

Aunt Hulda's Good Time

AUNT HULDA sat under the shade of the apple tree paring the fruit that had fallen from the gnarled, overladen branches. She was dressed in a faded blue calico gown and a checked apron, and wore a home-made sunbonnet upon her gray head. At her right was the turnpike leading from the barn to the road in front of the house. A few feet to the left was her back door. It was a warm afternoon, and the shade of the tree had tempted her from the hot kitchen, as it often did.

Aunt Hulda's meditations were not worthy of record. She was a simple old body, living a simple, circumscribed life and thinking simple, unimportant things. For instance, she was about to make apple sauce, and she knew her sauce was highly praised by the farmers' wives who now and then dropped in for a visit and some tea. These were memorable occasions with her. She reflected upon the evident enjoyment Mrs. Worrell had displayed only last week, when she ate two full saucers of Aunt Hulda's apple sauce. From the same tree, too. It was a good tree; she had used its fruit in sauce for many years; thirty—maybe forty. It was hard to remember the exact time. Probably it would keep on bearing these rosy-cheeked apples as long as her days lasted, and then—

Then she looked up and saw the boy. He had just ridden up the turnpike on his bicycle, and glancing over the fence perceived Aunt Hulda seated under her tree.

He could not have said what made him pause, dismount and regard the homely picture thoughtfully as he leaned upon his wheel. When he saw that she observed him he took off his cap and bowed to her, and she returned the salutation composedly. Then, after a hesitating glance up the road, he dismounted his wheel through the open gates and came to where the woman was sitting.

"Good afternoon," he said, pleasantly. "Will you let me lie here and rest a bit?"

She nodded. She liked boys; and this one was fresh and manly and good to look upon. He wore a modest gray suit and cap, and stockings of brown worsted. There was nothing "flashy" in his appearance, which could not be truthfully said of all the bicyclers Aunt Hulda had seen spinning along the smooth turnpike.

The boy leaned his wheel against the tree, reclined gracefully upon the grass, and resting his head upon his elbow, watched the deft fingers that busily continued to pare and quarter the apples.

"Tired?" she asked, in a motherly tone. She had never been blessed with children, but had all a mother's tenderness for youth still fresh in her old heart.

"Not very," he answered; "but it looked cool and pleasant here, and—and I thought I'd like to talk with you."

She nodded again. "You see, I am not limited as to time," he continued, lazily stroking the kitten that had crept to his side, "for I am taking a cross-country trip on my wheel as part of my vacation. I never know where I shall stop at night; that is one of the delights of the trip. When dark overtakes me, or I grow tired, I stop at the nearest village."

"The highest place to here is Millbank," remarked Aunt Hulda. "There's a circus there to-day."

"A circus? Why, that's jolly! There's nothing I love better than to attend a country circus. Not for the sake of the bareback riders and clowns, you understand; but to watch the people and enjoy their enjoyment."

"Martin is there now," she said. "Martin?"

"My man. It's his year. We take turns, you know; he goes one year, and I go the next. Martin went early this afternoon, so as to see the animals fed; but he won't see the show till the evening performance. It's always better evenings. He took his supper in his pocket."

"But why don't you go together?" asked the boy, sitting up.

"It costs too much," she replied frankly. "We really can't afford it at all, now times are so hard; but we're two old folks, living all by ourselves, and we thought as we'd divide up, and take in the circus every year. When I go, I tell Martin all about it; and when he goes he tells me. It gives us something to talk about when we're alone in the evenings, and it's almost as good as going yourself to hear Martin describe it."

The boy lay back and looked at her curiously. He did not laugh. It seemed to him he was nearer tears than laughter, although he could see well enough the comedy of it.

"How far is the town?" he asked. "Two miles."

"Have you a horse?"

"Yes, indeed. Old Piebald is in the barn now. Martin never takes him to the circus; no more do I. We walk. Piebald gets scared at the steam piano, and it costs a quarter to put him up in the hotel barn."

"Let's go," said the boy, suddenly. "Where?" demanded Aunt Hulda, dropping her knife in amazement.

"To the circus. Be my guest. I've plenty of money—more than I shall know how to spend on my trip, and I'd like to take you to the circus. We'll see it all—sideshow and everything—and we'll have a real jolly time!"

