondly at her little brown-flowered plate as she did so.

It was long past the hour for steady-going villagers to be in bed. Lill Burdell, fed, washed, consoled, was sleeping like an infant, in one of Thusa's lavender-scented bedgowns. Her benefactress sat by the small window, gazing out across the fields. She was restless, and her thoughts were of her old lover. Ministering to the starved and homeless waif had set her thinking of what might have been, if she had not been so proud and defiant in those early days. Henry had surely been entitled to an explanation. Ah, but that bitter, reproachful look of his! She could not forget it. He might have had more faith in her, instead of marrying Cicely Mellen within a month. If he had waited, he



"HE SAID YOU WOULD UNDERSTAND."

arrested midway from bowl to mouth. A childish terror began to overspread the sharp features, and Thusa stepped nearer to the window.

"Poor soul!" she said, gently. "Are you so hungry that you have to rob our shelves? Don't be frightened. I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Take this."

She quickly buttered a slice of bread, and the marauder, clutching it, burst into tears, which she wiped away with her juice-stained fingers, creating a fearful effect.

"I never stole!" she cried, "but I ain't had scarcely a bite for two days, an' when I see them things in the dish, I jest had to take 'em."

"Come around to the kitchen door," said Thusa, pityingly. She spread a second slice of bread, and poured into a little pink-sprigged cup her own slender allowance of milk. In view of such abject misery, what mattered milkless tea and a short-ened ration of bread and butter? The girl slipped around to the kitchen door and stood there, ragged, unkempt, altogether wretched. Thusa watched her compassionately, as she ate and drank like a starved animal—for the time being she was little more. Taking the cup from the grimy fingers, and going back to wipe the shelves, Thusa brought out a third slice of bread and butter.

By gentle questioning, she learned that the girl's name was Lill Burdell; that she was 13 years old; had lived with a woman in New York, who beat and abused her, trying to make her steal; and that she had run away; tramping and begging by day; sleeping in barns at night; honestly trying to get work at the farmhouses; and nervously warned off the premises of most, with a few cold pieces, as if she had smallpox, that dread of rural districts.

Her clothing was literally rags—fastened about her, heaven knows

would have seen that Nathan Burnside was nothing more than an ordinary friend. (Alas! he had seen it, after he had forged his own fetters.)

So pride and regretful love battled in the lonely heart. The night wore on, and Lill Burdell dreamed lavender-scented dreams. It was halfway to dawn when Thusa, reproaching herself for wasted time and strength, crept into bed beside her adopted child.

Henry Gleason was also keeping vigil with memory. A chance word with Nathan Burnside had led to an explanation of that summer evening ride so long ago. Was it too late to sue for pardon? Would Thusa be deficient in proper pride, if she would listen to a second avowal? She still remained young and lovable in his eyes. Yet, after all, she had been to blame in not explaining the breaking of the appointment.

So pride and affection contended in the widower's heart also. The circles made in the ocean by the casting in of a pebble go on widening; and philosophers tell us that every physical movement produces never-ending vibrations in the cosmic ether. The thoughts set vibrating in those two practical, middle-aged hearts were to have swifter results than either dreamed.

Two or three days later, just before Easter, Lill Burdell was carrying a basket along the village street. She wore a made-over calico gown of Miss Thusa's, shoes and stockings, warm underclothing, and a neat straw hat on her smooth hair. Proud of her decent apparel and the trust reposed in her as represented by a "quarter" tightly clinched in one hand, she examined the houses along the street, and finally stopped hesitatingly before one.

"Miss Thusy said, 'a white house with green shutters,' but I can't remember whether she said the first

or the second. I've forgot the name, too, so I must run my chances. There's some hens a-squawkin', anyway."

She opened the gate and walked boldly up the flagged walk to the front door. The true city gamin, male or female, is untroubled by bashfulness. Her ring was answered by a tall, thin, gray-haired man with melancholy gray eyes. Lill held out the basket in one hand and the quarter in the other, saying:

"Miss Thusy says will you please let her have a dozen fresh eggs for Easter, an' she wants 'em good an' big."

Henry Gleason stared at the odd little figure, who stood stock-still after delivering her message.

Miss Thusy! Was the world coming to an end? Then the explanation occurred to him. Thusa must have sent this queer child to his next neighbor, Mrs. Wilson, who sold eggs regularly, and the girl had mistaken the house.

A sudden thought whirled into his mind. Not being widely read in the poets, the line—

"Take the goods the gods provide thee, did not occur to him, but he acted on the principle implied. He took the basket and the money, and bade the child come in. He was alone, the housekeeper having gone to the next town to do some "trading," and the hired boy was plowing.

Easter eggs! Thusa should have such an Easter basket as no young girl in the village could boast. In the bottom of the basket, he arranged two dozen of the finest, freshest eggs he could find in the henhouse. Then he wrote a hurried note—not high-sounding, but with true love in every line. Truly he was making up for lost time. He slipped the money inside, sealed the letter and laid it on the eggs, folding a paper over all. Then he went to the housekeeper's cherished window plants and loaded the basket to the very handle with Easter lilies and roses.

"Ain't there no change from the quarter?" asked sharp, city-bred Lill, looking curiously from him to the flowers and back.

"Inside—in an envelope. Miss Thusa will understand."

"Did he spose I'd lose it, if he gave it to me in my hand?" said Lill to herself rather scornfully, trudging off with her fragrant load. A little later, the flower-laden basket was dumped on the Hills' kitchen table by breathless Lill, who had come as near to running as the safety of the eggs would permit.

"He sent you all these lots an' lots of flowers, Miss Thusy, an' the eggs an' change is at the bottom of the basket. He said you would understand."

He! What was a child talking about?

"Didn't you go to Mrs. Wilson's, Lill?"

"I went to the first white house with green shutters"—Miss Thusa dropped white and trembling into the little kitchen rocker—"where the hens was a-squawkin', an' the man that come to the door give me the eggs an' the flowers. I didn't see no woman anywheres."

Thusa sprang suddenly from the chair and lifted out the flowers, Lill bringing water for them in an old-fashioned pitcher. When the note appeared, Thusa caught it up and fled to her room, scarcely glancing at the eggs. Kneeling beside her patchwork-covered bed, Thusa wept and smiled by turns over her old lover's note, in which he told her he would be with her in an hour. Then, womanlike, she got up and began to freshen and improve her faded face and hair, her plain garments. But the greatest beautifier was the soft light in her changed eyes.

On a lovely summer morning, Lill Burdell, plump and rosy from weeks of care and kindness, stood on the back porch of the Gleason farmhouse, scattering corn to a flock of hens. Mrs. Hill sat near, shelling peas freshly picked in the morning dew; and Thusa Hill Gleason, looking years younger and prettier, was stirring in a housewifely fashion about her spacious kitchen, getting ready a substantial breakfast.

"Look, grandma," said Lill, "ain't they pretty? An' squawkin' jes' like they did the day I came for the eggs—an' neither me nor them a-dreamin' how soon we'd all be livin' here together."

Ah, Lill, you little guessed what you were doing that day, when you stopped at the wrong house—the first house where the hens were "a-squawkin'!" Nor did your Miss Thusy—who will always be "Miss Thusy" to you—realize, on that cold spring evening, that the ragged, tempted little tramp, with whom she shared her own scanty meal, was an angel entertained unawares.—Leslie Dane, in Good Housekeeping.

### Blessing of the House.

Among the Gregorian Armenians the periodical "blessing of the house" takes place at Easter. This consists of the repetition of a prayer by the priest, accompanied by the burning of incense, and the sprinkling with holy water in the "sala" or central room of the house.

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