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Miss Martha

By EDGAR WELTON COOLEY

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AUNT BECKY placed her hand upon the little girl's head and smiled wistfully.

"Do you know how to live with your pa and ma in the big house on the hill?" she said. "I just love that place."

"Then love it," the girl said. "Why, Aunt Becky?"

"Just look at that old Judge Singleton. He got out down in the open sun. 'Won't you tell me about Miss Martha?' she asked."

"Aunt Becky took a gun of potatoes in her lap and prepared to peel them. Her face was gladdened in recollection."

"Well, Auntie," she began, "I know Miss Martha when she was just a little bit of a child like you, and I don't care where you go or where you look you won't ever find any sweeter girl nor any purer angel than was she."

"And I knew Mr. Joe and Mr. Henry when they were just little boys, about so high, playing together in the meadow or fishing in the old White river over there."

"Mr. Joe's father was Judge Singleton, who came to Indiana when there was hardly anybody here but Indians. And Mr. Henry was the son of General Beasley, who fought with Sheridan in '63."

"It was curious how much Mr. Joe and Mr. Henry were attached to one another when they were little boys. It couldn't rain on one without raining on the other, and when the sun was shining the shadow of one was always kissing the other's little dimpled feet. So they grew into manhood, with the sunshine stored in both their souls and the blue of the sky in Mr. Joe's eyes and in Mr. Henry's the shadows of the grapevines across the path."

"But there came a time when Mr. Joe and Mr. Henry came down the path together; they were not arm in arm, for Miss Martha was walking between them, but I couldn't see her."

"One day Mr. Henry came alone, and there was a shadow on his face that I didn't like. With never a word he sat down in the door and took off his hat."

"By and by I put my hand on his head and said, 'What's the matter, Mr. Henry?'"

"Nothing much, Aunt Becky," says he. "Only just a pain in here." Then I knew it was Miss Martha."

"Where's Mr. Joe today, Mr. Henry?" I says.

"He's over to Miss Martha's," says he.

"After awhile Mr. Joe came down the path, whistling."

"Hello, Henry," says he. "I've been looking for you," says he, walking over



SHE FRIENDED NOT TO BE INTERESTED.

to where Mr. Henry was sitting on an old log. But Mr. Henry did not answer. He just got up and walked away with his arms folded and his face white and left Mr. Joe standing with dumb lips and scarlet face."

"A few days after that I saw Miss Martha and Mr. Henry drifting down the river in a boat. Miss Martha was sitting in the stern looking down at her hands trailing in the water, and Mr. Henry, with his oars crossed in his lap, was leaning forward gazing into Miss Martha's face."

"Pretty soon Mr. Joe came along. I knew he had seen Miss Martha and Mr. Henry, but he never let on, only he wasn't whistling, as usual."

"Well, about this time the war with Spain broke out. Old Judge Singleton drove around making speeches—and he was a powerful speaker in his day—and General Beasley got on his old white horse, all fixed out in the uniform he wore when he fought with Sheridan, and went galloping up and down, calling on all the men folks to enlist."

"And the very first one who stepped

upon the platform and signed his name to the enlistment was Mr. Joe.

"The tears came to my eyes when I saw that, for Mr. Joe was all that the old judge had left, and the judge's head was like that hillside when the wild cherries are in bloom—that white."

"The judge grew pale and leaned on the table for a moment. Then he took Mr. Joe's hand and says, 'God bless you, my boy.' And that was all he said."

"When Mr. Henry saw what Mr. Joe had done he climbed upon the platform as quickly as he could and says, 'I'm going along with Joe.'

"The old general was used to war, and the sea of battle was burning in his veins. 'If you didn't put your name down then, sir,' says he, 'you wouldn't be no son of mine.' says he. But I was standing where I could see a line fall from old Mr. Beasley's eye."

"I tell you my heart was sad after that, and I mean then over I loved to see Mr. Joe and Mr. Henry come down the path under the old grapevines, only I knew Miss Martha was walking between them."

"That was the next to the last day they were going to be at home, and Mr. Joe and Mr. Henry were lying in the grass right there looking at the old White river that was drifting, drifting—always drifting southward and never coming back."

