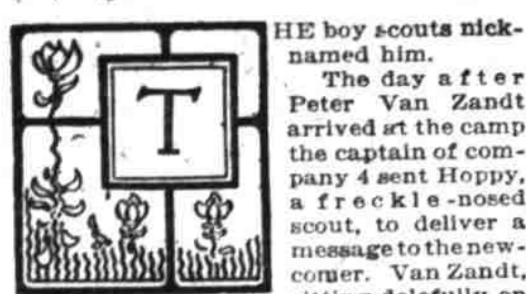


Pumpkin Pete

By DOROTHY JEFFERSON



HE boy scouts nicknamed him. The day after Peter Van Zandt arrived at the camp the captain of company 4 sent Hoppy, a freckle-nosed scout, to deliver a message to the newcomer. Van Zandt, sitting dutifully on the edge of his cot, received Hoppy coldly and turned his back on a cheerful burst of gossip which was offered with the message.

"You've got the best captain in camp," Hoppy volunteered clubily. "he's in love with the colonel's daughter, Marjory Delmar. Ever seen Miss Marjory?"

Peter Van Zandt knew little or nothing about the talents and prejudices of boy scouts. Accordingly he met Hoppy's friendly green eyes with a frigid stare and shrugged his wide shoulders in a manner which plainly indicated his indifference to the captain's affairs of heart.

"Tell Captain Summers that I shall report to the sergeant at once," he ordered briefly.

Hoppy, feeling unjustly rebuffed, strode spitefully out of the barracks and went in search of his boon companion, Lanky Jones.

"Gee, that new private in company 4 is cocky," he declared with a contemptuous twist of his thumb toward Van Zandt. "I mean that big, light haired fellow with the jack-o-lantern face. Seen him yet? His name's Peter—Peter—"

"Pumpkin Eater!" prompted Lanky glibly. "Sure, I seen him comin' in last night. Pumpkin Pete, I call him."

The ridiculous name stuck. Private Van Zandt found himself branded by the scorn of the two most popular boy scouts in camp, and even he, wrapped in smug self-satisfaction, admitted that there was a distant resemblance between his good looking yellow head and a ripe pumpkin. His features were large and clearly cut, and his mouth, when he smiled, was a broad slit in his round face. The smile was, however, a rare thing, after he was selected under the draft law and transferred from an eastern college to a western army camp.

Not that Peter Van Zandt was a slacker. He wasn't. He was a strong, clean limbed young American, with a greater amount of physical courage than the ordinary man possesses. Only one thing stood between him and a healthy enjoyment of the life at the post. His red blood was diluted, weakened, adulterated by the blue blood of his ancestors. His inability to forget that he was a Van Zandt did not mean that he was a coward, but it meant that he was something almost equally deplorable. A snob makes a poor sort of soldier.

If Peter had been an officer he would have found comfort in imposing menial tasks on the men below him in rank, but, being a private, he rebelled silently at the discharge of his duties.

"Van Zandt is a queer proposition," Captain Summers said one day as Peter rounded the barracks leading Monty, the captain's horse. "Isn't he a specimen of

manhood for you, Marjory? He was All-American halfback last year, and yet he was never popular at college. The boys call him Pumpkin Pete, and, so far as I know, he hasn't a friend in camp."

Marjory Delmar sat erect in her saddle and stared at Peter's approaching figure with frank curiosity. He lowered his eyes after the first glance at his captain and the colonel's daughter, and delivered Monty with a respectful but exceedingly brief salute. A smile crept into Marjory's blue eyes as she cantered up the road beside Captain Summers.

"So Pumpkin Pete is a mystery to you," she said presently. "I'm surprised at your inability to diagnose such a common malady. Mr. Van Zandt is suffering from a severe case of wounded pride—from a severe case of wounded pride—nothing less. He, like nothing other men I know, feels that he should be a commissioned officer because of family prestige. The idea of taking orders from a social inferior is intolerable to him."

Captain Summers laughed. "Snob, eh?"

