Mother's Day

Remember Her on Sunday Next

May 11, 1930

The Acton Free Press

THURSDAY, MAY 8, 1930

BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

If you have a grey-haired mother
In the old home far away,
Sit down and write the letter
You put off, day by day.
Don't wait until her tired steps
Reach heaven's pearly gate,
But show her that you think of her
Before it is too late.

If you've a tender message
Or a loving word to say,
Don't wait till you forget it
But whisper it to-day.
Who knows what bitter memories
May haunt you if you wait?
To make your loved ones happy
Before it is too late.

We live but in the present
The future is unknown;
To-morrow is a mystery,
To-day is all our own.
The chance that fortune leads to us
May vanish while we wait,
So spend your life's rich pleasure
Before it is too late.

The tender word unspoken,
The letters never sent,
The long-forgotten messages,
The wealth of love unspent,
For these some hearts are breaking,
For these some loved ones wait,
So show them that you care for them
Before it is too late.

Another Short Story

What the Man in the Moon Saw

C. A. STEPHENS

IT was one of the last years we did lumbering up in the Flagstaff region. The winter's cut of spruce had gone down Dead River to the Kennebec, and the Old Squire had driven up from home to pay off the river-drivers and had taken me with him—for this was after Addison, Halstead and the girls had left the farm, and the old gentleman was there alone again, except for such assistance as the present writer—then about nineteen—could give him.

There was a crew of twenty-eight of the river-men; and it is doing them no injustice to say they were rough fellows, noisy, sometimes quarrelsome, especially so after they were paid off for their season's work and, as was often the case, some sneaking bootlegger had found his way to them with intoxicants. There wasn't much then that anyone could do save to let them alone. They had taken possession of the little tavern where we had put up while adjusting their accounts; and after supper that night they were "celebrating" after their own fashion. The hubbub was prodigious. Some were roaring forth songs, some crowing like roosters others dancing jigs, the calks of their driver's boots splintering the floor. The crockery at the supper table suffered. Two chairs had crashed. High words rose at intervals, and there had been several scuffles.

To be out of the noise, the Old Squire walked out to the road which passed the tavern door. "It's their way of having a good time, I suppose," he said. "But crazy men couldn't behave worse. It's the same every year when they come off the drive. I'm afraid we shall get no sleep here."

Dusk was falling. But for the uproar in the tavern behind us, the night was very calm—the stillness of the northern wilderness when its burden of winter snow first goes off. At a distance the swollen river sent its low, hoarse murmur across the forest. A few frogs, after their long, cold slumbers, were raising tiny voices, lulling each other in the twilight; and afar, a little saw-whet owl began its measured orake. Then came a louder outburst of howls from the exhilarated crew inside the open tavern door. The Old Squire turned to listen.

"My son," what say to driving home to-night instead of stopping here?" he said suddenly. "'Tis thirty-eight miles, but the night isn't cold. The moon will be up in a little while. Our horse has been standing all day. I believe I would rather do it and be at home in the morning than stay here." The idea pleased me immensely. "Well, then," the Old Squire cried, "you run and hitch up Whistle (our driving horse). I will go indoors; settle our bill and get our coats."

We had bought half a dozen bushel baskets that afternoon from an Indian basket-maker who lived near the tavern—baskets woven from ash strip. After hitching up, I set the baskets together and lashed them on behind the buckboard seat. The Old Squire came out, and we set off, glad to get away into the restful quiet of the spring night.

"You may drive," he said; "perhaps your eyes are sharper than mine." And then for some minutes he sat silent beside me as I guided Whistle along the narrow, dark road, which, indeed, was little better than a trail. "Oh, well, I suppose we must never allow ourselves to be discouraged about the human race," he said at length, and I knew he was thinking of the noisy crew we had just left at the tavern. "But improvement comes slow, painfully slow, and sometimes we grow disheartened because we fail to witness in one short lifetime that progress which only comes in the course of centuries. Patience is what we need to cultivate, patience and faith. I hardly hope to live long enough to see intoxicants abolished," he added. "But that will come in time."

A silvery radiance began to show above the eastern horizon, and ere long the full moon slowly poked up its round, ruddy face over the black tops of the spruce woods, preternaturally big and strangely like a human countenance. The Old Squire laughed. "The man in the moon is looking at us," said he. "Looks jolly, to-night, as if out for a frolic." He laughed again. "A full moon like that always makes me feel cattish, as if I would like to play hide-and-seek. When I was a boy, the young folks played hide-and-seek a good deal by moonlight. Hide-and-seek, we called it then, for when the one who 'blinded' had counted a hundred he shouted 'Ready,' and all who had hidden cried, 'Coop.' Then the search for the hidden ones began, in the barns and about the corncribs and haystacks. There is something in moonlight that makes us feel antic."

Whistle trotted rapidly on; he had been homesick and was glad to get away from the wild uproar at the tavern. As we drew near Duck Pond, six miles on our way, voices were heard ahead, and the glare of a fire came in view. Pulling up at the log bridge over a brook that flowed into the pond, we saw torches along the brook bed. A party of young fellows were there, spearing suckers, which at this season come up certain streams by night, to deposit their spawn. By waiting till about an hour after dark and then obstructing the channel near the pond great numbers of these fish can often be speared.

