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J. E. COLLINS Editor and Proprietor.

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Funny Uncle Phil.

I heard the grown folks talking last night when I lay abed, so I shut my eyes and listened to everything they said; and first they said that Polly and Phil were coming here, and a good old soul was Polly, but Phil was always queer. And they never, never, never, in all their lives could ever see how Polly came to marry him, nor how they could agree; for she was just as bright and sweet as any flower in May, but he was tight as a drum-head, and as black as a stormy day. And his nose was always poking into other folk's affairs, and he was altogether too fond of splitting hairs; and he had so many corners you never could come near without your hitting some of them, or being in constant fear. Well, I listened very hard, and I remembered every word. And I thought it was the queerest thing a body ever heard; and in the evening, when I heard the chaise come down the hill, I almost couldn't wait to see my funny Uncle Phil.

Bat, oh! what stories grown folks tell! He wasn't black at all! And he hadn't any corners, but was plump and fair and small; his nose turned up a little, but then it was so wee, how it could poke so very much I really couldn't see. And when he saw me staring, he nodded hard, and then he asked them softly if I was Elsie's child; and when grandma said I was he took me gently on his knee, and wound my longest curl about his finger carefully.

And he told me 'bout my mamma when she was a little girl, and all the time he talked he kept his finger on that curl; till at last I couldn't stand it, and I slipped down by his chair, and asked him how he came to be so fond of splitting hair. My! how he stared! and Jimmy laughed, and grandma shook her head, and grandpa had his awful look, and Uncle Sam turned red.

And then the clock ticked very loud, the kitchen was so still, and I knew 'twas something dreadful I had said to Uncle Phil. But I couldn't help it, then, so I told him every word, and he listened very quietly; he never spoke nor stirred, till I told him 'bout the corners, and said I didn't know how he could have so many when there didn't any show.

And then they all shook hands again, and Jimmy gave three cheers, and Uncle Sam said little pitchers had most monstrous ears; and grandma kissed Aunt Polly; but then she looked at me, and said I'd better "mediate" while she was getting tea. That means that I must sit and think what naughty things I've done; and it must be 'cause I'm little yet—they seemed to think 'twas fun. I don't quite understand it all; well, by and by I will.

Creep softly up to him, and ask my funny Uncle Phil.

AN APRIL HOAX.

Looking at it from without, it does not appear very unlike its fellows, this little suburban cottage of the Roys, with its unpromising hooded porch, over which the ivy trails its dark green foliage, its two parlor windows in front, and its bay-window at the side; but within there is nothing commonplace. Every room, every corner, reflects the refined taste of Janet Roy, and the quaint fancies of her brother Dick.

Dick, the handsome, the talented, the gentlemanly—he is all this and more in his sister Janet's eyes—is sitting on the window-seat, the sun bathing his shapely figure in its impartial rays. He is reading the morning paper; when more interested probably than most men are wont to have, for he recognizes the mannerism of each writer on the editorial page—he is on the editorial staff himself—and takes pleasure in seeing how Smith treats the Eastern question, what Jones thinks of the condition of the Indians, and what Brown has to say on the presidential policy. He has not written a stroke for over a week himself. He has been quite ill; a heavy cold threatening pneumonia has kept him a prisoner at the cottage, and for seven mornings has the public been deprived of the pleasure and profit of perusing his timely and caustic remarks upon general topics. Only yesterday he stepped across the threshold into manhood; it was his twenty-first birthday.

The clock on the mantel-shelf tinkles forth eight silvery notes. Dick looks up from his paper with some show of impatience. Where can Janet be? As if in answer to his thought, the door opens, and Miss Roy, tall and graceful, in a dress of olive-green serge, in charming contrast with her light golden hair, comes softly in.

"Have you been waiting long, Dick?" she asks, in a pleasant, kindly voice. "I must have overslept myself."