"Exactly."

The conversation turned to other things and Peter Van Zandt, the blue-blooded private, slipped out of Summers' mind. The autumn air was fresh and cold and a bright color flamed in Marjory's cheeks as she gave her horse the rein. Her black hair loosened and tumbled under her velvet tam, and she wound her plaid scarf tightly about her throat.

Captain Summers halted at the foot of a steep hill and faced her abruptly. "Let's rest the horses a minute," he suggested.

Marjory looked up quickly and found confirmation for her suspicions in his face.

"It's getting late," she parried.

"Marjory, I won't pretend any longer. I can't. I've been trying to tell you that I love you for months and months. Things can't go on this way. I want you to be my wife."

Captain Summers was an impressive figure as he sat at ease on his big cavalry horse, waiting for the girl's answer.

She studied him under lowered eyelashes before she spoke. "I'm not sure," she said finally. "I like you, but it's an awfully big question. Will you give me a month to make up my mind?"

Summers nodded. "As long as you wish, dear," he said softly. "as long as you wish."

Marjory's blue eyes danced with sudden inspiration.

"I'll tell you at the officer's ball," she declared. "It's to be given in the gymnasium, Halloween. Spooks and wishes don't dare dance at an army post unless invited to do so, and I made father promise to give a regular harvest home party that night. I'm too old to steal gates, but I still love the Halloween legends. I believe I can give you my answer at the ball."

Silently, sullenly, Peter Van Zandt received orders from a sergeant the following day. He recalled the curiosity on Marjory Delmar's face as she appraised him the afternoon before, and his soul

stomached at the thought that she intended to make him ridiculous.

"Curry that mare and take her around to the colonel's house!" the sergeant commanded unfeelingly. "Miss Delmar wants to ride her."

Pumpkin Pete obeyed. He thought savagely of the silver pins on the captain's shoulders as he climbed the hill behind the barracks. He would have given a large share of the Van Zandt fortune for a lieutenant's insignia.

"The girl's a heartless creature," he assured himself over and over again. "She knows who I am and she sees an opportunity to humiliate one of the Van Zandts. My mother probably cut the little climber dead socially and she wants revenge."

Marjory Delmar was sitting on the porch knitting a khaki-colored sweater. She smiled as Pumpkin Pete halted the neatly curried mare at the gate and touched his hat in salute.

"Tie the horse, please," she called; "I want to talk to you."

"Were there no limitations to a private's duties? For a moment Van Zandt stood rigid, defining insubordination in his own mind. A night in the guardhouse was preferable to possible insult from the girl.

"Come in," she called again; "I want to talk to you."

Pumpkin Pete sat uncomfortably on the porch railing and twisted his broad-brimmed hat in his work-knurlled hands while Marjory began the lecture she had prepared for him. A million tiny blue devils danced in her eyes.

"I don't know who you are," she said calmly, "and I don't care. You're a private in company 4, and the boys call you Pumpkin Pete. The captain says you are incorrigible. Now, when I sent for you today I had just one thing in mind. I want to help you."

Peter turned his yellow head toward the girl and smiled tolerantly.

"Help me, Miss Delmar?" he queried. "How can you help me?"

"By teaching you to forget yourself. I'm very frank about it, Pumpkin Pete, but I hate to think that there is a single man in father's regiment who will not make a good soldier. You won't, so long as you assume the attitude that you are above your rank. I guessed right about that attitude, didn't I?"

Peter Van Zandt scowled. "Yes," he said shortly. "It's no secret. I am hardly congenial with the men in my barracks."

Marjory nodded silently. "I was right," she said frankly. "You may go now. Bring my horse around every afternoon at this time, please, Mr. Van Zandt."

She knew his name, after all. Pumpkin Pete law awake long after taps that night and meditated on his odd introduction to the colonel's daughter.

"She knew my name," he murmured drowsily as he closed his eyes. "She knew that I was a Van Zandt."

