

TOLD IN THE VERNACULAR.

AN AMERICAN STORY.

'Lobelia,' said pa, 'don't you never have nothin' more to say to that young man?'

You see pa was set in his ways, and when he said a thing he meant it. Lobelia had been going about considerably with Nathan Spoke, and pa, he hadn't any idea of Nathan, or of our Lobelia throwing herself away on him.

Lobelia was our daughter; I 'dunno whether it's a curious name or not. She was a pretty gal was our Lobelia—couldn't find a prettier in all the States.

Well, when pa said that, Lobelia got down and began to cry.

'It's my steady company, pa,' she said. 'Please don't ask me to give up my steady company.'

'I call him your onsteady company,' said pa. 'There won't be much steadiness in him, if he's a chip of the old block. Mind what I say. No more of his visits for you. And mowbo when you can take a cake a body can eat without splitting it with a hatchet, and can sew on a button so it won't blow off, I'll hunt up a decent husband for you—one worth money.'

'Well, after this I'll advise the poor girl didn't do let him call on her. As far as I know she never saw him, and I mean Grimes, a widower, and worth his hundred thousand, come over most every evening, and pa, ma, say his mind was the matter for Lobelia.'

'I want for me to intercede, though I petted her, and let her know that I stood by her, but I didn't want to rile pa up. Pa isn't pleasant when he's riled. But one day when she asked me to let her go and take her knitting and spend the day with Fannie Brown, I was so glad to see her look so chipper and feel like going out once more, that I said yes right off, though it was ironical-day, an ironical-day is hilly.'

Well, she went about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and two there came up most awful thunderstorm. The lightning it zigzagged, and the thunder it boomed, and the rain it poured down like cats and dogs. I was skinned myself, and knew jest how Lobelia felt.

After a while the storm calmed down a bit; at least it went further off—the thunder did—and I sat looking through the rain, out of the front window, when who should I see coming along the road but two people a man and a gal. He was walking pretty fast, holding up an umbrella and doing his best to keep the rain off her. She was togging on his arm, and every time the lightning flashed, hiding her head in his coat sleeve.

I knew she was our Lobelia, by her blue muslin dress and her little grey sash, but at first I could not tell who the man was. Minute more I saw it was Nathan Spoke. Yes, and there was pa a looking too.

'It's that fellow,' says he. 'Well,' says I, 'see how its storming. Ah,' says pa, 'I'm glad of it. I'll show Lobelia how to disobey me.'

And out he ran into the hall. I followed him, and what was he doing but locking the door; and after he'd done that he flowed to the kitchen door and fastened that. He didn't leave a place to get in at before he was done, not to much as the cellar-way. And he put all the keys in his pocket, walked into the parlor and sat down on the sofa and began to read the newspaper.

I was near dumfounded. 'Oh, pa,' says I. 'Oh, pa dear; oh, you ain't going to lock your own gal out in a storm-like this?'

'Hold your tongue, ma,' says he. 'I've master in my own house. But she may be struck,' says I. 'She may be struck, pa.'

'Women never keep any scientific,' says he. 'Dod' you hear the thunder reverberating away over the mountains. If it strikes anybody south of Parker's Point I'm a goose.'

'But she'll be skinned to death,' says I. 'Just what I want is to skinned her,' says pa. 'I'll skinned her out of spunking with Nathan Spoke.'

And just then comes 'bang! bang! bang!' at the door, and my poor Lobelia's voice comes through the keyhole.

'Oh, ma, lemme in! Oh, ma, lemme in! The lightning comes, as if it was a tryin' to strike me. And it will too. Lemme in, and I lemme hide my head in the pillar. Oh, lemme hide my head in a pillar.'

'Your pa has taken the key out, Lobelia,' says I, 'and he won't give it to me.'

'Oh! oh! says Lobelia. 'Oh! oh, dear! Is he hid at me for coming home with Nathan?'

'Yes, dear, says I. 'Just then came a crash and a shriek.'

'That one most struck me,' says Lobelia. 'Oh! oh! Pa, dear, let me in to hide my head somewhere. I was so skinned I'd have come home with any sort of feller. Oh! oh! I didn't care how horrid he was so he had an umbrella. Lemme in, pa!'

'But he wouldn't. I told him I'd have high strikes, but all he said was—'

'Well, they are easy cured with a bucket of cold water.'

And I know he was equal to doing it, though I had my now Japanese poplin on.

'After the storm is done I'll let Lobelia in,' says he. 'Not a minute sooner. I'll cure her of spunking with Nathan Spoke.'

Well, I sat down by the door and cried and listened, and cried and listened. After a while I didn't hear anything more, and in an hour or two the storm was over; but pa never budged until minkling-time was come. Then he took down his hat, and threwed in the key of the front door, and went out the back way himself.

I rushed out, and I looked up and I looked down, and I couldn't find Lobelia. After a while pa began to look, too; but there was no sign of her. She wasn't in the barn; she wasn't in the woodshed; she wasn't anywhere.

'You've killed my poor gal,' says I. 'Dead folks is to be found, they don't vanish like smoke.'

But he was as white as a ghost when he said it, and after going down cellar and up attic, and over the neighbor Jones's, he put on his coat, and I got my bonnet, and we hurried up the horse and wagon, and rode down into the village.

Everywhere we asked, 'they shook their heads. She hadn't been here; she hadn't been there; and we were almost frightened out of our senses, when at last, what should we see but Nathan Spoke himself, coming out of the hotel with two plates of dinner in his hand, and a tin kettle of coffee on his arm.

'Hello,' says pa. 'Hello,' says pa. 'Where's my girl?' says pa. 'Hiding her head,' says Nathan. 'Where?' says pa. 'Up in my room,' says Nathan. 'I've been keeping bachelor's hall at Widow Gunter's over the way. She's been up there hiding her head.'

'How dare you take her there?' says pa. 'You shall be punished for this. Here, where is she? Fetch her down.'

'Can't be did,' says Nathan. 'See these plates, don't you? One of 'em is for me; one for my wife. I married Lobelia over at Parson Grey's just as that biggest clap of thunder came—the one that sound ed like a thousand o' brick, and struck somewhere, sartin sure.'

'Married?' says pa. 'Married?' says I. 'Yes,' said Nathan. 'It's all your doing. She begged to come in, and hide her head, and you wouldn't let her. Then she says to me, "Let me hide my head somewhere." Oh, let me hide my head somewhere! Lobelia says I, "there's one place—that's my bosom. Just come to Parson Grey's with me, and he'll give you a right to hide it there for ever."

She says: 'Oh, anything, so I can hide my head.'

'So we went to the parson's. There's the certificate. I brought her over here afterwards, and she hid her head as much as she liked. I've just been out for some dinner, I'll get two more plates if you'll stay and dine with us—with me and my wife. You see, sir, you looked your daughter out, and I wouldn't have been half a man not to help her find a place to hide her head in—not to find the best I knew.'

'Hold your tongue,' says pa. 'But we went upstairs and saw Lobelia. She was lying on a sofa, with a pillar on her head, but she took it off when we came in.'

'Oh, ma and pa, also said, 'don't be angry. I had to hide my head somewhere, and you wouldn't open the door.'

You see she had right on her side, and she was married, and it couldn't be helped, and even pa has got over it now, though it took a long time first; but he don't pride himself on managing folks as he did before the thunderstorm, when he wouldn't let Lobelia hide her head in a pillar, and she hid it in a husband's heart instead.

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