

Uncle Jake's Best Joke

By JANE OSBORN

Maud pouted—not the piquant arch pout of her courtship days but the spoiled-child pout that she dared to indulge in now that she was really truly married to the embodiment, in her eyes, of all masculine charms and virtues—Rodney Blaine.

"I think you are a mean old thing," she announced with some heat. "To have to have him along with us. He'll just spoil everything. It isn't that I don't like him, but he is such a dreadful joker!"

The joker referred to was none other than Rodney's uncle, Jacob Blaine, a slightly built but erect old gentleman, who at three score and five had given up business and determined to lead the rest of his days in the open. If he had none of the crochets which are sometimes ascribed to those of advancing years he had some of the follies that had been characteristic of his boyhood. Nothing pleased him better than a practical joke, though his jokes were always of a kindly nature and, so far as any one knew, they had never caused any one real discomfort.

But Maud took herself, and above all she took Rodney, amazingly seriously. Now that summer had come, the Rodney Blaines had made arrangements to depart from the city for the woods, where Rodney owned a small mountain cabin.

He had just announced his intention of encouraging Uncle Jake to occupy a smaller cabin not many rods from theirs which he would make the headquarters for his fishing and outing trips; and he would share the company of his nephew and niece in many of his hours of inactivity.

"Well, my dear," Rodney assured his wife, "it isn't at all as if he were critical or intended to interfere with you in any way. There is no one else who likes so well as you—and me. He's the best sport in the world and what if he does pull off a practical joke once in a while? I rather like his joking."

"Like his joking!" echoed Maud, and her eyes snapped fire as much as eyes as blue as hers ever could snap fire.

"And besides," said Rodney, as he went on inspecting the fishing paraphernalia that he had recently purchased as preliminary to the vacation in the woods, "besides, Uncle has willed everything he has to us. That shows that he is devoted to us."

Maud at this accused her husband of being mercenary, though had any one else made this accusation she would have raged indeed.

The result was that Uncle Jake went with the Rodney Blaines, and this was not because Rodney acted contrary to his wife's pleadings, but because after having protested and pouted she assured her husband that he was right as in all other cases and that she was sorry that she had shown such prejudice and would try to feel as strong attachment for Uncle Jake as did her husband.

Then she regretted her good nature. First he disguised as possible game warden and called at the cabin one day when Rodney was not at home and informed Maud that her husband had been violating the game law and would have to serve a life imprisonment. Maud, in spite of her ardent suffrage principles, was quite ignorant of the law and before she recognized Uncle Jake in the heavily false-bearded person, she had offered him her entire worldly wealth if he would go away and say nothing to the authorities concerning Rodney's guilt. Then on the day that she went fish-

ing with him he contrived to have her book attach itself to a little package that he had brought with him to the brook and which proved, after Maud had excitedly angled for five minutes, to contain a can of sardines—a delicacy for which she had a decided aversion and of which Rodney and Uncle Jake, not knowing this, had set in a large supply.

Mild and even stupid jokes both of these—yet Maud allowed herself to be annoyed by them.

"He's a dear in many ways," she told Rodney, the evening after the sardine episode, "but so long as he jokes I cannot stand him."

"I wasn't going to tell you," Rodney replied, "but you see it is just because Uncle Jake does joke that I'm so attached to him. If he hadn't been a joker, you'd now be Mrs. Somebody else and I'd be a disconsolate old bachelor."

It was in midsummer and Maud—the eighteen-year-old Maud who pouted very archly then and still wore her curls merely tied at the back of her neck instead of in the present psychic—was four or five hundred miles away from Rodney, who was working in the city in the office of the Uncle Jake Blaine had not yet found occasion to retire.

Rodney had danced with Maud and sent flowers to Maud on occasions just as a dozen others had done, and as he had done to a dozen or so besides. Of course he thought she was pretty, and when there were other men trying to put their noses on her dance order Rodney was always as eager as the others.