The queer friendship grew—under difficulties. Peter Van Zandt began to look forward to the hour when he led the mare up the hill for Marjory to ride, and little by little he ceased to dread the railway in her calm voice. Army ethics prevented him from calling on her, but her

very presence at the camp made life worth living. He took an interest in his work and frequently exchanged jokes or smokes with the men in his company.

"Notice how Pumpkin Pete's perkin' up?" Hoppy demanded one day when he observed a wide smile on the blue-blooded private's face. "Looks like he'd signed a new lease on life."

October days slipped by with increasing rapidity, and the raw privates found themselves transformed into straight-shouldered, strong-muscled soldiers. They no longer ached at the end of the long hike, and the sham battles became good sport.

Colonel Delmar viewed his regiment with increasing pride, and Captain Summers was exceedingly gratified with his company's progress. Indeed, the two men complimented each other whenever they met, and it was only Marjory, who had done her bit silently, who received no recognition for her services.

"Nevertheless," she told herself, "I've done something for the army. I've made a soldier out of a snob."

Preparations for the officers' ball began a week before Halloween. Captain Summers had marked the date on a little calendar in his room, and he left nothing undone that could add to the success of the affair. He dispatched a squad of men to the woods for autumn boughs and gave his personal supervision to the decorating of the gymnasium. He bought new music for the band and ordered the refreshments. He even hired a gypsy to tell fortunes.

Marjory's answer meant a great deal to Captain Summers. He loved her as much as he was capable of loving a woman, and his good judgment told him that a marriage with the colonel's daughter would hasten the advancement he expected and deserved. He was a brilliant officer for his age, quick-witted, level headed and fearless. Men liked him and women adored him. With Marjory for his wife he felt he might rise to any height.

Halloween afternoon Pumpkin Pete found Hoppy waiting for him when he went to the stable to curry the mare. The scout was perched on an inverted barrel, his green eyes staring thoughtfully into space.

"I can't understand this world, no-how," said Hoppy wearily, "but I brought you the note."

Pumpkin Pete took the folded piece of paper from the boy's outstretched hand and read the message that was scrawled across it.

"Hoppy," he demanded sternly, "where did you get this?"

"From her, of course. I was walkin' by the colonel's bungalow an' she rushed out, all pink an' excited, an' hollered out to me. 'Hoppy,' she says; 'Hoppy, dear, will you take this letter to Mr. Van Zandt for me?'"

Pumpkin Pete smiled.

The unbelievable had come true. Marjory wrote that she was going out to the woods to gather some goldenrod, and she had obtained permission to take Private Van Zandt as her escort. Would he saddle two horses instead of one?

Would he? Less than five minutes later the bewildered and disgusted Hoppy had sidled out of the stable to confide in

Lanky Jones Pumpkin Pete rode up the hill to Marjory's house mounted on a shiny black horse. The little mare followed docilely behind.

"You see," Marjory explained as they rode through the country at a comfortable trot, "I wanted to apologize to you for the things I said that first day. I said that you would not make a good soldier, and father says that you are the best in your company."

Van Zandt made no reply. His eyes were fixed on a patch of goldenrod several hundred feet from the road.

"Shall we tie the horses and go after that?" he asked abruptly. "There's enough in here to decorate the whole gymnasium. Here, let me help you."

They scrambled across the field with the enthusiasm and agility of children. Peter drew a knife from his pocket and cut up many flowers as they could carry, and then sat down beside Marjory on a fallen tree trunk to arrange the stalks in neat bundles.

"The ball will be quite an affair, I suppose," he said cheerfully. "I smell envy of the officers."

Marjory caught the sarcasm and laughed merrily.

"You don't envy anyone," she challenged. "You are absolutely contented to do your duty, whatever that duty may be. You are a whole-hearted, red-blooded American soldier."

Peter turned and looked into her blue eyes with sudden seriousness.