She stared at him stupidly a while. The audacity of the proposition almost took her breath away. She saw he was in earnest, however, and she glanced from her coarse blue gown to his neat gray suit with a puzzled air. Strangers had been polite to her before, but none had ever offered to take her to a circus; nor, indeed, anywhere else. But this was a boy; a nice boy, too. He had risen to his feet and was standing before her, cap in hand.

"Do let's go!" he pleaded. "I—I can't," she answered; "I've got to make the apple sauce."

"Let it wait," he said, with a wave of the hand; "the circus only comes once a year."

"There's the supper."

"I'll help you get it—and eat it, also. And I'll help do the dishes."

"There's the stock to be fed," she continued. Her tone was growing more irresolute, and he noted it.

"Two of us can feed the stock in no time," he declared; "so come, please; let's get to work at once."

"I—I don't know what Martin'll think," she protested, as a last resort. But she rose from her chair, nevertheless, and stood with the pan of apples under her arm, a look of pleased anticipation spreading over her wrinkled face. He took the pan from her and carried it into the kitchen.

The boy stopped an usher, and after a whispered conversation was escorted by Aunt Hulda, behind the tiers of seats and through a narrow passage into the box. Their appearance caused a murmur of surprise from the surrounding benches. Many knew the old lady's pleasant, homely face, and marveled at seeing her thus occupying the position of honor opposite Squire Meldrum himself.

Martin was seated away down near the ringside, but he looked up with the others, and his astonishment was intense when he saw Aunt Hulda framed by the crimson curtains and canopy, and a strange youth beside her who was paying her devoted attention. All during the circus the poor man divided his gaze between this remarkable vision of his wife and the antics of the clowns and jugglers. He saw her drinking red lemonade with her companion, and that her lap was loaded down with peanuts and candy and popcorn; for the boy would do nothing by halves, and bought everything that was offered for sale.

Martin shook his head, and sighed, and looked again. It was certainly Aunt Hulda, but how she came there was a mystery he could not fathom.

He waited outside the tent while they heard the concert, after the circus itself was over. Martin was not given to solving problems; time would explain everything, he thought. He knew when they were coming by her laugh, and such a laugh he could not remember hearing from Aunt Hulda since the happy days when they were first wed. He put out his hand and touched her, almost diffidently, as they followed the crowd from the entrance.

"Huldy!" he said. "Good gracious!" she cried; "if it isn't Martin! We've been looking for you everywhere, for the boy wanted you to stay with us to the concert. It's his fault, Martin," she added, more soberly. "He would have me come as his company, you know—and I couldn't well say no."

"I'm glad you had the chance," said Martin, simply. Then he plucked her sleeve. "Who is he?" he whispered.

"I don't know," she answered, behind her hand; "but, O Martin, he's been so good to me!"

"Well, are we ready for home?" broke in the boy. "I expect old Piebald is anxious to get back and munch his hay. Shall we go?"

They drove home almost in silence, with Martin sitting in the back of the wagon box and the boy driving. Only once did Aunt Hulda speak, and that was to say, with a contented sigh, "I don't think we missed a single thing!"

While Martin put up the horse the boy got his wheel from the kitchen. "I shall sleep at Millbank to-night," he said, brightly; "for the hotel there seems like a comfortable place; but before I go I want to thank you for a very happy evening."

Aunt Hulda leaned down, and taking his round face between her hands, kissed him tenderly.

"What made you do it?" she whispered. "Why were you so good to an old woman like me?"

The boy stood looking into the night for a moment before he answered. "Mother and I," he said at last, softly, "were always good comrades, and had many jolly times together; and when I saw you sitting under the tree this afternoon, my heart grew hungry for some one to go with me, as she used to do, and have a happy time. She's dead now, you know."

His voice broke with a sob, and the woman gathered him into her arms and held him close to her for a while. Then she kissed him again, with a sweet, motherly caress.

"Good night," he said. The next moment he had mounted his wheel and disappeared down the road; but she stood looking long after his figure had faded into the darkness, and listened until the last muffled sound had died away upon the soft night air.—Youth's Companion.

Past His First Youth.
The swan is said to be excellent eating when young; but as it is one of the longest-lived of all creatures, it is well to learn if possible how old your bird is before you cook it.

