

Old Lady Number

31

By LOUISE FORSLUND

Author of "The Story of Sarah" "The Ship of Dreams" Etc.

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SYNOPSIS.

Captain Abraham Rose and Angelina, his wife, have lost their little home through Abe's unucky purchase of Tenasby gold mining stock. Their household goods sold, the \$100 auction money, all they have left, will place Abe in the Old Ladies' home, or Any in the Old Ladies' home. Both are self-sacrificing but Abe declares: "My dear this is the first time I've had a chance to take the wunt of it." The old couple bid good-by to the little house. Terror of "what folks will say" sends them along by paths to the gate of the Old Ladies' home. Miss Abigail, matron of the Old Ladies' home, hears of the ill fortune of the old couple. She tells the other old ladies, and Blossy, who has paid a double fee for the only double bed-chamber, voices the unanimous verdict that Abe must be taken in with his wife. Abe awakens next morning to find that he is "Old Lady No. 31." The old ladies give him such a warm welcome that he is made to feel at home at once. "Brother Abe" expands under the warm reception of the sisters, and a reign of peace begins in the Old Ladies' home.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

It "plagued" the others, however, to see that none of them could get ahead of Blossy in their noble endeavors to make Abraham feel himself a light and welcome burden. She it was who discovered that Abe's contentment could not be absolute without griddlecakes for breakfast three hundred and sixty-five times a year; she it was who first baked him little saucer cakes and pies because he was partial to edges; and Blossy it was who made out a list of "Don'ts" for the sisters to follow in their treatment of this grown-up young-old boy.

"Don't scold him when he leaves the doors open. Don't tell him to wipe his feet. Don't ever mention gold mines or shiftless husbands," etc., etc. All these triumphs of Blossy's intuition served naturally to spur the others on to do even more for Brother Abe than they had already done, until the old man began to worry for fear that he should "git sp'it." When he lay down for his afternoon nap and the house was dull and quiet without his waking presence, the ladies would gather in groups outside his door as if in a king's antechamber, waiting for him to awaken, saying to one another over and again, "Sh, sh!" He professed to scoff at the attentions he received, would grunt and growl "Humbbug!" yet nevertheless he thrived in this latter-day sunlight. His old bones took on flesh. His aged kindly face, all seamed with care as it had been, filled out, the wrinkles turning into twinkles. Abraham had grown young again. With the return of his youth came the spirit of youth to the Old Ladies' home. Verily, verily, as Blossy had avowed from the first, they had been in sore need of the masculine presence. The ancient coat and hat, which had hung in the hall so long, had perhaps served its purpose in keeping the burglars away, but this lifeless substitute had not prevented the crabbed gnomes of loneliness and discontent from stealing in. Spinster, wife and widow, they had every one been warped by the testy jest-so-ness of the old maid.

Now, instead of fretful discussions of health and food, recriminations and wrangling, there came to be laughter and good-humored chatter all the day long, each sister striving with all her strength to preserve the new-found harmony of the home. There were musical evenings, when Miss Abigail opened the melodeon and played "Old Hundred," and Abraham was encouraged to pick out with one stiff finger "My Grandfather's Clock." "Hymn tunes" were sung in chorus; and then, in answer to Abe's appeal for something livelier, there came time-tried ditties and old, old love songs. And at last, one night, after leaving the instrument silent, mute in the corner of the parlor for many years, Aunt Nancy Smith dragged out her harp, and, seating herself, reached out her knotted, trembling hands and brought forth what seemed the very echo, so faint and faltering it was, of "Douglas, Douglas, Tender and True."

There was a long silence after she had finished, her head bowed on her chest, her hands dropped to her sides. Abraham spoke first, clearing his throat before he could make the words come.

"I wish I could git a husband fer every one of yer," said he.

And no one was angry, and no one laughed; for they all knew that he was only seeking to express the message conveyed by Nancy's playing—the message of love, love triumphant, which cannot age, which over the years and over death itself always hath the victory.

CHAPTER VII.

Old Letters and New.

Blossy left the room without a word, and went stealing up the stairs to the little cupboard where she now slept, and where was hung on the wall, in a frame of yellow hollyhocks,

pointed by her own hand, a photograph of Capt. Samuel Darby, the man who had remained obstinately devoted to her since her days of pinafores. The picture betrayed that Captain Darby wore a wig designed for a larger man, and that the visage beneath was gnarled and weather-beaten, marked with the signs of a stubborn and unreasonable will.