"If I am," he said softly, "it's because you've made me one. I've known you such a little while that I'm afraid to tell you all the things that I've been thinking about you. I owe you a lot, Marjory Delmar. You've made a man of me. I've learned to play this soldier game, and it's better sport than football. Freshman year at college I was a weak-kneed sub on the team. Sophomore year I was All-American halfback. I'm not bragging, but I bet I'll have pins on my shoulders some of these days, and Pumpkin Pete will do his share toward licking the Kaiser when the time comes."

Marjory tried to speak, but her voice shook.

"I—I know, Peter."

It had come to them both all at once. The last rays of the afternoon sun fell softly on the field of goldenrod and turned the world into an unexplored paradise for these two. Peter took one of the girl's hands in his and held it several minutes before he spoke.

"I've got to tell you," he whispered at last; "I love you, Marjory. Perhaps a private should not ask a colonel's daughter to marry him, but I'm going to take the chance. You've made a man, little girl. Is he to be the happiest man on earth?"

His arms were around her and his lips had found hers before she could answer. For an instant she yielded to the embrace, and then drew back with a sharp little cry.

"Peter, Peter," she begged, "give me time to know myself. Captain Summers has asked me to marry him, and I promised to give him his answer tonight. You shall have yours, too. You won't be at the ball, but I'll send you a message, somehow. Will you wait, Peter?"

There was nothing else to do. Pump-

kin Pete was forced to go to his barracks that night at the usual time and watch the officers as they emerged from their rooms in their dress uniforms and strolled up the road to the brightly lit gymnasium. In his hand was a crumpled piece of goldenrod, and in his heart was Marjory's promise.

"You'll know tonight. I shall leave the dance at midnight—the witching hour—and go to my room. If my windows are dark at 12 o'clock my answer is 'No.' If there is a light, my answer is 'Yes.' It is easy to know one's fate on Halloween."

Taps sounded at 10 o'clock, and Peter Van Zandt, with the other privates, threw himself across a cot in the silent barracks. He thought of the events of the afternoon, and the knowledge that Marjory, his Marjory, was dancing with Captain Summers began to torture him. He wondered if, after all, she was playing a game at his expense.

After what seemed an eternity he glanced at his phosphorescent wrist-watch. It was at 10 o'clock. How childish of Marjory to insist that he wait until midnight for his answer! How absurd for a girl of her age to believe in Halloween rites! Would it never be midnight?

It was only the strength of his love that made him condemn Marjory's romantic plan. The seconds dragged like years. The silence in the barracks gave way to a chorus of rasping snores.

Getting out of bed and crawling across the barracks to the window which faced the colonel's house was an adventure which seemed to Peter fully as thrilling as creeping over a trench into No Man's Land. Three corporals and a sergeant lay slumbering between him and the spot where he should learn his fate. At one minute to 12 he pushed back his covering and slipped silently to the floor.

"She must say 'Yes,'" he told himself feverishly. "She must. I was a miserable sort of a cuss until I met that girl, but I'll do anything in the world to make her happy if she'll have me. She must."

The big clock in front of the gymnasium boomed the hour. Peter, reaching the window, heard it; Marjory, in her bungalow, heard it; and Captain Summers, returning from the ball, heard it. It was the witching hour of Halloween.

Captain Summers, passing the barracks where company 4 slept, heard something else. It was a queer noise, like a muffled shout, and he entered to discover its cause. He collided with a man in the dark.

"Here!" said Captain Summers sternly, "what does this disorder mean? Who is this prowling about at midnight?"

Van Zandt's incoherent words convinced the captain that he was a somnambulist.

"The light! The light!" he shouted. "Look out the window, captain. I'm the luckiest man in the world!"

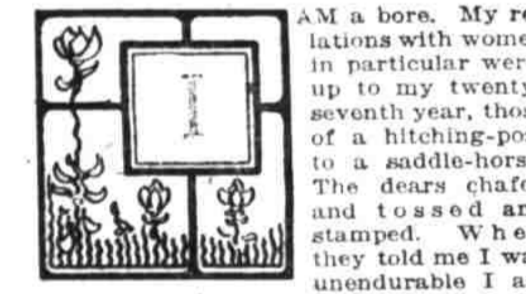
Captain Summers was in a bad humor. He glanced behind Peter, and strode wrathfully out of the barracks.