SUPPOSE WE SMILE.

HUMOROUS PARAGRAPHS FROM THE COMIC PAPERS.

Pleasant Incidents Occurring the World Over—Sayings that are Cheerful to Old or Young—Funny Selections that Everybody Will Enjoy.

"Say," queried Farmer Hayrix, "what dew they raise in them thar roof gardens down tew th' city?"

"Peaches, uncle," replied the city-bred young man.—Chicago News.

Mutual Compassion.

"Oh! my poor woman! My heart bleeds for one in your condition!"

"Thanks, sor; Oi was thinkin' the same of the likes of you!"

Putting Him Right.
Tommy—Mamma said you only come here on account of the lunch.

Rev. Fiddle, D. D.—Hereafter, my dear child, I shall come for dinner, too.

Expected to Exchange It.
Customer—I want to buy an umbrella.

Dealer—Yes, sir; something for about \$5?

Customer—No; something about \$1. I'm going to a party.

A Good Catch.
Tom—When I went fishing down at the beach this summer I landed a twenty-pounder.

Dick—Oh, I landed a 130-pounder there.

Tom—What a fish?

Dick—No, a girl.—Chicago News.

In the Book Store.
Josh Wayback—Gimme a lot of French novels I hear so much about.

Mrs. Wayback—What do you want them for, Josh?

Josh Wayback—Well, Mandy, we got a lot o' space to fill in the new bookcase and they'll tell me them French novels is very broad.

Ignorant, but Not Blissful.
Miss Citybred (in country)—What kind of a tree is that?

Uncle Hayrix—That's an apple tree.

Wanted to Turn Her.
"Lot's wife wuz turned into a pillar of salt," said the old colored citizen, "en ef de days of miracles wuznt pas' on gone I'd lose my temper some day en ax de Lawd ter turn mine into a week's groceries!"—Atlanta Constitution.

Cause of His Sadness.
Mr. Goodman—Your little playmate seems sad.

Willie—Yes, sir. He had ter stay home from school yestidy.

"The Idea! And he's sad on that account?"

"No, sir; it's because he had ter come back ter school ter-day."—Philadelphia Record.

Villains! Vipers!
Mrs. Ruthven—It's a shame that reporters are permitted to put the names of society people in the papers.

Mrs. Smythe—Indeed, it is, my dear. They always spell mine wrong.—The Smart Set.

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Labor World

England has American 'phones. Elwood, Ind., has a doctors' union. Cincinnati school teachers will form a union.

Toronto carpenters demand an eight-hour day. Worcester labor unions may adopt the union label.

Denver's plumbers' strike is over. The wage scale is \$4.25 a day. The Baltimore Federation of Labor will organize a ladies' auxiliary.

Los Angeles lumber handlers gained a nine-hour day without asking for it. Thirteen hundred employes of Lipton, the cup chaser, struck for an increase of wages.

Pittsburg's United Mine Workers are considering Carnegie's offer to construct a workers' hospital there. Worcester's building trades, with the exception of the steamfitters and helpers, have won the eight-hour day.

Typographical Union, Winnipeg, wants the number of hours of labor per week reduced from fifty-four to forty-eight.

The United States and England are the only two countries in the world that now have exclusively private railroad systems.

Troy has twenty-seven factories where collars, cuffs and shirts are made. They employ 15,000 persons, four-fifths being women.

The Trades and Labor Council of Quebec is urging on the provincial government the establishment of a bureau of labor statistics similar to the Ontario bureau of labor.

New York has 1,881 labor organizations, with a total membership of 261,523 men and 14,018 women. Of this total of 276,141 trades unionists 174,022 are in the city of New York.

Pittsburg's \$1,000,000,000 steel combine is to introduce automatic machinery in its tinplate mills, similar to that in operation in the steel plants. It is expected that hundreds of skilled workmen will be gradually displaced.

San Francisco labor people having carried the city, are planning to spread out and carry the State. In Connecticut a State party is to be formed, and the Colorado unions are preparing to take the field along independent political lines.

AS TO DESERTED WIVES.
Apt to Be Forgiving, Even if They Make Complaint to the Courts.