Even now the aged belle could hear him saying: "Here I be, come around ter pop ag'in. Ready ter hitch?" Samuel's inelegant English had always been a source of distress to Blossy; yet still she stared long at the picture.

Six months had passed since his last visit; tomorrow would be the date of his winter advent.

Should she give the old unvarying answer to his tireless formula?

She glanced around the tiny room. Ashamed though she was to admit it even to herself, she missed that ample and cozy chamber which she had so freely surrendered to Abraham and his wife. She missed it, as she felt they must crave their very own fire-side; and she thought that they missed the old homestead made her yearn for the home that she might have had—the home that she still might have.

Again she brought her eyes back to the portrait; and now she saw, not the characteristics which had always made it seem impossible for her and Samuel to jog together down life's road, but the great truth that the face was honest and wholesome while the eyes looked back into hers with the promise of an unswerving care and affection.

The next morning found Blossy kneeling before a plump little leather-bound, time-worn trunk which she kept under the eaves of the kitchen chamber. The trunk was packed hard with bundles of old letters. Some her younger fingers had tied with violet ribbon; some they had bound with pink; others she had fastened together with white silk cord, and there were more and more bundles, both slim and stout, which Blossy had distinguished by some special hue of ribbon in the long ago, each tint marking a different sister's missives.

To her still sentimental eye the colors remained unfaded, and each would bring to her mind instantly the picture of the writer as he had been in the golden days. But save to Blossy's eye alone there were no longer any rainbow tints in the little old trunk; for every ribbon and every cord had faded into that dusty, yellow brown which is dyed by the passing of many years.

Abraham discovered her there, too engrossed in the perusal of one of the old letters to have heeded his creaking steps upon the stairs. "Didn't see yer, till I 'most stumbled on yer," he began apologetically. "I come fer the apple-picker. That's a handful of russets in the orchard yit, that's calc'latin' ter spend Christmas up close ter heaven; but— Say, Blossy," he added more loudly, since she did not raise her head, "yew seen anythin' o' that air picker?"

Blossy glanced up from her ragged-edged, crackly billet-doux with a start, and dropped the envelope to the floor. For the moment, so deep in reminiscence was she, she thought Captain Darby himself had surprised her; then, recognizing Abe and recalling that Samuel's winter visits were invariably paid in the afternoon, she broke into a shamefaced laugh.

"Oh, is that you, Brother Abe? Don't tell the others what you found me doing. These," with a wave of her delicate, blue-veined hands over the trunk and its contents, "are all old love letters of mine. Do you think I'm a silly old goose to keep them cluttering around so long?"

"Wa'al"—Abe with an equally deprecatory gesture indicated Angy's horsehair trunk in the far corner of the loft—"yew ain't no more foolisher, I guess, over yer old trash 'n me an' Angy be a-keepin' ter air minin' stock of mine. One lot is wuth 'bout as much as 't'other."

Recovering the envelope that she had dropped, he squinted at the superscription. "Not meanin' ter be inquisitive or personal, Sister Blossy," a teasing twinkle appearing in his eye, "but this looks dretful familiarly, this here handwritin' does. When I run the bench—yew've heard me tell of the time I was on the life-savin' crew over ter Bleak Hill fer a spell—my cap'n he had a fast jest like that. Uster make out the spickest, spannest reports. Lemme see," the twinkle deepening, "didn't the gals say yew was a 'spectin' somebody terday? Law, I ain't saw Cap'n Sam'l fer ten year or more. I guess on these here poppin' trips o' his'n he hain't wastin' time on no men-folks. But, Blossy, yew better give me a chance ter talk to him this afternoon, an' maybe I'll speak a good word fer yer."

Blossy, not always keen to see a joke, and with her vanity now in the ascendant, felt the color rise into her withered cheek.

"Oh, you needn't take the trouble to speak a good word for me. Any man who could ever write a letter like this doesn't need to be coaxed. Just listen:

"The man you take for a mate is the luckiest dog in the whole round world. I'd rather be him than king of all the countries on earth. I'd rather be him than strike a gold mine reaching from here to China. I'd rather be him than master of the finest vessel that ever sailed blue water. That's what I would. Why, the man who couldn't be happy with you would spill tears all over heaven."

