The Free Press Short Story

THE BUGGIN'

GERTRUDE WEST

Stary sang from the kitchen a hired hand. Above his light shirt and porch where she was hanging dusty blue serge a thin, whimsical face, up disheloths to dry.

Grandpap Cummings from stooping above the rank young rows of beans and stood listening.

"Ain't that the truth?" he said as he

caught the words of his granddaughter's song. "I'd defy anybody," he thought, "to walk through a good, clean; thrifty garden and not go out a happier man." His eyes, following the straight weedless rows, rested proudly on coarse-stemmed, wide-leafed cucumber vines, close, ruffly green lines of lettuce, and straight young corn, with its flowing silk tossed thrifty eyes a puffy pink bug clinging

He looked a roly-poly Santa Chaus as he stood there among the trim rows. Hale at seventy, with shrewd eyes, he had been for years the head and adviser of his widowed daughter's home.

gate behind him. "I was just thinking," he said to her, "of the dimes and quarters that hang

pretty." "Dimes, and quarters!" she repeated well take hold." jestingly. "Things don't have to have value to look pretty, to my notion."

"Sure not. But then I was always mental. There's all the color in a squash hand for the tin can and the stick that flower that there is in a nasturtium, and Grandpap was offering. besides there's the squash coming on." from my squashes."

"If everybody saw things alike, the world would be full of one-eyes, but I hand so that he might not be tempted like to look ahead. Take the potato to "shirk on him." Grandpap found so pretty if it wasn't making music with manner of locomotion. singing lessons for Alice and Alicia."

her twin daughters' confidence than had was not swifter than his practiced eye their grandfather. "Is that what they ve the pink bugs fairly beating a tattoo on set their hearts on?"

Grandpap modded, holding up a finger for silence as from the house there came drifting again a fragment of Alice's song, joined now by Alicia's higher trill.

declared, "and if singing school starts that plan, but a pair of extra-good legs next week, I've made up my mind they and a passable voice is the limit of her are going to it."

"That's right," agreed Sarah Stacy, originally intended for a buil frog." straightening from her hoeing. "If we i "A good voice ain't to be sneezed at, can take off a load of early potatoes conceded Grandpap. "Do you mean you Monday, that'll start the girls in on their sing?" lessons. And if middling wet weather lasts us up into the summer and the my other natural attribute serves me well pests don't get the potato patch, we'll I'm endeavoring to wade through colhave plenty to see them through."

Together father and daughter stepped across the abundant dew-wet rows to the potato patch. There Sarah, stooping to examine the thrifty vines, gave a cluck of dismay. For, clinging to the under potato patch and upon the backs of side of the leaves as she turned them stooping workers. Alicia paused now over, was a plump coral-colored parasite and again to mop the perspiration from which Grandpap recognized as Colorado her pretty face, blow an expressive beetle, the bame of the potato grower.

for a glimpse at the menace and straightened at once, the glint of action in his task, and Alice, moving lightly along the

all there is to it," he announced. "Right she began unconsciously to hum a little after dinner we'll hustle out with the tune, which gradually increased in twins and make a short job of it." Sarah nodded absently to her father's softly, to herself. cheerful conclusion, but her thin face

wore an unusual pucker. "Tve engaged, to help Mrs. Colville "The little girl has a sweet voice," he with her cleaning this afternoon," she commented. explained, "and I hate to fail her. I "That's so," Grandpap agreed. "That's always feel that my word's as good as one reason why we're so bound to save my bond, but if you and the girls can the potato crop. Singing school opens get out, Father, I'll pick up somebody on next week and we want the twins to the road to Colville's and send him to take." help in my place."

"Go shead, Sarah. Wouldn't have you alert, broke in at that. fail a neighbor. Hands ought to be easy "I'm crazy to take," she declared, to get. Some one was telling me the "but I dread the starting in. We don't, new family that's moved in below has know the first thing about notes, and strapping big boys. I don't give a hoot I do hate to look green." whother they're friend or stranger, just "Hi-ho," said the young man. He so's they can bug."

had to do was drive up ond down the at that corn over yonder, look at me. rows and hold a rubber hose."

"Yes, and a sprayer costs money, and Alice, hearing the bantering voice poison comes high," responded Grand- paused and glanced curiously back. pap cheerfully; "and two good hands

help them better themselves." with an old tin can and a sharp little nothing to that." stick. Bending industriously to the long As he spoke, he was selecting eight on the smudge of smoldering straw they he had drawn in the dirt, and upon the had lighted at one end of the patch.