"No," replies Dick, throwing down his paper and yawning languidly, "not very long; but I'm glad you've come, for I'm decidedly hungry. Rather a good sign, isn't it, Jean?"

"Very nice, as you are, to the Roys this morning, both of which Sarah hands to Miss Janet, who hurriedly reads the addresses. One is for herself, the other is for her brother."

"Here is a letter for you, sir, if your name is Horatio," she quotes, reaching it to him across the table.

"But my name is not Horatio," he replies, correcting, as he takes it. "Are you aware that to paraphrase is perfectly allowable? If your name be Richard would be much more appropriate, and would sound far better."

"I saw it was in Harry's handwriting, and so feared it was Cousin Margaret," "Uncle Arthur!" repeats Dick. "Uncle Arthur! He's one of my respected great-uncles, whom I have never had the pleasure of seeing; a California millionaire, I understand, it ever strikes him that a little of his wealth would be acceptable to his great-niece and great-nephew, who are battling with the world far away over here in the East?"

"Oh, Dick!" exclaims Miss Roy, greatly shocked, "how can you talk of the poor man's money when he is just dead?"

"Poor man!" says Dick, laughing. "I always thought he was a rich one." "May I inquire," asks Miss Roy, meekly, when her brother had twice said "know her handwriting," "is he rich, and is about to begin again, what Nell has to say that is so very interesting?"

A slight flush mounts to Dick's face as he hurriedly crumples the missive into his pocket.

"Nell!" he repeats. "How did you know it was from Nell?"

"But it's just like hundreds of others," continued Dick, buttering a hot roll in continuance of his breakfast. "All ladies write in the same style now-a-days. The letters are all very tall and all very wide."

"Each lady's hand has a peculiarity, nevertheless," "Which nobody can deny," quotes Richard. Some hands are pink and some are white, some are fat and some are lean, some wear diamonds and some wear none.

"How you trip one up!" exclaimed Janet, smiling. "You know very well what I mean. Would you have me stumble over the whole length of 'chirography' every time?"

"By the way, it would only be a waste of breath, and would seem as though you were intentionally siring your knowledge of Webster's Unabridged."

Dick is beginning to congratulate himself on the mastery way in which he has turned the subject and escaped rudely telling his sister that the contents of Miss Nellie Taylor's letter are not for her ears, when she again refers to his remarks.

"By-the-by," she says, as she draws from the urn her brother's second cup of coffee, "speaking of some hands with diamonds and some without, Nell doesn't wear one, does she? When do you propose presenting her with one of the gems?"

"I was not aware" (with mock gravity) "that young men are generally expected to provide their lady friends with diamond rings."

"Did the fact that there is such a thing as an engagement ring ever present itself to your enlightened intellect?"

"Engagement!" repeats Dick; "did I understand you to say engagement? Since when, pray, did you conclude that your respected brother had given his heart to another? I know of no engagement."

"Oh, dear!" says Janet, sighing melodramatically; "have I really been mistaken? And here I was already congratulating myself on so soon having a sister-in-law!"

"Do you remember the nursery rhyme?" asks Dick.

"Can the love that you're so rich in build a fire in the kitchen? Or the little god of love turn the spit, spit, spit?"

I should hesitate, I think, to ask any one to marry me, for fear of having that couplet thrown in my face. Now if that dear old great-uncle of ours had only taken it into his aged head to leave us a few of his many thousands, I then perhaps I might think of engagements and diamond rings and mothers-in-law; and you might begin to speculate on the comparative advantages of my various lady friends as a sister-in-law."

"Poor, dear old man!" Janet continues, kindly. "I can just remember sitting on his knee and playing with his long beard at the time he was on from the West. It's really a shame, Dick, our being so lively, and Uncle Arthur, grandfathers own brother, lying dead."

"Well, my dear, I should be lying alive if I said I was sorry he's gone; for while there's death there's hope, and who knows but he may have thought of you?"