The birch-bark torches lit up the water; the fishers, each with his torch in one hand and his four-pronged spear in the other, were leaping briskly to and fro, and the thud of the iron points among the stones rang out sharply. On both sides, the banks were already "aflop" with the impaled fish.

As we sat watching the scene, one of the young torch-bearers approached so near that Whistle snorted at the sputter of the blazing bark. "Don't you want some suckers?" the youngster shouted to us. "They're big."

Big ones they were; and for a twenty-five cent piece he filled one of our bushel baskets from the squirming heaps on the bank. Numbers of these suckers would have weighed three pounds apiece.

Then for two hours or more Whistle trotted on, the moon mounting higher, frogs peeping and now and again an owl hooting in the forest depths. Twice our horse stopped short as if fearing to go on, and we surmised there was a bear not far away. Presently we heard one give its quite human-sounding outcry at a distance. Once as two porcupines scuttled across the road a lynx, evidently in pursuit of them, uttered its raspy screech from a near-by thicket. All the wild denizens of the forest were astir, seeking their prey or the companionship of their kind.

"An hour later we emerged into settlement along the intervale of Wild Stream, where they were five farms and a sawmill, a neighborhood quaintly known as "Jericho." At the first of these habitations the good people were apparently abed and asleep; not a light glimmered from a window. And now a roguish idea, inspired by the moon, perhaps, occurred to the Old Squire.

"What if we leave them a mess of suckers?" he said laughing. "We can put them in one of these new baskets and set it by the house door. When they find that basket, and suckers in the morning, they will wonder where in the world they came from! When they quiz their neighbors about the basket, and find it doesn't belong to any of them, they will wonder still more! It will be a mystery in Jericho."

So we pulled up, put a half-dozen of the suckers in one of the new bushel baskets, which I deposited gently on the doorstep, then stole back to the buckboard.

For some reason, the humor of this prank appealed to the Old Squire that night. "Let's not show partiality in Jericho," he said. "It's rather expensive in bushel baskets. But never mind. We can get more. Let's leave a mess of suckers at every house here."

Accordingly we pulled up at the next farm. Here, too, all was dark and still; and, counting out six more suckers in another basket, I left it on the doorstep, and we walked Whistle on to the next place. It was there the sawmill was located. We knew the name of the folks there, having once called on our way up to the lumber camps. It was Kilburn. The man was a prosperous farmer and millman, with a large family of girls. The sawmill was on the stream just across the road from the farm. The latter consisted of a house and long ell, at the far end of which were a shed and a large barn. The mill was on the west side of the highway, and the farm on the east side. About the mill were numerous piles of freshly-sawn lumber, slabs and edgings, all showing quite clearly in the moonlight. Water was pouring through the sluiceway of the dam. Otherwise all seemed quiet. On passing the house, however, we saw that here the people were astir. Late as was the hour, two front windows of the ell were brilliantly alight.

"We must be cautious here," the Old Squire whispered; and what we did was to pass the house for two or three hundred yards, before stopping. I was of the opinion that the old gentleman had better remain at the buckboard and hold Whistle while I went softly back, but did not like to tell him so, and he kept with me. He appeared to be renewing his youth that night! Accordingly we tied Whistle to a tree by the roadside, at the edge of the woods, then went back with our basket. The curtains of the two lighted windows were not drawn, and on approaching the door we could hardly kept seeing what was going on inside. The Kilburn girls must have had the company of their neighbors, that night, for there, sitting about a long table, all busily engaged cutting and weaving strips of gay-colored paper into some sort of airy fabrics; and, as this was about the first of May, we guessed at once that their ornate creations were May baskets, for use at May-night frolics.

Afterward, I had little doubt that those Jericho girls were gathered there, and sitting up late, in expectation of May-night calls.

After a single hasty glance inside, I stole forward to deposit our basket of fish on the doorstep, the Old Squire remaining a few steps behind. The glare from the windows was in our eyes, and in setting the large basket on the stone step I inadvertently jarred a tin pail that had been left, bottom up, at one end of it. I think those girls must have been listening. Slight as was the sound, they apparently heard it; yet even so, how eight girls contrived to rush forth so quickly is still a mystery! We had scarcely taken three strides before the door flew open and they were out, laughing, shouting and chasing us—for it is a part of the old Mayday game to catch the fellow that hangs a May basket.

We were badly taken by surprise. Our plan hadn't provided for this. I durst not speak aloud to the Old Squire, nor he to me. Aware, perhaps, that his legs were not quite what they once were, the old gentleman dodged round the corner of the house, then hooked it across the road to the cover of a lumber pile beside it, and from that, slid down a great heap of sawdust at the lower end of the mill and hid beneath the mill floor. But I had sprinted straight away down the road, to reach our buckboard, and, though hotly pursued by three of the girls who ran like veritable Atalantas, I succeeded in casting off Whistle's halter, jumping on the buckboard and escaping, though not without a poignant sense of anxiety as to what was happening to the Old Squire, who had disappeared, I hardly knew how or where. One of those sharp-eyed girls had caught a glimpse of him, however, as he crossed the road, and five of them were after him among the board piles; but he got to cover beneath the mill floor and, scrambling over still greater heaps of the dry sawdust that lay under it, dug himself in, so to speak, far back and to considerable depth, then lay still. But, of this, of course, I knew nothing.