Sarah had been gone perhaps an hour "This"—he pointed out the parallel and the "buggin" was progressing lines-"is a stairway going up, and this steadily if a little slowly when Grand small family I have here"—he indicated pap looked up to see a stranger advanc- the carefully stationed bugs - "are "all ing toward the potato patch.

"Here comes the hand, girls," he called have learned the children's names and guardedly. "Well, he can cover con- their relative places on the staircase you

have/a long way to stoop." The young man who with some dif- made a wide flourish- to introduce to floulty has untangling his long legs from you my family in the order of their the barb-wire sence which protected the retirement." And, in a surprisingly good

*************** TANK God for a garden," Alice garden was dressed a bit elaborately for

> eyes behind huge shell-rimmed glasses, In spite of the clothes, the pleasant and instructor back to work. non-descript features and gawky length

friendly fashion to the young man. "Mr. Cummings?" the visitor inquired. "Culpepper is my name. I was sent

here by Mrs. Stacy." "Yes," put in Grandpap briskly,flicker of breeze had just shown to h to a sprawling plant, and he was anxious

to be on with the good work,-"Sarah said she'd send somebody. You can see before you what you're expected to do.' The blue eyes behind the big glasses blinked and the young man started to Barah came with her hoe through the speak, but Grandpap cut him short once

"It ain't much of a job, and it don't take brains-just plenty of pep." h on these bushes and make them so stated briskly. "Here's your can, and here's your bug stick. You'd just as

If the young man had at first intended to speak, he had changed his mind.

With a smile he threw aside his coat one to like things useful as well as orna- and, rolling up his sleeves, held out a

"If it doesn't take brains," he said His daughter shook her head. "Flow- "then I'm your man, and 'pep' is my ers are flowers, and I like them separate middle name—the middle syllable of my name, to be accurate. Lead on." Keeping discreetly close to the new

patch over yonder; it wouldn't be half himself envying the young man's efficient jackknife over his work, he went down "Singing lessons?" She had less of the rows with a long straddling gait that

the bottom of his tin can.

"You are a hustler," Grandpap said at last in kindly praise.

"Nature intended me to hustle," returned the young man with a glance "There are no two prettier voices," he down at his long legs. "I am built-on endowments. I sometimes fancy I was

"In summer time, yes. And in winter

"H'm," said Grandpap, vaguely im-"That's kind of funny."

"Yes," agreed the young man, "it is. The warm sun shone down on the "wh-ue" between pursed red lips and Grandpap stooped beside his daughter declare it the hottest day of the season Grandpap bent rheumatically to his rows, was silent and pleasantly occupied volume till she was singing aloud, if

> The hired man working near Grand pap pricked up his ears.

Alicia, loltering near, her young ears

sat back on his heels, his tin can ir Dinner was a bustling meal. The one hand, the little wooden scraper in twins accepted the situation as a matter the other, and turned his wide, engaging grin upon Alicia. "Everything and "Mr. Colville sprayed his potatoes with everybody is green at some time in life. bug polson," Alice commented. "All he Look at these fine young potatoes—look

Alicia giggled.

The young man had stooped and with were put on every one of this family to the aid of his "bug stick" was drawing some parallel lines in the soft black By the time Sarah set out for the earth. "I "took" at singing school once neighbor's the other members of the myself," he was saying, "and as to family were already affeld, each provided dreading to start, there's positively

green rows, they scraped the fat pink plump pink bugs from his tin can and insects from the leaves, to deposit them placing them accurately upon the lines intervening spaces.

dutiful children going to bed. When you siderable space at one step, but he will will have mastered the first lesson in singing school. Allow me" - and he

insect in turn:

"Do. Re. Mi. Fa. Sol La. Sl. Do." sniggered appreciatively. "And you say that's all there is to singing lessons?

You're joking."

together now."

And, taking a careful, pitch, the smouldering straw. "hand" led off, followed by the lusty voices of the fifteen-year-old twins, warbling the major scale.

was suspended while the workers crowd- have all dallied along considerable, but ed round, studying and discussing the it's helped to pass over a tiresome job; Father you and the girls? with wide comical mouth and twinkling hired man's diagram.

pleased Grandpap. "He looks biddeble," progressed rapidly in the acquaintance than right." he commented to himself as he modded in of the staircase family, and they kept - But the stranger shock his head and vigilant watch upon it all the remain- made no move to take the money.

would shrick, and then would ensue a own,"

tenor, he sang slowly, indicating each hilarious poking to restore the delinquent to his proper place.

