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Poor Old Uncle Ben

His Final Resolve and the Result.

By MILO HOLCROFT

"Hello, Uncle Ben!" Joe called as his buggy flashed by the loaded wagon. Uncle Ben replied to the salutation of his good looking young nephew with a surly nod. He twisted about on his load and gazed at the receding vehicle. It was she herself, and out riding with that young scamp!

She was enjoying the fellow's company, too, so much that she had only a slight bow for him.

She had never ridden with him except once at a funeral, when she went to the cemetery in his buggy because there was not room for her elsewhere.

He had imagined many times since the things he would have said to her during that ride if he had known beforehand so as to be prepared, but he had not, and the ride had been a silent one.

She was bright and talkative with Joe, though. When he recognized, with a shock of surprise, who Joe's companion was they were chattering like blue jays.

He felt wronged somehow, though he had no claim to be. But he had always meant to marry her if she would consent when he found courage to put the question.

He knew Joe was in the habit of going to her brother's, where she lived, but until that minute he had not looked upon the fellow as his rival. Joe was young and good looking, and women thought so much of those things.

Uncle Ben wasn't an old uncle at all. But he had come to think himself very venerable and aged indeed. When a person becomes an uncle before his manhood and when fate so shapes it that one must become not only uncle, but father and mother to one's nephews the responsibility conduces to a feeling of old age, even when the said nephews are not much younger than oneself.

So Uncle Ben very naturally supposed there was no chance for him at all with the woman whom he loved so truly. He even decided that he would sell his farm and go away. He brooded over it all day and with heavy pain, forgetting to make his usual sharp bargain in business.

As he drove into the gate at home toward evening Joe's buggy again appeared, and he drew up for a chat. He was in fine spirits and boyishly handsome beside Uncle Ben's rough farm clothes and soiled boots.

"Guess I'll take that cow, Uncle Ben," he said, with a conscious smile. "I expect to need her."

Uncle Ben grunted and busied himself with the gate.

"You see, I'm—oh, I might as well say it right out—I'm going to be married pretty soon."

"Settled, is it?" His uncle glanced up sharply, his face rather pale. "Well, not quite," Joe hesitated, "but she understands me well enough, and it's going to be settled tonight and the day fixed. I'm invited there to supper, and I'm sure she knows what to expect. In fact, it nearly came out this morning."

Uncle Ben said nothing, and after a moment Joe, who was accustomed to his reticent relative, started off, saying: "Milly will be glad you are our nearest neighbor. She thinks a lot of you."

Despite Uncle Ben's resignation, he felt his gay and handsome nephew's carelessly confident words as if they were so many sharp, savage thrusts from a dagger. There came a hot, suffocating sense of shame and rage into his heart that he should be thrust aside, unseen, unheard.

As he stumbled along by his team to the barnyard he was seized with a great impulse to see her and speak yet, although it was useless.

He looked about vaguely at first, then with keen calculation. Joe was still in sight. He had stopped to talk with some one, as was his social custom. He would not hurry, not dreaming of need for it.

His team was tired, and the other horses in the pasture. If he would forestall Joe he would have to go afoot across lots. And there was no time to shave and garb himself as he would have liked before going into her presence.

He tied up his horses and started. Joe was still talking when he had cleared his own farm and the next. It was two miles, but he could cut off a considerable distance by going across lots, and most of the way he could keep an eye on Joe's progress.

Over the hill a grove intervened.

As he dashed into it he caught a glimpse of Joe skimming along in the distance, seeming to fly.

Then Uncle Ben flew, too, or nearer to it than he had ever imagined it possible for him to go.

Through the grove and Donner's pasture scudded "old Uncle Ben." By that time Joe had nearly reached the half mile corner.

Old man Donner yelled to know the meaning of the wild flight. Uncle Ben waved an impatient hand and sped on, crossing the road, where he had a view of Joe's rig whirling around the corner.

From the ridge, a quarter of a mile nearer his goal, he saw with satisfaction that Joe had stopped, the center of gossiping neighbors who always gathered at Donner's.