"By and by Mr. Joe says, 'Henry,' says he, 'tomorrow we're going to the war. Maybe we will never fish in the White river or gather grapes or wild cherries off these hills together any more,' says he, 'and there shouldn't be any shadows between us, Henry,' says he. 'Let's go to Martha, you and me, and ask her which she thinks the most of. Like as not,' says he, 'she ain't caring very much for either of us.'

"Mr. Joe smiled at that and took Mr. Henry's hand. Then, arm in arm, they went up the path, and there wasn't any shadows between them after that—there never was any more."

"Mr. Joe and Mr. Henry found Miss Martha in the meadow back of her father's house, and Mr. Joe explained what they had come to find out."

"Now, of course Miss Martha knew very well what her answer should be, but she pretended not to be interested. So she glanced roguishly first at one, then at the other, the sunset creeping into her cheeks and the light of all the stars creeping into her eyes. Then she plucked a daisy out of the clover and said she would let the daisy decide. And with that she pulls off the petals, saying, 'Joe, Henry, Joe, Henry,' like that. And the last petal was Henry."

"Mr. Joe didn't say a word. He just took Mr. Henry's hand in both of his a minute, then he crossed the meadow and went down the road, leaving Mr. Henry smiling and looking Miss Martha's hand and Miss Martha gazing after Mr. Joe, all the sunlight and the starlight fading out of her face and eyes. And the next day we were all up to town to see the soldier boys march off to war."

"I never saw any brighter sunshine or any bluer sky than there was on that day. Old General Beasley was on his white horse, galloping back and forth and waving the sword with which he fought with Sheridan, and Judge Singleton climbed on a box and made a speech to the soldiers, exhorting them to bring glory to old Lawrence county. 'Presently the captain spoke, and the soldiers put their guns on their shoulders and they were off down the road. Mr. Joe and Mr. Henry were marching side by side, and as they turned the corner—Mr. Henry glanced back at Miss Martha. She fluttered her handkerchief, and he waved his cap, and in his eyes was a great happiness."

"But Mr. Joe never looked back; he just kept his eyes to the front. And there was a meadow lark singing somewhere down by the river."

"Miss Martha received many letters from Mr. Henry, and she used to come down the path and sit in the door right where you are sitting now and read them, but I could tell by the way she sighed when she finished that the letters from Mr. Henry didn't satisfy her."

"One day she says to me, playing with the strings of her bonnet, 'Auntie Becky,' says she, 'do you ever get any letters from Joe, Auntie Becky?'"

"Then she pulls the bonnet down over her eyes, but I saw her cheeks, and they were the color of a sumac leaf in October—that red. 'Oh, Auntie Becky,' she said, 'I wish there never had been any daisies in our meadow, and she covered her face with her hands."

"So the weeks had the months went by with nothing but war, war, war. But one day Miss Martha burst in at the door all excited, and she says, 'Oh, Auntie Becky, sit down. I've something important to read you.'

"It was a letter from Mr. Henry, and he wrote about a big battle down in Cuba. The letter wasn't written for more than two weeks after the fight, for Mr. Henry had been wounded and was in a hospital."

"Mr. Henry called it San Juan when he was shot. He wrote that when he came to himself after being struck he was lying on the ground and there was a terrible pain in his breast."

"He tried to get upon his feet, but fell back exhausted and waited for death. And pretty soon Mr. Joe came crawling to him."

"Mr. Joe didn't have on any hat, nor he didn't have any gun, and his hair was matted with blood, and his face was black with powder smoke."

"He took Mr. Henry's hand in his arms, and he held a canteen to his mouth and he said, 'Here, Henry, drink some of this.'

"But Mr. Henry only glanced up into Mr. Joe's face weak like and says, 'I low I'm done for,' says he."