"Oh, Dick!" beseechingly, "please don't joke about it. I really do feel bad, and Cousin Margaret and Harry must be so grieved."

"I am sure we all do. Don't you think, Jean, we had better bow the shutters and hang out black bombazine?"

"I shall bow the shutters," adds Janet, feeling rather angry at her brother's continued joking. "It is the least we can do, and it shows some respect for our grandfather's brother," rising and leaving Dick still at the table.

"Our grandfather's brother!" repeats he; "what an awfully near relative!"

Surely he must have bequeathed something to his brother's grandchildren. Dick is in his study now—a neat, cozy little room back of the drawing-room, which is in reality the library, but which Mr. Roy, he being a literary man, chooses to call his study. He is sitting at his table, with Nell's letter spread out before him, and is reading it for the fourth time. "Very nice, as you are, to the Roys this morning, both of which Sarah hands to Miss Janet, who hurriedly reads the addresses. One is for herself, the other is for her brother."

"DEAR DICK,—I have been looking for you to call, as you promised, and am much surprised at not having seen you. Your birthday, I think you told me, is about this time. Did you have a party? and are you so elated at having attained your majority that you are above visiting your friends? I cannot think that because you are now a man you have forgotten your friends, and I am sure that you will be glad to see me. Please call soon, and tell me all the news of your life. Ever your friend, NELL."

That is it; and in it Dick is trying to find traces of something more than friendship.

"Nell is an awfully jolly girl," he says to himself, leaning back in his chair and thrusting his hands into his pockets; "just as full of fun as ever she can be. I wonder whether she really does care anything for me? I'm not altogether a bad-looking fellow, if I do say it myself, and I fancy I can talk quite as well as the most of 'em. How is one to tell whether a girl cares more for him than for another, when she persists in being jolly with every one?"

Then he gets to thinking of some means to solve the problem. How shall he prove to her that he is not a mere flatterer? He presents an idea comes to him, first faintly, indistinctly, and more plainly and more vividly, until a plan—an excellent plan, he thinks—stands out before him in beautiful symmetry. Everything seems to have worked in favor of it, and he is naturally joyful over his discovery.

He opens one of the drawers in his writing-table and takes out a packet of letters. Through them he searches until he finds two that Janet wrote him while he was away on his midsummer vacation. These he spreads open before him, and taking a sheet of note-paper he begins to write, now closely studying his sister's letters, now slowly putting words upon the paper. Half an hour, and he has finished. He folds the sheet, incloses it in an envelope, and addresses it as carefully as he has written it. Then he rises, and unlocking the door, meets Janet in the hall. She sees him take down his hat to go out.

"Had you not better wear your overcoat?" she asks. "I'm afraid you might catch cold going far," he answers; "only to post a letter."

"To Nell?" she asks, teasingly. "Are you not rather prompt in answering your correspondents?"

Dick, making no reply, goes out, while she laughs to herself and hurries away to her numerous household duties.

The next morning is the 1st of April—All-fools' Day, with its temptations to practical jokes and its myriads of little innocent lies, when every one does his best to make a fool of his best friend as well as of his dearest self. It is a bright, sunny morning, that swells the buds to bursting, and draws up the blades of fresh young grass as a magnet draws steel.

Dick Roy is in the very best of spirits; he has persuaded Janet into believing that he has taken a fresh coat; has assumed a voice as hoarse as a veteran bull-frog; and has been looking the very picture of distress, until the arrival of the postman—just as he is creeping in to breakfast and adding to his sister's anxiety by his distressed countenance.

Janet, by his distress, is brightened up, and in the clearest tone remark, "Pon my word, Jean, my old's gone. Did it strike you this was the first day of April?"

An expression of relief mingled with annoyance mounts Miss Roy's countenance.

"You awful boy!" she exclaims. "You should be ashamed of yourself, trying to fool your own sister."

"And succeeding, too," laughs Dick.