My pursuers did not follow far, after I reached the buckboard. "Oh, we know you, Jim Brown!" one of them called out several times. "We know you, if you have got a new cap. Had to come with your horse, didn't you? Didn't dare to trust your own legs!" another cried, mockingly. Evidently I was mistaken for some one they know well.

As soon as I was sure they had turned back, I pulled up, hitched Whistle again and followed them softly, keeping to the shadows of the trees beside the road. I was consumed by anxiety about the Old Squire. I guessed now that he had run to the sawmill, for I heard the girls calling out to one another there; and I was afraid he might have tried to cross the stream on the mill dam and fallen in. At that season of the year the water was high. I stole nearer, through alder clumps, till I came within easy hearing distance, then listened intently. Judging from the voices, all eight of the girls were now at the mill, searching diligently. "Oh, we know you are hid here, somewhere, Mark Jordan!" cried one. "You may as well come out. You haven't fooled us by wearing that long coat and big hat!" another cried, laughing. "Emma saw you scud across the road. She knew you."

For some time longer the search went on, in and out among the piles of lumber and slabs, and in every dark nook and corner of the mill. Then they crept down the bank and looked under the mill floor, among the wheels and sawdust heaps. "If you've buried yourself up here, you had better come out," I heard one of them cry; and then they got sticks of edging and appeared to be prodding the heaps.

Where or in what plight the Old Squire was, I couldn't imagine. Apparently these girls believed he was Mark Jordan and was hidden somewhere thereabouts. At length two of them crossed over on the dam and searched the log piles and bushes on the other side of the stream. Afterward, they all stood around a long while in the moonlight, shouting occasional exhortations to the supposed Mark to come forth and show himself.

What to do, I hardly knew. If the Old Squire was safe, it was best, of course, for both of us to keep still; but I was dreadfully afraid something had befallen him. For a man of seventy-eight, he was active; but of course seventy-eight isn't twenty. I began to be afraid he might have had a bad fall among the logs below the dam or slipped off them into rapid water.

It seemed to me those girls would never go back indoors! Two of them stood on top of a board pile, watching the mill and everything about it. I began to fear they would remain there till morning! At last it occurred to me that the Old Squire might have reached the woods on the far side of the stream and made a circuit around to the road below, where we had left the horse. In that case he would be waiting for me there; and upon that, I hastened back where I had last hitched Whistle. But he was not there, and again I stole back up the road toward the mill. I was now really alarmed; and my resolution was as good as taken to hail the girls, reveal our identity and ask them to aid me in looking the Old Squire up. Before I came in sight of the mill, however, I saw some one stealing down the road in the shadow of the woods, and was vastly relieved a moment later to hear the old gentleman speak. The girls, it appeared, had at last given up the hunt, and gone into the house. He was laughing, and he looked very dusty in the moonlight.

"Well, they didn't catch us, did they?" were his first words—with the grin of a boy eighteen; and as I brushed him off a bit he told me of his predicament under the mill. "I thought at one time they would surely find me!" he said. "They stuck sticks down all around me. Once they hit my leg; and one of them crept clean over me, pawing in the heap with her hands. I was nearly smothered. They were bent on capturing Mark Jordan."

We drove on,—the moon riding at its full height in the heavens,—and owing to our escapade in Jericho we did not reach home till nearly seven in the morning.

"It may be just as well not to say too much about this," the Old Squire remarked, with a droll glance at my face, as we drove up the lane. "Your grandmother, you know, has rather strict ideas about the behavior of old people. She might think this much worse than it really was."

I fully agreed with him; but we came near exposure at the start. Breakfast was ready on the table; and after putting up Whistle we went directly in, grandmother greeting the Old Squire with a caress, as usual, after such absences from home. But something about his hair and his raiment instantly attracted her attention.

"Why, Joseph, your hair is full of something that looks like sawdust!" she exclaimed. "Your clothes, too, are all covered with it! And, my sakes! both pockets of your coats are full of it. Where have you been?"

"Well, Ruth, the fact is we were rather busy for an hour or two at a sawmill up the country," the Old Squire replied with an all-wise glance across at me. "I should say 'busy'!" the old lady cried, brushing at his sleeves. "Go come to the woodbox while I empty your pockets. You must have worked awfully hard!" she added. "And at your age, Joe, do you think it is quite prudent to exert yourself like that, nights?"

"Perhaps not," the Old Squire said. "I'm afraid I'm getting a little old for such jobs; but a sudden emergency arose—and it seemed to be a work of necessity."

The dear old lady looked a little puzzled, not wholly satisfied. In fact, we barely escaped by.

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