"All their questioning and scandalizing will hinder him and help me," he soliloquized breathlessly, dashing on with renewed vigor.

The excitement of the race obliterated all other thought. "I'd lose my farm sooner than be beat," he declared, feeling a new, keen thrill in life as his supple limbs took him over the rough ground.

Just to get there and say what he had to say before Joe arrived was all his thought now. As to how it should be said, he was past thinking of that.

When he leaped the last fence Joe had disappeared behind the hedge that fringed the home stretch. Old Uncle Ben put on a last spurt.

From the sheep pasture Milly's father hailed him. Uncle Ben did not even wave in reply. The hired men stared as he rushed past the barn where they were choring.

He had no time to go around to the front. There was no time for knocking at the doors or for formalities of any sort. Away down the road he could see Joe's hat advancing rapidly.

He leaped the steps to the back porch and hurled himself into the kitchen. The fates favored him. She was at the table mixing biscuit.

"Milly—will—you—marry—me?" he panted, staggering against the wall. "Quick! Answer me! I've always meant to—have you! I love you—more 'n I've got time—to tell you. Now—quick—will you marry me?" He flung his hat down and mopped his streaming face.

She gazed at him in staring surprise, but at his hurried, panting, insistent demand she stammered with crimson bewilderment. "Why, yes, Benjamin, I don't know but I will."

"Yes? Jo—rusalem! Is it yes?" he shouted, seizing her flurried hands. "Say it again! Quick!"

"It's yes unless you're crazy, and I'm afraid you are."

"No use, Joe, you're too late! She's mine!" he exulted as Joe and the family streamed in with surprised inquiry.

Then Joe comprehended and burst into shouts of laughter. "Oh, Uncle Ben, Uncle Ben, what a blunder! But you've popped at last anyhow! Here's the Milly I'm going to marry," drawing to him the blushing young girl. "Isn't that so, sweetheart?"

Little Milly nodded, then ran and hid her face on Aunt Milly's bosom. "But I thought—you've been going with him and"—Uncle Ben began.

"Don't tell me you thought I'd take up with that fellow?" Aunt Milly said indignantly. "Well, thank fortune it's done and you've promised me! Laugh away. I'm happy!" said old Uncle Ben, casting off all his imaginary years from that moment.

Got Rid of the "Hurdles."
 Dr. Gregory of St. Paul's, London, reformed many abuses at the great cathedral, among them payment for admission, lazy officials and sleepy vergers. The fact that St. Paul's is nowadays much more truly a place of worship than a show place is principally due to the dean's enthusiasm for reform. In the days when people actually had to pay to enter the cathedral the dean found a verger erecting a barrier of hurdles to keep back the visitors.

"What are you preparing for?" asked Dr. Gregory. "Is it to be a cattle show?"

And there were no more hurdles in St. Paul's.—London M. A. P.

Badly Handicapped.
 "By golly," gurgles a casual caller; "by golly, I met the nerviest guy on the street I ever saw in my life!"

"Go ahead and tell us about it," we said wearily.

"This panhandler came up to me and said, 'Would you please help a poor man what ain't able to work?'"

"Why, you look plenty strong," says I. And, honest, he looked as if he could pick me up and throw me across the street.

"I may look strong," answers he, "an' I may be strong. I am. But I can't work."

"What keeps you from working?" says I.

"My pride."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

FLORAL ARISTOCRATS.

Orchids Are Not Parasites, and It Is Difficult to Raise Them.

Aristocrats of the flower kingdom—and probably the least understood. You hear them called parasites, which is only one of the common mistakes made about the orchid. You see a hundred different shapes and a dozen different colors grouped together, each shape perhaps a distinct family and each with a separate name.

In the first place, orchids are not parasites. A parasitical plant is one which gets nourishment from another plant. Certain orchids live on trees, but they get their food and drink from the air by means of aerial roots. We call them epiphytes. Other orchids get their nourishment directly from the ground. They're called terrestrial orchids.