Or it would be Do who was unruly, group, he lifted a wonderful mellow "Well, now!" gasped Grandpap. He With such digressions it was well on to- voice. ward dusk before the "buggin'" was

ened their tired backs and looked with went striding away across the field. of satisfaction back over the sturdy green teachers don't illustrate in quite this rows. The enemy had been circum- wide-eyed after him. "If that ain't the way, but the principle is the same. All vented. Even Do, Re, Mi, and the rest boniest hired man ever I come u had at last been deposited upon the against!"

The hired man put on his coat. Grandpap thrust a hand into After that, the afternoon's bugging he conceded genially. "To be sure, you her crisp voice called out to them:

so I've nothing more to say." old man thought and hustled both pupils the "hand."

"I'm payin' you for a full half-day," not get around any sooner." But already the young people had he stated magnanimously. "It's no more Grandpap stared blankly at

"I feel myself well paid already," he here?" "Sol is rolling off his step." Alicia answered. "I have no garden of my

And, standing there in the sweetsmelling dusk, before the startled little

then who was that 'loony' you

that young Mr. Culpepper, the singing serenity. "Nothing out of the road that

""Thank God for a garden," he sang. Then, before the marveling audience At last, however, the workers straight- could speak or move, he turned and

The little group on their preoccupied way to the house were still marveling pocket. "The job's done and done well." Sarah's wagon sounded at the gate and

couldn't find a hand to send in my place "He's just dailying to make time," the He held out some jingling change to I figured on getting back in time to help you some with the bugging, but I could

"Couldn't find a hand? Why, Sarah, at the stricken twins,

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teacher that was getting signers for term of singing lessons. I told him to come up and see you, Grandpap; about

his signing up for the twins." Grandpap gazed at his daughter and that has no garden might count it a

have you done?" "Why, I didn't send anybody-except | Then Grandpap abruptly recovered his

"Oh, Grandpap," breathed Alice, "what

can see. His work was a free-will offering, and he got a good bit of fun out of it, as far as I noticed. And a body privilege, nothing less, to work a spell in a trim, neat patch like ours. I gues the afternoon hasn't been wasted-for

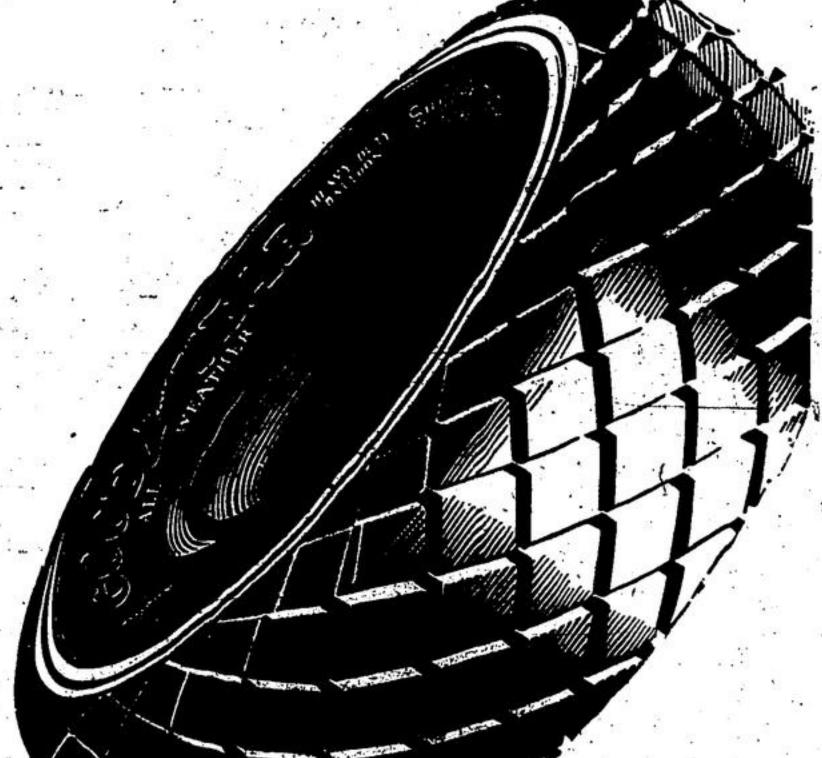


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