An odd statement emanating from the Chicago Bureau of Associated Charities casts an interesting sidelight upon the divorce question. According to this statement, the burden upon the bureau of women who have been deserted by their husbands is out of all proportion to a civilized society. In one way and another it has been estimated that there are in Chicago 8,500 women who have been thus left alone in the world. Some of the recreants have disappeared, but many are still hangers-on in the household, leaving their wives to earn the bread. What, then, the Chicago courts are asking, is to be done with these offenders? This question would be simple enough were it not that the deserted wife is loath to set in motion the machinery of the law, or if she has done so, is generally anxious to stop it.

A Philadelphia lawyer, when asked about this, was of the impression that affairs were not much better in this city, says the Philadelphia Press. "You must," he said, "devise an effective punishment before you can stop a crime. When a husband is to be tried for ill-treating his wife the latter must generally be the prosecutor, and if she gets as far as taking the oath her spirit generally leaves her at about that point. She leaves the magistrate's office, and by night she is back at the station house begging to see the fellow. I believe that in Philadelphia fully 75 per cent of these arrests are lost through the default of the wife as the complaining witness. Besides, many a woman who would be only too glad to be rid of a husband in any other way will refuse to take a step that would land him in jail."

The Chicago society is now looking out for about fifty women who have been deserted. These women are cleaning, cooking, sewing, and scrubbing at from \$1 to \$1.50 a day, but an officer of the society expresses the opinion that fully 40 per cent of them are sharing their earnings with their good-for-nothing husbands.

Millions in the Milk Trade.
Outside the business of supplying New York City with milk, the farmers of New York State have an investment of \$43,450,000 in cows, and a corresponding amount in dairy farms and fixtures, the total being not less than \$150,000,000.

A Royal Painter.
The Empress Frederick has always been an admirable artist. At Windsor one room is entirely hung with exquisite water colors done by her, and at a great charity bazaar two paintings done by her sold for £1,000 apiece.

How many really know what all the articles in a manicure box are for? Stand up and be counted. You really have grounds to organize an exclusive society.

IN THESE DEPARTMENT STORES.



Customer (at book department)—I want to get "The Last of the Mohicans."
New Clerk—Well, I guess you'll find that at the remnant counter.

Ignorant, but Not Blissful.
Miss Citybred (in country)—What kind of a tree is that?

Uncle Hayrix—That's an apple tree.

Miss Citybred—Why doesn't it blossom?

Uncle Hayrix—It's a little too late.

Miss Citybred—Oh, then I'll get it real early in the morning and see it blossom.—Chicago News.

Heavy Returns.
"What business brings the heaviest returns?" asked the man who wanted to know.

"The literary business," sighed the struggling author, as he opened a two-pound rejected book manuscript.—Philadelphia Record.

Equalizing Matters.
Knox—Don't you believe in telling your wife everything that happens?

Proxy—Well—er—I can't say that, but I do believe in telling her some things that don't happen.—Philadelphia Record.

The European Plan.
Landlord (after fair guest has faint ed at sight of her bill)—Jean, I have sent the boy for a glass of water for the lady, and I want you to see that 10 cents is added to her bill. Understand!—Fliegende Blaetter.

Consoling.
She—I believe you are marrying me for my money alone.

He—Oh, no; that'll be gone soon.

The Aftermath.
Husband—Come, sit on my lap, my dear, as you did in our old courting days.

Wife—Well, I declare! I haven't received such an invitation for an age.

Husband—And—er—bring a needle and thread with you, my love.—New York Weekly.

Didn't Give 'Em Away.
Mrs. Justwed—Do you sell turkeys?

Poultry Dealer—Well, I don't look like a philanthropist, do I?

Answered the Purpose.
Her Niece—And this, auntie dear, is a real old master.

Aunt Tabitha—Don't you fret, child it's just as good as some of the new ones.

A Suggestion.
The Angry Father—What do you expect me to do—send you all the money you ask for, or calmly allow you to get into debt?

The Son—You might do both.—Life.

Some Worth Cultivating.
He—What do you think about the microbes in kisses theory?

She (cheerfully)—I've heard that we couldn't get along without certain kinds of microbes.—Puck.

All in That Class.
Sillicus—Have you noticed that most heroes are married men?

Cynicus—Sir every married man is a hero.—Philadelphia Record.

What has become of the old-fashioned ones who went to bed in the dark?