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Uncle Terry

By CHARLES CLARK MUNN

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

BLANCH had kept her threat and literally taken possession of her new friend and installed her in the guest room of the Nason residence. To be taken in hand, as it were, by a cultured and wealthy young lady, and to have a liveried and obsequious coachman on duty to convey them anywhere and everywhere was a new experience. It was not long ere Alice began to feel herself quite at home in the Nason family and to notice that Mrs. Nason treated her in a motherly way.

"I see that you are fond of your little charges," she said, after Alice had described her school and some of the peculiarities of her pupils who wore outgrown roundabouts or calico pinafores, "and I suppose they grow fond of you as well."

"I try to make them," replied Alice, "and I find that is the easiest way to govern them. I seldom have to punish any one. In a way, children are like grown people, and a little tact and a few words said in the right way are more potent than fear of punishment."

"And do you not find life in so small a place rather monotonous?" asked Mrs. Nason.

"Oh, yes," replied Alice, "it is not much like city life. It is delightful to have theaters and the excitement of social duties, as I imagine you have all the time, and yet I am not sure I should like it. I fancy once in a while I should sigh for a shady spot in the woods in summer where I could read a book or hear the birds sing. It is only in winter that I should like to live in the city."

Alice's stay in Boston passed rapidly until only two days were left, when Blanch said to her, "I have invited a few of my friends here to meet you tonight, and I want you to sing for me."

"Oh, please do not ask that," replied Alice hastily. "I do not sing well enough."

"But you sing in church, and that is much harder."

"That is nothing," answered Alice, smiling. "Not one in ten of those country people know one note from another. Here all your friends hear the finest operatic singers, and I would cut a sorry figure in contrast."

"But you will sing just once to please me, won't you?" pleaded Blanch.

"I will not promise. I will see how many are here and how my courage holds out."

When that evening came Blanch waited until Alice had become somewhat acquainted with the little gathering and the reserve had worn away, when she went to her and, putting one arm around her waist, whispered, "Come, now, dear, just one little song: only one to please me." At first Alice thought to refuse, but her pride came to the rescue, and the feeling that she would show her friend that she was not a timid country girl gave her the needed courage, and she arose and stepped across the room to the grand piano that stood in one corner. Her cheeks were flushed, and a defiant curl was on her lips, and then without a moment's hesitation she seated herself and sang "The Last Rose of Summer."

She had sung it many, many times before, and every trill and exquisite quiver of its pathos was as familiar to her as the music of the brook where she had played in childhood. She sang as she never had before, and to an audience that listened entranced. When the last sweet note had passed her red lips, she arose quickly and returned to her seat. Two little tears stole out of Mrs. Nason's eyes, to be quickly brushed away with a priceless bit of lace. Sweet Alice, the motherless little country girl, had from that moment entered the heart of Mrs. Nason. When the applause had subsided, it was Frank that next pleaded.

"Won't you sing one for me now, Miss Page?" he asked. "I bought the song I wanted today." And, going to the piano, he unrolled and spread upon the music rack—"Ben Bolt!"

"But I only consented to sing once for Blanch," Alice replied, "and there are others here who I am sure can do much better."

"Come, please," he said coaxingly. "Just this one for me." And once more Alice touched the keys.

Back to a simply furnished parlor in Sandgate, with its lamp on the piano and open fire burning brightly as it had one year ago, went two of that company in thought, and maybe others there, whose youth had been among country scenes, were carried back to them by the singer's voice and saw a byway schoolhouse "and a shaded nook by a running brook" in fancy, or perhaps a little white stone in some grassy corner, where, "obscure and alone," lay a boyhood's sweetheart!

All the pathos of our lost youth thrilled in the voice of Alice Page as she sang that old, old song. Not one in that little audience but was enthralled by the winsome witchery of her voice and for the moment was young again in thought and feeling. When the guests had departed Mrs. Nason turned to Alice and, taking her face in her hands, exclaimed, "I want to kiss the lips that have brought tears to my eyes tonight."

The last evening of her visit she decided to spend with her brother, and when she came to bid adieu to her hostess that much dreaded haughty mother had resolved herself into a charming lady.

"It is odd, Bertie," she said to her brother that evening when they were alone together, "how different people seem when one comes to know them. From one or two things which you have said and an admission that Frank made a year ago I felt I should be sure to hate his mother, and now I think she is perfectly lovely."

"So she is to those she likes," answered Albert. "You carried her heart by storm last evening as well as the rest of the company. I never heard you sing so well."

"I am glad I didn't break down, anyway," she replied, "for when I touched the piano my heart seemed in my mouth."

For an hour they discussed the Nasons, while Albert noticed his sister avoided any mention of Frank, and then he said: "Well, sis, which of the places we have looked at do you think I best engage, and when will you be ready to move?"

