

The Storyteller

THE SPIRIT OF HARRIET

(Concluded from last week.)

'Miss Lois,' cried Trask's cheery voice from the step one evening she sat at her early tea, 'I've come to one evening as she sat at her early tea, 'I've come to ever saw in your life. Get your hat, little woman, and come along.'

'Why, Mr. Trask!' faltered Lois, the hot color rushing to her face. 'Why, I've never gone buggy-riding with a man in my born days! Sister Harriet—'

'Stuff and nonsense!' laughed Trask. 'It is high time you began, then, because I expect to take you many a time. Come along, that's a good girl. Is this the thing you wear on your head?' he asked, gaily, handing her the little Shaker bonnet that hung on the knob of the chair.

'Goodness me, no! That's my sunbonnet. Why, if I did go I'd have to wear that hat Marthy got me. It's turned up on the side, and got a white bow, and is so dreadful young lookin', I didn't know if I could bring myself to it or not; but I ain't got nothing else fit—that is, if I do go.'

'Go! Of course you'll go. Young lookin'! Why, I don't know a girl that's got brighter roses than you're wearin' on your cheeks this minute. That horse ain't good at standin', so you'd better hurry up, Miss Lois. And you're to bring your little white shawl, Marthy said, because I may keep you out late and the dew'll be fallin'.'

Some way—Lois never quite understood it herself—the bandbox was untied by the aid of Trask's clumsy fingers, the new hat fastened before the murky old mirror, and she was meekly following him as he strode before her with the little white shawl drifting over his arm.

'I do hope the neighbor's ain't lookin',' whispered Lois, as Trask tucked in the linen robe. 'I never felt so briggity in all my life.'

'Now, that's the difference between us,' chuckled he. 'I was just wishin' the whole town could see us set off, and for that reason we're goin' right up through the square. We'll take the Blicktown road and get out into the country, and I'm not goin' to bring you back till—well, I'll tell you that later.'

'My land! You ain't goin' to drive right up past the stores, Mr. Trask?' pleaded Lois. 'It's band night and the whole town will be out.'

'Why, sure,' teased Trask. 'I heard the boys say they was goin' to play on the court house steps about nine, and we'll stop and take that in if we get back in time.'

Lois sank back with a half sob. Her cheeks were ablaze and her eyes like stars under the turned-up hat with its white bow. She fairly held her breath as the old white horse lumbered heavily up High street. She was so ashamed, and yet—and yet—it was so good to know he didn't care who saw them; it was so comforting to feel that even if he had forgotten, he was proud to have her, Lois—not the girl, but the woman Lois—at his side. If only she could forget Harriet's scorn, if only she might enjoy this moment to the uttermost and let to-morrow take care of itself. Away they jogged along the shady road, across the rumbling covered bridge, past the lime-kiln, and out among the broad fields that nestled in the lovely valley.

Trask got out again and again to cut for her the tallest stems of goldenrod, the royalist of purple asters and the reddest of turning leaves, until the old buggy would hold no more of autumn's stores. He sang for her snatches of old songs, he whistled 'Bob White' to the little brown quails that scurried across the road, he chirruped greetings to the horse, who lifted his old white ears in answer to every sound of that kindly voice.

The sun was sending long shafts of light across the river as the horse settled into a walk upon the level road. Then, without a word of warning, Trask put his arm about the little figure at his side and said softly:

'So my little woman thought I had forgotten.'

Philameliac was bathed in moonlight. Even the quaint old house among its dry, rustling lily-stocks—like ghosts of the copper chalices of July—grew beautiful in its silvery mystery. The clock in the church tower was booming ten as Lois opened the gate and went up the walk. The rasping of the dry lily-stocks as her skirts brushed against them was full of reproof, and a shadow fell upon her happy, singing heart.

'I never was out so late in all my life,' she said as she unlocked the door, glad even for the sound of her own voice. 'Seems as if every blessed thing was holdin' up its hands in horror. But I'm so happy, so

happy! Please, dear Lord, let me be happy. Gray loves me the same as he did when I was a girl, and we're to be married just as soon as the Doll girls can get my dress made, and I won't be alone again—never again!'