"Go back to bed, Pumpkin Pete," he flung back contemptuously; "the only light I see is a grinning jack-o-lantern in Miss Delmar's window. It looks strangely like you!"

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The Wild Bore

By ROBERT BARRON



AM a bore. My relations with women in particular were, up to my twenty-seventh year, those of a hitching-post to a saddle-horse. The dears chafed and tossed and stamped. When they told me I was unendurable I attributed their words to natural coyness; until for the first time Rose Wynne described me to myself.

I will remember the day.

I was seated opposite her in her colorful reception-room. The great lapis lazuli clock above the maroon tiles of the fireplace, the wainscoting, topped with a design in rich maroon leather, the clear blue of the ceiling hover yet before my eyes. Rose was an artist of the odd, something of a painter, and, in the wisest sense, a bohemian. She herself had laid out the colors and fittings of that rare but cozy spot.

It pleased me—enthralled me—to sit in her chair by the window while she talked from the sofa.

Perhaps I loved her; I had often told her I did. Certainly I wanted her to marry me, for she was entrancingly pretty. I had money, too—only a couple of millions, but that would have been enough.

On the particular day of which I am speaking, her hand resting beside her delicate throat, where it lay against a Russian blue velvet pillow, she broke off the course of what she was saying to remark:

"Christopher, there is only about one hope left for you—maybe not even one. I am afraid I shall have to give you up, as all the other girls have done—unless—"

My throat grew dry. I looked for a long time into her eyes without asking her to continue. I searched all over her red-brown hair, the firm, though feminine, contour of her cheek, the vivid red lips, without finding a single point to pin a thought to, except the platitude that she was lovely past enduring. All the while I would not ask for her alternative.

She continued of her own accord:

"Unless you can learn to talk as though you weren't really a bore. Why don't you try always saying the opposite of what you intended to? It would be lots more interesting. Honest, it would!"

I found my feet. For the first time within my memory hot shame rushed through my temples.

"Miss Wynne," I said hastily, "before I see you again I will indeed have discovered the fact that I am a bore."

As I made my way out she was going to remonstrate, then thought better of it.

I drove home in deep meditation, having more than once to stamp on the emergency brake, while some cop or drayman cursed me.

During the next few months I kept out of the society of women—yes, and of men for the most part. Mornings I read Mark Twain, Bill Nye, Josh Billings, and all the old and new stand-bys; studied joke books and magazines and cultivated my sense of outlandishness in the newspaper comic pages.

Afternoons I took novels that ran to conversation, in which, for the sentiments there expressed, and substituted their opposites. At the end of a week I could say to myself with profuse politeness:

"Good night, Mrs. Edmonds. I have had the devil of a slow time at this reception of yours"; or "I hope you won't dance with me, Miss Osborne"; or "I didn't play golf yesterday; and I tell you I didn't make that long seventh hole in four"—all without relaxing that pained expression which, I have noticed, a clever man is expected to wear morning, noon and night.

A month later I could temper my reversals almost with taste. I say almost, because neither I nor any of my family before me have ever possessed a particle of true sensibility. I grew more studious, than ever—read Moliere and Shakespeare for historic background—and eventually, to my surprise, became fond of the exercise of wit.

One morning in the dead of winter I awoke laughing. I seized a mirror. In it I saw the merry grin I used to wear when I laughed the glass presented to me a long, twisted bunch of features, looking as sad as a man who has just salted his coffee. And now at last I knew that I might pose as the thing I was not—a humorist.

That evening I attended a ball at the Cameron-Hales, because I knew Rose was giving an affair of her own and would not be there. I wanted to avoid meeting Rose; yet she persisted in sending me her invitations as if there had been no split between us.

Driving down by myself, I stalked in through the door just as the old Chris Cudd might have done.