Alice pursed her lips and looked at the shipwreck scene near her as if it contained a revelation.

"I am not so sure," she answered finally, "that we should make the change at present. If I were certain your beautiful waif of the sea would adhere to her filial resolution, it would be different. If you secure this legacy for her that you told me about and she donates it to those old people, as you say she intends to, the next thing will be an invitation to my dear brother's wedding. That is one reason why I hesitate to make this change. Another is that I do not think it would be good for Aunt Susan. She says she is willing, but when she has left all the associations of her life behind she will just sit and grieve her poor old heart away in silence."

"My dear sister, have you considered Frank in your calculations?" Alice's blue eyes assumed an expression like unto a pansy and her face the placidity of a mill pond as she answered, "I had quite forgotten his existence!"

CHAPTER XL.
WHEN on the morning of her departure from Boston Alice stood beside the train exchanging the usual goodby words with her brother, she was surprised at being joined by Blanch and Frank. The former brought her a basket of lunch, sent with her mother's compliments, and the latter an elaborate bouquet of flowers.

"I want to kiss you goodbye," said Blanch, and when the two had embraced, Alice kissed her brother and took her seat. No one apparently noticed that Frank was not on the platform when the train started, and when it was well under way Alice was astonished to see him enter the car.

"You will not object to my company home, will you?" he asked. "I thought you might be lonesome, and as I have not had a chance to talk to you since you came to Boston I decided to go up with you. I can come back on the night train, or if you prefer to ride alone I can get off at the next station."

"Oh, no; I am very glad of your company," she replied, "and it was good of you to think of it. It is a long ride, and I have had such a nice time I should have been disappointed. You did not know," she added archly, "that one reason I came to Boston was to look at flats. Bert wants us to come here and keep house for him—Aunt Susan and me."

"And are you going to do it? I hope so, for that would give me a chance to take you to the theaters."

"No, the plan is off for the present," she answered. "Not but that I would like to, but we think it is not best for Aunt Susan."

For an hour they trundled along through the snow clad country, chatting commonplaces, and then Alice said, "Did you meet the island girl last summer that you told me Bert had fallen in love with?"

"Only once. Bert invited her and the old lady on board the Gypsy and introduced them. They remained only long enough to look the yacht over. I left that day."

"What did you think of this girl?" asked Alice hastily. "Tell me what she looks like."

"She has a beautiful figure and eyes like yours, which you know are what I admire, only they are not so full of mischief. They have a faraway look that makes you think her thoughts are a thousand miles away."

"How was she dressed?"

"Oh, I haven't the least idea," was the answer. "She might have worn calico for all I could tell. The only thing I can remember is that her dress was tight fitting and very plain."

Alice smiled. "Those faraway eyes must have entranced you, your description is so lucid," she replied sarcastically. "How long did Bert stay there after you came away?"

"Only a few days. I never asked him. I told him to keep and use the Gypsy as long as he wanted, and then I cut stick for Blanch and—Sandgate."

He seemed to dwell upon the little outing, and Alice, noticing this, fought shy of the subject.

"Well, how do you like my haughty mother now," he asked, "if that is a fair question?"

"I think she is the most gracefully charming hostess I ever met, and you ought to be proud of her. You conveyed a wrong impression of her to me the first time I met you."

"I am sorry if I did," replied Frank. "I did not mean to. Mother fell in love with you the night you sang, and I knew she would. That is why I almost begged you to sing."

When the hills of Sandgate were visible he said, "I have an hour before the returning train and just time enough to see you safely home."

Alice looked at him with surprise. "And that is your idea of my hospitality," she exclaimed, "to let you go away like that? The morning train is the earliest one you can escape on, and if I am not good enough company for you this evening, you can go and call on Abby Miles."

What a surprised and glad old lady Aunt Susan was when the two stepped off the train.

"Don't mind me, Aunt Susan," Frank said with easy familiarity. "I am not a visitor, I am a big brother escorting a lone sister home."

How kindly that wrinkled face beamed on him behind her spectacles while he insisted that she stand by and let him unharness and see to the horse as she directed. And how willingly he carried baskets of wood in and started the parlor fire.

"I did not know you could make yourself so useful," Alice observed.

When supper was over he asked her in all manner of questions about her school, when she meant to open it again, how the old miller was, what had become of the boat, how the mill pond looked in winter, and had she been there since the day she gathered lilies. "Always back to that spot," she thought.

When he asked her to sing "The Last Rose of Summer" she exclaimed with a pretty pout: "I do not want to sing that. It reminds me how scared I was when I sang it last."

"But you brought tears into most of our eyes that night."

"Do you want to weep again?" she asked archly, looking up at him and smiling. "If you say you do, I will sing it."