Blossy's cheek was still flushed, but no longer with pique. Her voice quavered and broke; and finally there fell upon the faded page of the letter two sparkling tears.

Abraham shuffled uncomfortably from one foot to the other; then, mut-

tering something about the "pecky apple hook," went scuffling across the floor in the direction of the chimney.

Blossy, however, called him back. "I was crying, Brother Abe, because the man I did take for a mate once was not happy, and—neither was I. I was utterly wretched; so that I've always felt I never cared to marry again. And—Samuel's wig is always slipping down over one eye, and I simply cannot endure that trick he has of carrying his head to one side, as if he had a left-handed spell of the mumps. It nearly drives me frantic."

"Brother Abe, now tell me honestly: do you think he would make a good husband?"

Abe cleared his throat. Blossy was in earnest. Blossy could not be laughed at. She was his friend, and Angy's friend; and she had come to him as to a brother for advice. He, too, had known Samuel as man to man, which was more than any of the sisters could say.

Stroking his beard thoughtfully, therefore, he seated himself upon a convenient wooden chest, while Blossy slipped her old love letter in and out of the envelope, with that essentially feminine manner of weighing and considering.

"Naow," began Abe at length, "this is some'n that requires keerful debatin'. Fust off, haowsomever, yew must remember that wigs an' ways never made a man yit. Es I riccolec Sam'l, he was pooty good es men go. I should say he wouldn't be any more of a risk tew yer than I was tew Angy; mebbe less. He's got quite a leetle laid by, I understand, an' a tidy story-an'-a-half house, an' front stoop, an', by golly, can't he cook! He's a splendid housekeeper."

"Housewifery," remarked Blossy sagely, as she began to gather her missives together, "is an accomplishment to be scorned in a young husband, but not in an old one. They say there hasn't been a woman inside Samuel's house since he built it, but it's as clean as soap and sand can make it." "I bet yer," agreed Abe. "Hain't never been no fly inside it, neither, I warrant yer. Fly can't light arter Sam'l's cleanin' up nohaow; he's got ter skate."

"He says he built that little house for me," said the old lady, as she closed down the lid of the trunk. There was a wistful note in Blossy's voice, which made Abraham declare with a burst of sympathy:

"Tain't no disgrace ter git married at no time of life. Sam'l's a good provider; why don't yew snap him up terday? We'll miss yew a lot; but—"

"Here's the apple picker right over your head," interrupted Blossy tartly, and Abe felt himself peremptorily dismissed.

Scarcely had he left the attic, however than she, too, hastened down the steep, narrow stairs. She spent the remaining hours before train time in donning her beautiful lace gown, and in making the woman within it as young and ravishing as possible. And lovelily, indeed, Blossy looked this day, with a natural flush of excitement on her cheek, a new sparkle in her bright, dark eyes, and with her white hair arranged in a fashion which might have excited a young girl's envy.

The hour for the train came and went, and, lo! for the first time in the history of twenty years Captain Darby did not appear.

Blossy pretended to be relieved, protesting that she was delighted to find that she would now have an extra hour in which to ponder the question. But the second train came and went, and still no Captain Darby.

All the afternoon long Blossy wore her lace gown, thinking although there were no more trains from the eastward that day, that Samuel would still find his way to her. He might drive, as he usually did in June, or he might even walk from his home at Twin Coves, she said.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Found in a Glacier.

Sir Martin Conway has recently told this story of finding a lost ax in the Alps: Zurbiggen, one of the celebrated mountain climbers of the world, in scaling a peak of Les Anglaises, near Chamounix, accidentally let his ax fall near the summit of the peak. It fell some thousands of feet. In the normal course of things it was buried in snow and swallowed up in the glacier, being covered deeper and deeper each year, and at the same time being carried slowly downward as the ice flowed on. Seven or eight years afterward Hon. C. G. Bruce and Harkbir, a Sepoy chief, in descending a peak of the Alps just as night was falling, and a great crevasse barred the way, being unable to find the bridge over it, cut a path down to the bottom, where Harkbir stepped on an ax which had M. Z. Zurbiggen's initials on the handle. There could be no mistake as to the identity of the ax, as Harkbir had seen it and used it before.