Mrs. Cameron-Hale was immensely pleased to see me, she said, and asked whether I had been abroad, to account for my recent disappearance. I replied that I was glad she was glad, and hoped she would have no cause to be sorry. As for the past few months, I had dispersed myself in a quite unusual and unseemly manner. I hoped she had done the same.

After a retreat of three steps, with her mouth slightly open, Mrs. Cameron-Hale bowed distantly from that distance. I walked on, laughing—though, of course, to the company my face presented an aspect of ironical grimace only. The in-

cident, whispered around the ballroom, was received with amazement.

After a survey of the hall, with its border of gold candelabra, and the low-gowned ladies drifting from wall to wall, I strolled toward a girl who had long ago repudiated me. She stood by the blue silk curtain of a street window and, as she was looking below, did not notice me.

"Miss Acton?"

"Oh, I—I hardly recognized you! You're Mr. Cudd, aren't you?"

"By no means."

"Oh, but you know, there's no use denying it, Mr. Cudd. I wanted to look forward to the hour when he led the mare up the hill for Marjory to ride, and little by little he ceased to dread the railway in her calm voice. Army ethics prevented him from calling on her, but her

against nature. I was tricking the world and my own soul.

What was social success bought at such a price? It was a cramped and narrow world that I was trying to lose my soul for. I ran over in my mind the companions with whom I had lately associated. They were hollow, selfish, witless—everything unpleasing.

And where was Rose Wynne? On my reading table lay a pile of letters which had remained since the morning unopened. I tore the envelope of one abstractedly, strewing it, as I afterward noticed, in little pieces on the floor. Then I happened to glance at the contents—an invitation to the most aggravated ball of the season.

The highest and worst of society would be there—and Rose Wynne. She would glisten like a pearl in the sty.

I accepted.

My face grew, if possible, longer and knottier. I had made a new resolve. I would be honest with myself and the world. I would speak out, from the depths of my weariness at long-established hypocrisy, and tell the truth to all. My fall from society I would take manfully. Why had I hesitated to avoid meeting Rose, even when the term of my promise was ended, if not that I felt cleverness to be no part of me, but a hypocritical assumption? I had waited until it should become an element of my nature.

Rose was dressing when I arrived. I was led upstairs to the little blue room with the maroon wainscoting, which clung in my memory to the last detail of carved furniture and the designs on the rug. My peace of mind was gone now. I spent the next few minutes seated in a massive mission chair with Russian blue satin cushions, trying to assure myself that I was not going to lose self-control when she entered.

Nor did I lose it.

She came, all rustling silks and roses—a subdued golden yellow from head to foot. One low-hanging loop of her red-brown hair threw the neck and shoulders into a matchless harmony of color and line. I wondered at the artistic restraint with which she wore one necklace only, and a single ring, of all her topazes—for she had hundreds. She seemed so removed, so high above me as she stood there, that momentarily I forgot poor Chris Cudd's existence.

"You have not been here in a long time. Are you going to the ball?" she asked.

"I wondered if you wouldn't go with me, Chris," I ventured.

"I shall be delighted. Why haven't you come before, Chris? I expected you months ago."

We went down together to the street.

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"Do you mind if I talk a little?" I asked humbly.

She smiled full on me.

"Now Chris, what is it all about?"

"Well, then—you see, I've been a hypocrite. I've put on a lying face to the world, made believe I was clever, and fooled most of them. But when you come down to it, I'm just the same bore at heart. I have the same conceit, and the love of talking about uninteresting essentials—only now people sit around me and laugh at me. Do you see how it was that I couldn't face you? I was acting. I was a hypocrite."

"Tonight I am going to be the old Chris Cudd. I am going to brag about my golf, and say the same stupid things I used to say. Rose, they have mistaken me for a clever man. That fills my promise. Can you endure my company now on the old footing?"

"Yes, Chris; but you couldn't be the same now, no matter how hard you tried. If you read your own character you would understand how you have emerged."

We went on to the ball. It seemed