The only letter this morning is one for him. It is hidden by a large yellow envelope, and addressed in a boy's hand that gives one an impression of important business at once. As Dick opens it and catches sight of the heading, his face brightens in expectation, and continues brightening until he has read it quite through, when he is wearing the broadest of smiles.

"Hurrah!" he shouts, his boyishness making its appearance through his newly acquired manhood—"hurrah for Uncle Arthur! Hurrah! Jean, we've been left a fortune!"

Janet looks at him unbelievably. She has been fooled once this morning, and does not intend to submit tamely to what she considers her brother's second attempt.

"If you must joke, Dick," she says, calmly, her voice and manner strangely contrasting with his excitement, "pray don't take such a horse about your property. I don't believe in it, but still I remember now what day it is."

"But I'm not joking; it's a fact. Here is a letter from the dear old boy's lawyer. Look at the postmark; look at the letter-head; read the message," he goes on, excitedly, running around to his sister's side of the table and spreading the envelope and its contents before her.

He is certainly not fooling her now, as she is compelled to admit when she is thus presented with the evidence. The same heavy style of writing that was without is within.

"Richard Roy, Esq." (it begins)—"I have pleasure in informing you that the will of the late Arthur Roy, Esq., of this city, bequeaths to his great-nephew and great-niece, Richard and Janet Roy (yourselves), each the sum of fifty thousand dollars. These amounts are invested in the latest government bonds, and shall be forwarded to you in due course."

"I have the honor to be your obedient servant," "J. MADISON PERRY, Executor."

The effect of the reading on Janet is quite the reverse of that of her brother. Instead of breaking forth into joyous shouts, her sensitive nature causes her to burst into a flood of tears.

"What can she be crying for?" he thinks. A legacy of fifty thousand dollars he does not consider a cause for weeping, and concludes that his sister has become mystified in regard to the time to weep and the time to laugh.

"What is the matter with you?" he asks, when the first outburst has subsided into occasional suppressed sobs.

"Oh, Dick!" cries Janet, wiping her eyes, "I believe you have no feeling at all. Just to think what a dear, kind uncle we have lost! How good of him to remember us!"

"Very good of him, indeed," adds Dick, "and so that that ought to make one sad. Rather a cause for rejoicing, I should say. Poor fellow, he was so old he couldn't enjoy it, and I dare say he's better off where he is; that is, if he was as good as his will makes me think he was."

"Janet is really grieved. Her nature is so intensely sensitive that a great kindness invariably has this effect upon her. She refuses any more breakfast, and goes hastily up to her room, where she spends the morning in trying to picture her uncle as he was when, so many years ago, she sat on his lap, and child-like ran her tiny fingers through his long gray beard."

All through the morning, as thinking thus, she sits diligently sewing, tears ever and anon well up in her eyes and go trickling down her cheeks before she is aware of their presence. As a natural consequence, twelve o'clock finds her with very red eyes and nose, and a general appearance of having gone through a most heart-rendering affliction. This is her condition when Sarah knocks at the door, and entering announces that Miss Taylor is in the drawing-room.

"Oh, what shall I do?" exclaims Janet, in perplexity, as soon as the maid is out of ear-shot. "She will see that I have been crying, and will want to know all about it; and I really can't talk of it now. I wonder where Dick is; he might go and see her, and explain that I'm not well; but dear me!—getting up and smoothing back her hair with both hands—'I suppose he's out somewhere. He won't be here when he's wanted, but sure to be here when he's not.' So, wiping her eyes for the hundredth time since breakfast, and giving her nose the fiftieth gentle blow, she goes softly down to the drawing-room in search of her visitor. Nellie Taylor—a rather short, plump girl, with a charmingly pretty pink and white face—rises quickly as Janet comes in.

"Oh, Jean!" she says, going to meet her, and presenting a countenance that for signs of weeping is not a whit better than Miss Roy's. "I do sympathize with you. I'm much surprised at these words. On what account does she sympathize with her? Surely she cannot know why she has been spending the morning in tears."