He Knew That Money Talks.

He couldn't talk English, though perhaps he understood a little, but he knew a thing or two. He was riding on a huckster's wagon past a public school. His partner had gone into a house to sell some truck, and he was learning the business. His clothes were ragged and shabby, much like those of the stage tramp. The children started to jeer at him, making remarks about his clothes. He seemed to understand that they were making fun of his clothes, so he reached in his pocket and pulled out the bromide "roll of bills that would choke a cow." These bills he waved at the children, for apparently he believed that money would insure respect, even if he did have old clothes.

ADVANCE OF GERMANS LIKE MOVING FORWARD OF NATION

By PHILIP GIBBS.

Paris.—When I escaped from Amiens, before the tunnel was broken up, and the Germans entered into possession of the town on August 28, the front of the allied armies was in a crescent from Abbeville, south of Amiens on wooded heights, and thence in a irregular line to south of Mezieres.

The British forces, under Sir John French, were at the left of the center, supporting the heavy thrust-forward of the main German advance, while the right was commanded by General Pau.

A Million on the Move.

On Sunday afternoon fighting was resumed along the whole line. The German vanguard by this time had been supported by a fresh army corps, which had been brought from Belgium.

At least 1,000,000 men were on the move, pressing upon the allied forces with a ferocity of attack which has never before been equaled. Their cavalry swept across a great tract of country, squadron by squadron, like the mounted hordes of Attila, but armed with the dreadful weapons of modern warfare.

Their artillery was in enormous numbers and their columns advanced under cover of it, not like an army, but rather like a moving nation—I do not think, however, with equal pressure at all parts of the line. It formed itself into a battering ram with a pointed end and this was thrust at the heart of the English wing.

Impossible to Resist.

It was impossible to resist this onslaught. If the British forces had stood against it they would have been crushed and broken. Our gunners were magnificent and shelled the advancing German columns so that the dead lay heaped up along the way which was leading down to Paris; but, as one of them told me:

"It made no manner of difference. As soon as we had smashed one lot, another followed, column after column, and by sheer weight of numbers, we could do nothing to check them."

After this the British forces fell back, fighting all the time. The line of the allies was in the shape of a "V"; the Germans thrust their main attack deep into the angle. This position remained the same until Monday, or rather had completed itself by that date, the retirement of the troops being maintained with mastery skill and without undue haste.

River Choked With Dead.

Meanwhile General Pau was sustaining a terrific attack on the French center, by the German left center, which culminated on (date omitted). The River Oise, which runs between beautiful meadows, was choked with corpses and red with blood.

From an eye witness of this great battle, an officer of an infantry regiment who escaped with a slight wound, I learned that the German onslaught had been repelled by a series of brilliant bayonet and cavalry charges.

"The Germans," he said, "had the elite of their army engaged against us, including the Tenth army corps and the Imperial guard, but the heroism of our troops was sublime. Every man knew that the safety of France depended upon him and was ready to sacrifice his life, if need be, with joyful enthusiasm."

Give Great Punishment.

"They not only resisted the enemy's attack, but took the offensive, and, in spite of their overpowering numbers, gave them tremendous punishment. They had to recoil before our guns."

"Hundreds of them were bayoneted and hundreds were hurled into the river. The whole field of battle was outlined by dead and dying men whom they had to abandon. Certainly their losses were enormous, and I felt that the German retreat was in full swing and that we could claim a real victory for the time being."

Pau Compelled to Yield.

Nevertheless the inevitable happened, owing to the vast reserves of the enemy, who brought up four divisions, and General Pau was compelled to give ground.

On Tuesday German skirmishers with light artillery were coming southward, and the sound of their field guns greeted my ears. Presently I saw the figure of a French dragoon, with his carbine slung behind his back. He was standing by the side of a number of gunpowder bags. A little farther away were little groups of soldiers at work by two bridges, one over a stream and one over a road. They were working very calmly and I could see what they were doing. They were mining the bridges to blow them up at a given signal.

As I went farther I saw the streets were strewn with broken bottles and littered with wire entanglements, artfully and carefully made.

Trap for German Army.