"No," he answered, and then hesitating a moment added: "I do not feel that way tonight. I may when train time comes tomorrow."

Her eyes fell, and rising quickly, like a scared bird anxious to escape, turned away.

But a strong hand clasped one of hers, and then she heard him say: "Am I to go away tomorrow happy or miserable? You know what I came up here to ask. You know what I have worked and studied and waited for all the long year since first I saw you and for whom I have tried to become a useful man in the world instead of an idler. It was to win you and to ask this that I came here today."

Then she felt an arm clasp her waist and a voice that trembled a little say: "Answer me, sweet Alice, is it yes or no?"

And then he felt her supple form yield a trifle, and as he gathered her close in his arms her proud head touched his shoulder.

CHAPTER XLI.
THE winter had passed and March returned when one morning Albert received a bulky envelope bearing the Stockholm postmark and containing numerous legal papers and a lengthy letter. He did not notice Frank when he came in or even hear his greeting, and well might Albert be keenly absorbed in those documents, for they made him the emissary privileged to lay at the feet of the girl he loved—a fortune!

No more need she devote herself to her foster parents, no more need Uncle Terry putter over lobster traps in rain or shine, or good, patient Aunt Lissy bake, wash and mend, year in and year out.

Here was more than they could spend in all the years that were left them, and what a charming privilege it would be to him to place in her loving hand the means to make glad and bless those kindly people who had cared for her as their own, and what a sweet door of hope it opened for him!

Then, for the first time, he noticed Frank watching him with smiling interest.

"Well," remarked that cheerful young man, "I'm glad to see you emerge from your trance and return to earth again. I've said good morning twice and watched you for half an hour and you

didn't even know I was in the room."

When Frank had perused the most interesting of the documents he gave a low whistle and said: "Now, methinks, somebody will be taking a wedding trip to the Land of the Midnight Sun in the near future. I congratulate you, my dear boy, and you can have the Gypsy when you are ready." Then he added shyly, "May-be it can be arranged so there can be four in the party."

The next morning Albert, bearing the legal evidence of Telly's heritage and with buoyant heart, left for Southport. Late in the afternoon the little boat bearing him as sole passenger halted at the head of the island, and he saw the smiling face and muffled form of Uncle Terry standing on the wharf alone.

"Bless yer heart, Mr. Page," exclaimed Uncle Terry, grasping both of Albert's hands in his, "at the sight o' ye is good fer sore eyes."

"And how are Aunt Lissy and Telly?" responded Albert, smiling into the glowing face of the old man.

"Oh, they're purty middlin', an' they'll be powerful glad to see ye, too. It's been a long time since ye left us."

How vividly came to Albert every detail of his last parting from Telly, framed as she was in a background of scarlet and brown foliage! He could see her as he last saw her, standing with bowed head and tear wet face, and feel a tinge of the keen pain that pulsed at his own heartstrings then. He could almost hear the sad rustle of the autumn winds in the dry leaves that had added a pathos to their parting.

And now only a few miles separated them!

But the way was long and Uncle Terry's old horse slow, and the road in the hollows a quagmire of half frozen mud. Gone were all the leaves of the scrub oaks, and beneath the thickets of spruce still remained a white pall of snow. A half gale was blowing over the island, and when they halted in front of Uncle Terry's home the booming of the giant billows filled the night air, and by the gleam of the lighthouse rays Albert could see the spray tossed high over the point rocks.

"Go right in," said Uncle Terry, "an' don't stop ter knock; ye'll find the wimmin folks right glad ter see ye, an' I'll take keer o' the hoss."

With Telly it had been a long, dreary winter. Her only consolation had been the few letters from the only man who had ever uttered a word of love to her, and how eagerly they had been read again and again.

At times, when the cold desolation of winter was at its worst, only maidenly reserve had kept her from writing him that her loneliness and heart hunger were more than she could bear.

She had no inkling of his coming, and when Uncle Terry bade him enter the house she was alone in the sitting room laying the table, while Aunt Lissy was in the kitchen cooking supper. She heard the click of the front door latch and, stepping into the little hall as the door slowly opened, she met the man who for five long months had never been absent from her thoughts.

A glad cry escaped her, and then—

When Aunt Lissy came in and greeted Albert, if she noticed Telly's red face and neck no one was the wiser.

When Uncle Terry came in, and after Telly, as usual, had brought his horse coat and slippers, what a happy little party was seated at the table. What if the ocean surges thundered so near and at times tossed their angry tears against the windows! Inside were light, and warmth, and love, and trust, and all that is holiest in human emotions.