People don't understand, either, why orchids cost so much. They fail to see why a tiny plant is sold for, say, \$1,000. If they realized that rare orchids may have cost a long trip into a tropical jungle to obtain and that it takes from eight to ten years to raise a plant from the seed, with patient care and treatment, they could see why these flowers remain in the aristocratic class.

Only the orchid grower can understand all the details of his art, but the flower lover can easily learn to distinguish the various types.—Philadelphia North American.

THIS FISH IS A BUTCHER.

And He Carries His Saw in His Ugly Mouth at All Times.

Moral of this fish story is: The value of anything depends on how it is used. A safety match used to light a beacon lamp and another match used to set fire to a city have widely separated ranks in the realm of utility. On the same principle of values the sawfish belongs near the bottom rank in the ocean kingdom.

His saw, the presence of which you may have guessed already, consists of a long, beaklike mouth decorated with many sharp, firm spines. It varies in length with the size of the fish, some monsters twenty feet long carrying saws six feet long and a foot wide.

A saw, like a match, varies in value according to the way it is used. That's where the sawfish makes a fiasco of life. Think how much good he could accomplish by using his saw on harbors choked up with weeds, channels blocked with logs and lagoons crowded with trees and undergrowth.

Instead of a carpenter, a road builder, a farmer, the sawfish becomes a butcher. He swishes his saw this way and that quite recklessly and cuts up smaller fish into steaks and sausage; then he eats the pieces.—Philadelphia North American.

The Better Ways.
 Let it be said once for all that it is better for both body and soul to be obliged to go hungry sometimes than to be full always; it is wholesome to be weary frequently from hard work than to keep on a dead level of comfort or to know weariness only from the spinning dance and the daily pleasure; it is cleaner to be dusty and bathed in the blood and sweat of battle than to be so sheltered as not to know the meaning of a hand to hand conflict with a real problem or fierce temptation; it is grander to break the shackles of exclusiveness and walk free in the dingy city of social unpopularity than to be the idol of men and women who do not count for, but rather against, the progress of the race.—From "The Inspiration of Responsibility," by Bishop Charles H. Brent.

Meteors.
 Meteors had an unusual influence on the Greeks and Romans, who in a way worshiped the falling bodies of luminosity. It is declared that the Palladium of Troy and the image of Diana at Ephesus were erected to meteors. At times the fall of these mysterious strangers has been accompanied by disastrous results, for it is on record in China that ten persons have been struck and killed by them. The Smithsonian Institution has among its meteoric collections one which weighs in the neighborhood of 500 pounds, whose composition is nearly pure nickel. There have been discovered by chemical analysis twenty-nine elements in meteors, all of which are found on and in the earth.

Cats and Needles.
 Cats seem to have a habit of swallowing needles. When a cat is brought to a veterinary hospital suffering with a cough the doctor always looks for a needle. In one instance Dr. Childs of New York operated on a cat to remove what he thought was an ordinary needle. He found a hatpin nine inches long. But the cat's life was saved.—Popular Science Monthly.

This Modern Moses.
 "What's your idea of a party leader?" "A party leader," replied Senator Borah, "is a man who finds out what the people want."

"And then gives it to them?" "No; promises it."—Washington Star.

Pleasant Words.
 Poet—I seek a phrase that shall express the joy of life in two words. Can you suggest anything? Unfeeling Friend—Received payment.—Judge.

Without an Effort.
 Jack—Did your friend, Miss Howler, ever reach high C? Maud—Yes; one day at the dentist's I believe she did.—Boston Transcript.

Even the man who thinks he knows it all may change his mind after he gets married.—Philadelphia Record.



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Thursday, June 8th
 Annual Floral Pageant at 2 P. M.
Friday, June 9th
 Military, Fraternal and Civic Pageant, 10 A. M.
 Chinese Baby Show and Parade, 8:30 P. M.
 Costume Parade, Mardi Gras features in evening.
 Many other attractions not mentioned above.

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