It was obvious that there was very grim business being done and that the soldiers were waiting for something to happen. At the railway station I quickly learned the truth. The Germans were only a few miles away in great force. At any moment they might come down, smashing everything in their way.

The station master, a brave old type, and one or two porters, had demanded to stay on to the last.

"We are here," he said, as though the Germans would have to reckon with him, but he was emphatic in his request for me to leave at once if another train could be got away, which was very uncertain.

As a matter of fact, after a bad quarter of an hour I was put on the last train to escape from this threatened town, and left it with the sound of German guns in my ears, followed by a dull explosion when the bridge behind me was blown up.

Escape Narrowly.

My train, in which there were only four other men, skirted the German army and by a twist in the line almost ran into the enemy's country, but we rushed through the night, and the engine driver laughed and put his oily hand up to salute when I stepped out to the platform of an unknown station.

"The Germans won't get us, after all," he said. "It was a little risky, all the same."

The station was crowded with French soldiers, and they were soon telling me their experiences of the hard fighting in which they had been engaged. They were dirty, unshaven, dusty from head to foot, scorched by the August sun, in tattered uniforms and broken boots; but they were beautiful men for all their dirt, and the laughing courage, quiet confidence and unbragging simplicity with which they assured me that the Germans would soon be caught in a death trap and sent to their destruction filled me with admiration which I cannot express in words.

All the odds were against them. They had fought the hardest of all actions—the retirement from the fighting line—but they had absolute faith in the ultimate success of the allied arms.

Germans Are Reckless.

London.—A Chronicle correspondent writing from an unnamed town says:

"The Germans are displaying extraordinary recklessness, flinging away thousands of lives in the hope of ultimately gaining their end. No doubt the rapid advance of the Russians in eastern Prussia has something to do with this, and is responsible for the frantic and insane haste which characterizes the German attempt in northern France to smash the thin khaki line which so valiantly bars the road toward Compiegne, Soissons and Paris. "That stories of German atrocities are not one whit exaggerated may be gathered from the story told me by a sergeant who was wounded in the action near Mons Sunday a week ago. "As he lay helpless on the ground and the German infantry swept by he could hear, from the imploring cries of the wounded in his front, that they were being ruthlessly put to death by their foes.

Ordeal Is Terrible.

"Closing his eyes and simulating death, the wounded sergeant lay perfectly still. As the Germans passed him he received a violent blow in the chest from the butt end of a rifle which broke one of his ribs. He bore the pain unflinchingly and never moved a muscle. Another Prussian stabbed a wounded man with his bayonet as he went past. "The sergeant's ordeal was a terrible one and he expected every moment to be his last. Ultimately the German advance was broken and their infantry came rolling back, shattered and disordered, leaving behind a trail of dead and wounded. The wounded sergeant was picked up by British stretcher bearers and conveyed to the base hospital, where he is now fast recovering.

English Are Cheerful.

"Freshly arrived troops from England, who had been pushed forward, arrived in time to participate in the battle. These British re-enforcements had been carrying out strategic movements in troops trains for several days, and in the expressive phraseology of Tommy Atkins, 'they were fed up with the whole thing' and were all eagerness for a brush with the enemy. "Their chance came yesterday. Many were reserves with South African experience, and they marched to the front cheering the French and growling for 'William the Weed,' somehow confusing the emperor with William (of Wied) of Albania. French and English flags were borne at the head of each company. "They were in fine fettle, 'Are we downhearted?' would shout some one from the ranks, 'no, but William the Weed will be downhearted by the time we finish with him.'"

French Kind, Says Dying German.

Paris.—The American embassy here is daily in receipt of letters written by dying soldiers, forwarded to it by the French government for transmission to Germany. One is from a German aviator, who had fallen into the hands of the French. The man wrote: "Good-by dear father and mother; my leg has been crushed. The French officers are very kind." A postscript to this letter, added by a French officer, reads: "At this point the brave fellow died; please forward this to his parents."

Man Germany Honored a Hostage.

Paris.—The Petit Parisien points out the irony in the case of M. Ernst Solvay, who with Baron Lambert de Rothschild was taken as a hostage at Brussels. The paper says that Solvay, who is well known for his invention of a process by which soda can be bought at an extremely cheap price, was recently highly honored by European nations. Germany conferred on Solvay one of its highest honors, the gold medal of the Academy of Sciences of Berlin.