But it had never occurred to him that he might want to marry her. In fact, Rodney—in spite of his twenty-five years—had never thought very much about wanting to marry any lady.

But Maud at eighteen had definitely made up her mind, that lurked somewhere beneath those soft brown curls, that she did want to marry, and that she wanted to marry Rodney Blaine, though she would have died rather than to have let any one suspect this.

She had convinced herself—and at eighteen one convinces oneself of such matters quite easily—that there was no hope. She had smiled and pouted as archly for Rodney as she had for Tom and Bill and Walter, and Tom and Bill and Walter had all in their own way let Maud know that they found her distracting and that they dreamed of no greater happiness than to be her slaves for life.

But Rodney had made no such protestations and, though he always asked for dances when he was about he managed to dance with other pretty girls if she refused him.

Maud had thought it all out in her eighteen-year-old mind. She was quite sure that the case was hopeless and that she herself had arrived at the place where she must decide between a life of resigned spinsterdom or the alternative of marrying the man she merely liked.

This man was Walter. Walter had come up to her mother's country place to press his suit with considerable persistence. Maud had assured Walter that she didn't really love him, but had fibbed in saying that she loved no one else.

Then she thought it over quite definitely and decided that, as she was neither musical, artistic nor literary, and had no sisters or brothers to whose children she might devote herself, she had better be married, if only for a home and to have some one manage her affairs. If Walter asked her again before he went back to the city she had determined to accept him.

Then came the special messenger from the post office, ten miles away, bringing that ten-pound box of the choicest candy that the most expensive candy shop in the city had for sale.

Maud opened it, and out dropped a card that simply bore the engraved name of Rodney Blaine. That changed everything. Walter went back to the city unrewarded for his trip, incidentally asking another girl to be his wife, and was accepted.

The same locomotive that bore him back to the city and away from Maud, carried a letter from Maud to Rodney, that showed between the lines that she had been thinking as much of him as the candy showed that he had been thinking of her. Incidentally, the next mail carried an invitation from Maud's mother to Rodney to spend part of his vacation at their cabin, and—well, it was then that Rodney discovered what he had been too stupid to guess before, that Maud really was the most charming girl of his acquaintance and the one he had been in love with from the first.

"It was Uncle Jake that sent that candy," Rodney told Maud. "He was in one of his joking moods and he took your name because it was the first one he came across in my address book, then he got hold of a card of mine and off went the candy. You see I had always loved you, Maud, but I didn't know I had a ghost of a chance. I thought you were all in favor of that Walter Bates. So if it hadn't been for Uncle Jake's tendency to joke, I never would have had the nerve to ask you. I never could have guessed how things were."

Maud was in a reminiscent mood, that brought to her lips a pout that was arch and piquant. "I'm sorry I said what I did about him. Really I think he's a dear and I really didn't mind a bit about the sardines."

War's Havoc in Wales.

"Only those on the spot," says a correspondent of a London paper, can fully realize the devastation of the woodland portions of North Wales, which has been carried on for the past three years. This is notably the case in Carnarvonshire, where whole valleys and mountain sides have been robbed in order to satisfy the demand of the Government for pitprops and railway sleepers. Notwithstanding the fact that the timber already felled and re-cut runs into many thousands of cords, the process, according to the news made with the contractors, will stand in some cases into next year.

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...of averting a strike of 500,000 U.S. bituminous coal miners on November 1st does not look bright.

Several motor vehicles have arrived Frankfurt from Paris loaded with textile goods and other articles from Paris, thus reopening direct traffic relations between the cities.

The cost of the Portuguese army sent to the front in France was \$149,000,000 from its departure to its return.

Peter George and Thomas Ferguson of Nobel village, near Parry Sound, are dead, and a fourth is seriously ill, as a result of drinking alcohol treated with acetone.

Labor registered a sweeping victory in both East and West Hamilton in the Provincial election. Hamilton was one of the few Ontario municipalities to vote against prohibition.