After supper Uncle Terry and Albert smoked and talked, and when the evening was two-thirds past, Albert said: "Now, my good friends, I have a little surprise in store for you." Drawing from an inside pocket a bulky envelope, and crossing the room to where Telly sat, he handed it to her with the remark:

"I have the honor and exquisite pleasure of presenting to you, Miss Eteika Peterson, sole surviving heiress and descendant of one Eric Peterson of Stockholm, your paternal grandfather, these legal documents certifying to your inheritance of about \$150,000, besides various pieces of real estate as yet unappraised."

The effect of this announcement upon the three listeners was not exactly what Albert had anticipated. They seemed dazed, and Telly, holding the big envelope gingerly, as if it might bite her, stared at Albert. Aunt Lissy was the first to speak, and "Good Lord a-massy!" came from her in an awed whisper.

"Thank God, little girlie, you've got yer dues at last!" was Uncle Terry's



A glad cry escaped her, and then—

of Telly's life with them cast its shadow athwart his vision, he bowed his face upon his hands and added, "I knowed it 'ud come an' we'd lose ye, soon or late."

For an instant Telly looked at Uncle Terry, and then she thrust the envelope into his hands and clasped his arm. "I won't take it, father!" she exclaimed. "Not one penny of it! It's all yours, and I'll never leave you so long as you live!" Then she began to sob.

"Thar ain't no cause fer worryin' 'bout that yit, girlie," he answered, placing one hand on her bowed head, "an' no need fer ye to leave us 'thout ye mind to. We want ye allus, long as we kin keep ye, make sure." Then, noting the dumfounded look on Albert's face, he added, "Ye mustn't mind Telly's ways, Mr. Page; it's upset her a little an' made her histeriky. She don't quite understand yit what it all means. She ain't much used ter havin' a fortune drapped in her lap."

And then, rising, he added, "We'd best go to bed now, Lissy, an' mebbe Mr. Page, being a lawyer, can explain matters to Telly."

When they had left the room Albert seated himself on the sofa beside Telly and said: "I am a trifle puzzled and a little disappointed, Telly, at the way you feel about this inheritance. It is rightfully yours and will enable you to do much for the future comfort of those who are devoted to you. I had hoped also it would relieve your feeling of obligation a little."

"No money can do that," she answered quickly, "and all this won't be worth to father the care he has grown accustomed to from me."

"But won't this money do more for him than you can, Telly? Is there any need of his remaining here to putter over lobster traps and drive a wagon, rain or shine? He is getting too old for that anyway. Why not build a home for them in Boston, or, better still, share ours there?"

"A flush came over Telly's face," she answered, turning her face away.

"But we will have, darling, and as soon as you consent I shall begin to make it ready. I want you, darling, and I want a home. Life to me with you buried here is only desolation, and how much so to you the past five months can only tell. I know how you feel toward these good people, and your care for them shall be my care."

Telly hid her face behind her hands, and as she yielded a little to his clasp she whispered: "Do not say 'no' again, Telly! Do not rob yourself and me of love and home and happiness any longer! Make what plans for them you wish. Do as you will with your heritage. All I plead for is you." As he paused, holding her close while he waited for her answer, only listening love heard it whispered:

"And outside the billows that years before tossed her ashore and had woven their monotone of sadness into her life still tolled their requiem, but she heard them not. She had entered the enchanted castle of illusions.

CHAPTER XLII.
WHEN June had again clad Sandgate's hills and village with green and spangled its meadows with daisies there occurred two events of sacred import to four young people.

The first was a wedding in the village church where the sweet voice of Alice Page had oft been heard and where now as a bride she walked timidly to the altar.

Her pupils, aided by their parents, had turned the church into a bower of green, brightened by every flower that grew in field or garden. Even the old mill pond contributed its share, and the altar was white with lilies. Almost every resident of the town was present, and the aged miller sat in one corner and watched with wistful eyes. The Nason family, with Aunt Susan and Albert, shared the front pew.

Two weeks later occurred the other event, when the Gypsy steamed into the Cape harbor and a select party became the guests of honor at Uncle Terry's home. Long tables, decked with flowers and loaded with the best Aunt Lissy could prepare, stood under the trees in front. The little porch was a bower of ferns and clusters of red bunch berries, and every man, woman and child that dwelt on the island was there.

Then, after Albert and Telly had halted in the fern covered porch to utter the simple but sacred words that bound them for life, the gladsome party gathered and made merry at the tables.

The sun was low in the west ere Telly kissed the tear wet faces of Uncle Terry and Aunt Lissy and the Gypsy sailed away. Far to seaward the purple line of coming night was slowly creeping in, and side by side on the little knoll where stood a low white headstone those two sat and watched her pass out of their lives. When only the wide ocean was visible and the line of shadow had crept up to the wave washed rocks beneath them, Uncle Terry arose.

"We'd best go in, Lissy," he said. And she saw that she must lead him, for he was blinded with tears.

THE END.
The Cardiff Giant.
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