DEVOTION OF A HIGH ORDER

Surely Canine Sagacity Could Hardly Go Further Than the Instance That Is Here Recorded.

They were gathered round the stove in the country grocery store swapping dog stories. Abner Morgan had "all the best of it" with his yarns of the extraordinary intelligence exhibited by a collie belonging to his uncle. The others grew restive. Finally Job Perkins deemed the moment appropriate wherein to spring a tale that would cap all the others.

"That was a purty clever dawg, Ab," drawled he, "an' I make no doubt he was jest as knowin' as you let on. But say! He wasn't a marker to a dawg my old man owned! Boys, the devotion of that dawg to the old man was shore amazin'. Onct he heard the old man say he was pressed for money, so he went an' died the day before the dog-tax was due!"

SKIN TROUBLE ON HANDS

Caseville, Mo.—"My hands and feet were affected with a trouble similar to ringworm for a number of years. It first appeared as tiny clear blisters and in places the blisters were so close together that they almost formed one large blister. The skin was rough and cracked open. At times it was so bad that it disabled me; my hands became so sore that I could scarcely use them.

"I used every remedy that I could find but nothing seemed to do any good. Finally I sent for a sample of Cuticura Soap and Ointment and I then got a cake of Cuticura Soap and a box of Cuticura Ointment which completely rid me of the trouble." (Signed) Ray Bryant, Mar. 14, 1914.

Cuticura Soap and Ointment sold throughout the world. Sample of each free with 32-p. Skin Book. Address post-card "Cuticura, Dept. L, Boston."—Adv.

The "Bauer" Is Austria's Backbone.

The most interesting of Austrian types and the backbone of the dual monarchy is the "bauer." In social rank he occupies somewhat the same position as the old English yeoman, farming his own land, and in many cases enjoying a far more substantial fortune than the nobility. The "bauer" has a strict social code of his own, mixing neither with the laborers on one hand nor the aristocracy on the other, is apparently quite content with his lot, and takes pride in his ability to provide almost all the necessities of life from the productions of his own land, even, in many cases, growing the flax from which is woven the household clothing.—London Chronicle.

Supreme Test of Friendship.

An invitation to breakfast was, in Macaulay's opinion, one of the supreme tests of friendship. "You invite a man to dinner," he wrote to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "because you must invite him, because you are acquainted with his grandfather, or because you wish to see him. You may be sure if you are invited to breakfast that there is something agreeable about you."

Filial Solicitude.

"When I was your age," said Mr. Dustin Stax, "I did not stay out and dance all night as you do."

"I know it," replied his sociable son. "And I'm mighty sorry about it. That's why I'm trying to get you to come along and make up for some of the chances you've missed."

Correct.

"Practice makes perfect," quoted the sage. "Well," replied the fool, "that's more than you can say for preaching."

LEARNING THINGS

We Are All in the Apprentice Class

When a simple change of diet brings back health and happiness the story is briefly told. A lady of Springfield, Ill., says:

"After being afflicted for years with nervousness and heart trouble, I received a shock four years ago that left me in such a condition that my life was despaired of.

"I got no relief from doctors nor from the numberless heart and nerve remedies I tried, because I didn't know that coffee was daily putting me back more than the doctors could put me ahead.

"Finally at the suggestion of a friend I left off coffee and began the use of Postum, and against my expectations I gradually improved in health until for the past 6 or 8 months I have been entirely free from nervousness and those terrible sinking, weakening spells of heart trouble.

"My troubles all came from the use of coffee which I had drunk from childhood and yet they disappeared when I quit coffee and took up the use of Postum." Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

Many people marvel at the effects of leaving off coffee and drinking Postum, but there is nothing marvelous about it—only common sense.

Coffee is a destroyer—Postum is a rebuildler. That's the reason. Look in pkgs. for the famous little book, "The Road to Wellville."

Postum comes in two forms: Regular Postum—must be well boiled. 15c and 25c packages.

Instant Postum—is a soluble powder. A teaspoonful dissolves quickly in a cup of hot water and, with cream and sugar, makes a delicious beverage instantly. 30c and 50c tins. The cost per cup of both kinds is about the same.

"There's a Reason" for Postum. —sold by Grocers.