She lighted the lamp, and, taking off her gay hat, put it safely away in the bandbox, and for a long time she stood looking intently in the misty mirror, studying the sweet, gentle face that gazed out at her. She hardly knew it, with its rose-stained cheeks, its sparkling eyes and the happy curve of the lips; suddenly, with tear-dimmed eyes, she bent over and kissed the image in the glass.

'Poor thing!' she whispered. 'There! I'll wish you joy, since you haven't got anybody else to do it! This house is so full of Harriet it chokes you, and you are gettin' scarer and scarer, and you 'most wish you hadn't said yes. But you are goin' to be happy, you poor thing!' she continued, nodding encouragement to the face in the glass. 'Now go and get the box and read the letters. They're yours, all yours!'

With trembling she brought the little box to the twisted-legged stand, and sat down in Harriet's chair.

'Yes,' she said aloud, as if addressing some one. 'I know where I'm settin'. It's my house and my chair, and I'm goin' to read my letters. 'Twasn't nothing wicked what I'd done. Gray said it wasn't, and he never thought I was a bad girl, but just lovin' and trustin' like I was. He's kept my letters, too, and the tynotype I took out of ma's album, and he's loved it just like I did his.'

Slowly she turned the key and raised the lid. Upon the top lay a letter addressed in her sister's angular handwriting:

'To Lois when I'm in my grave.'

Lois sank back in the chair and hid her eyes, all her happiness dashed to the ground. What words of scorn had lain hidden all these months; what taunts were to reach back from that other world to cut and sting!

'I won't read it! I won't! I won't!' she moaned, then with swift passion tore open the envelope and began reading:

'My dear Lois,—I am not one of those that can ask forgiveness. I've tried and I can't; but now when the doctor tells me I've got to die I want you to know how it was with me. You don't understand me, you never did, but I don't blame you for that. I was just ten years old when mother laid you in my arms and told me I could have you for my baby. From that moment I loved you better than all the wide world. I loved you so I wanted you all to myself. I was jealous of everybody that came near you, and yet I felt I didn't know how to make you love me, and that made me mad and heartsick.'

'When I found out a boy you had never seen had stolen your heart from me in spite of all my guarding you, I felt like I could kill him. For every cruel word I spoke, for every tear you shed, I suffered a hundred times over. You were all I had and all I wanted—you and Beelzebub and the tiger lilies—and you would have been glad to leave me for a stranger. But all this was before I knew I had to leave you alone in the world. When the doctor told me that, I felt my punishment was greater than I could bear. I'd be glad, now, glad to know you was safe with him and not alone, all alone.'

'I know the first thing you'll do when you come back from my funeral will be to open this box and get your letters, so I'll put this where you will see it. Oh, little sister, nobody will ever love you better than I have, not even that man, if he comes back to you, and some way I feel he will—and I hope with all my heart he will, and that you will be as happy as you deserve. You were always a good girl and I didn't mean what I said, but I was half crazy for fear I'd lose you. Try to think kindly of me and forgive me, if you can. God bless and keep you. Your Sister Harriet.'

How long Lois sat there sobbing out her forgiveness, her pity, her remorse, she never knew. Harriet loved her. Harriet hoped she would be happy with Gray when he came back to her. There was to be no blot upon her happiness. Then, as she sat there sobbing softly, in the old chair where Harriet had sat for so many years, Beelzebub stood before her, his beautiful green eyes gazing at her steadily.

'Beelzebub, Beelzebub,' cried Lois, holding out her arms, 'she loved me all the time, and she loved you, too, dear Beelzebub!'

Slowly he came to her, sprang into her lap, and, with soft voluptuous purring, curled himself down to sleep.

In cases of attacks of Colic Cramp or Spasms will convince the most sceptical of its efficacy.—***

In the most obstinate cases of coughs and colds TUSSICURA can be relied upon to afford immediate and that and nothing else.—***