"Then, Mr. Henry wrote, Mr. Joe lifted him up a little and says, 'Don't

talk that way,' he says. 'You've got to live, Henry; you've got to live for Miss Martha; you've got to live to go back to the old White river,' he says. 'I missed you when we pulled ourselves together over there,' he says, 'and I came back after you, Henry. Hold on tight. I'm going to take you through that hell or Miss Martha ain't going to see either of us again.' And he did, and that was all Mr. Henry wrote to Miss Martha in that letter."

"When Miss Martha finished reading it she put it back in the envelope quietly and didn't say a word for two or three minutes. Then she said, 'Aunt Becky, wasn't that good and brave of Joe?' And that was all she said."

"Well, it was Miss Martha who first heard that the war was over and the soldier boys were coming home. She came dancing down the path as happy as a rabbit in the clover and threw her arms around my neck and said, 'The day just laughing out of her eyes, 'Aunt Becky, Joe's coming home!' But she never said a word about Mr. Henry."

"And when the boys returned we were all uptown to meet them. Miss Martha was there, all fixed out in her new white dress trimmed with ribbon, and her eyes glistened as if the brightness that had been missing from them had all come back at once."

"But when Mr. Henry stepped out of the ranks and took her hand in

both of his she bowed her head and let her glance wander to where Mr. Joe stood talking with his father."

"Then I saw clearly how things were, and I saw my duty as the Lord made me to understand it."

"So one day when Mr. Joe came down the path under the wild grapevines and sat down in the door to talk to Aunt Becky I told him how anxious Miss Martha had been regarding him, and I saw his face brighten suddenly, as the old White river brightens when the clouds part and let the sunshine tumble down."

"That gave me courage, so I said, 'Mr. Joe,' says I, 'why don't you go courting Miss Martha?'"

"Mr. Joe rose up, and there was a look of deep pain on his face, but his lips were pressed tightly together."

"Aunt Becky," he says, 'Miss Martha has decided between us.' And with that he turned and walked away."

"I told Miss Martha what Mr. Joe said. She didn't make any reply, but wandered slowly away down by the river, and I lost sight of her behind the brush over there."

"I followed her and found her lying amid the clover, with her face buried in her arms, the new sunshine falling asleep in her hair and her slim, little body shaking with her sobs."

"I took her in my arms and dried her tears and helped her back to my cabin."

"Then I heard some one whistling and saw Mr. Joe coming down the path. So I told Miss Martha to sit down, and I shut the door and went to meet Mr. Joe and told him there was an old friend in my cabin who wanted to see him."

"Who is it? he asked, but I says, 'Go in and see, Mr. Joe, and God bless you both,' says I. Then I opened the door, and Mr. Joe went in alone."

"I walked down by the river and sat on the bank, watching the tree limbs bending to kiss the ripples."

"When I returned it was nearly sunset, and when I glanced in at the open door I saw Mr. Joe holding Miss Martha's hands and looking down into her face, and Miss Martha was smiling up into Mr. Joe's face, and in the eyes of each I saw a great tenderness. There was a deep stillness in the room, but down somewhere by the river there was a sapsucker singing."

"Aunt Becky arose and, going to the door, drained the water of the potatoes."

"The child smiled. 'I am so glad,' she said. Then she arose hurriedly. 'But I hear mamma calling. Good-by, Aunt Becky.'"

"Vicarious Suffering. 'A headache is a dreadful thing.' 'Yes; I have known it to afflict a whole household.' 'What, at once?'"

"Yes. 'Must have been epidemic or something of that kind.' 'Oh, no, not at all! It was dad's head that ached.'"

A Few Suggestions For Xmas

Ladies' and Gents' Watches, Fancy Bathroom Fixtures, Fancy Lamps, Xmas Candles, Banquet Candles, Thermometers, Revolvers and Air Rifles, Fishing Tackle, Carpet Sweepers, Bread Makers, Meat Choppers, Cake Mixers, Boys' Wagons, 5 o'Clock Tea Kettles, Tea Sets, Alcohol Stoves, Fancy Baskets, of all kinds, Thermo Bottles, Flash Lights, Corn Razors, Watch Charms,

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TIDE TABLE FOR DECEMBER

Table with tide data for December 1908, including columns for High Water, Low Water, and tide heights in feet and hours.