"Come and sit down by me," Nell goes on, taking her hand and drawing her to a sofa. "Trouble comes to all of us some time, you know."

"But," begins Janet, thoroughly puzzled, as she sits down together, "my dear Nell!"

"There, now," interrupted she, "don't speak of it. I don't let me know how much worse you feel than I. I know you think so, but indeed—and the tears began to trickle down her cheeks again—"you don't know how I loved him!"

"Nell, what are you talking about?" Janet asks, excitedly, her grief having given way to astonished curiosity. "It is evident there is a misunderstanding somewhere."

"Nell looks at her curiously.

"Are you angry?" she asks, in a hurt tone. "I don't think I have approved of his making me his wife?"

"Uncle Arthur!" repeats Nell. It is she who is surprised now. "Who is Uncle Arthur?"

"Janet, dear, kind old gentleman who has just died."

"But I have been talking of Dick. You must have known I was. Poor dear Dick!" and again she is weeping as though her heart would break.

"But Dick is not dead?"

"There is a movement of the portiere which covers the entrance to the library."

"Nor likely to be soon," shouted Richard, running forward from his hiding-place, where he has heard all the conversation, his pleasant face wreathed in smiles.

The next moment he has caught Nell in his arms and is kissing away the remaining tears.

"You darling good girl!" he says, passionately, "believe you do care a little bit for me."

"But I cannot understand it," says Janet, in wonder. "What ever could have caused you to think Dick was dead?"

"The idea of asking me, after the letter you wrote!" replies Nell. "Didn't you tell me so? I didn't think, Jean, that you could perpetrate such an awful joke."

"But I wrote no letter," adds Janet.

Nell puts her hand in her pocket and draws forth an epistle.

"Read it," she says. "If you didn't write it, who did?" And Janet read:

"Friday morning.

"MY DEAR NELL,—I have very sad news for you. Our darling boy is no more. At twelve o'clock Wednesday night he breathed his last. Oh, how can I write it. Please to come out and see me. I know you thought a great deal of him, and can sympathize with me."

"Ever yours, JANET ROY."

Suddenly it comes to Janet that perhaps her great uncle was related to the Taylors.

"Was he?" she begins; but before she can finish the question Nell answers her: "Yes" (sobbing). "Didn't you know it? Oh, why didn't some one let me know that he was so ill? I would have so liked to be with him!"

Janet looked pityingly at her young friend. Surely her uncle must have been a very lovable old gentleman to inspire this affection.

"But how strange it is," she thinks, "that I never knew we were even distantly connected with the Taylors. Perhaps Dick knew it, but I'm sure he never told me." Then she begins sobbing again for mere sympathy, and for a moment not a word is spoken.

"Was he so very dear to you?" asks Janet, bringing the cambric into play again.

"Oh, Jean," Nell answers, also wiping away the tears, "you cannot imagine how we loved each other. There was no time set, but then it was understood that it was to come off as soon as his salary was sufficient for him to"—and then she burst into tears again.

"What was to come off?"—in surprise.

"What were engaged, you know," Nell says, looking up.

"Engaged?"—with great astonishment.

"Did you not know it?"

"But it is not my writing," says Janet. "I never make my own letters, nor sign myself 'Ever yours,' and, besides, there was no black on the door."

"It is very like your writing, and I never thought of the black. Who could have sent the letter if you didn't?"

Dick, who is still standing with his arm about Nell's waist, bursts into a hearty laugh. "I am the author," he says. "It was a little April hoax, and it worked admirably—far better than I expected."

"You awful boy!" exclaim Nell and Janet in chorus.

"The boy is dead," persists Dick.

"But what a frightful story you told!" says Nell, "and how terribly I was worried!"

"It is all true," says Dick. "There is not an untruth in the whole letter: the boy is no more; the boy did breathe his last. I am a man now. Thursday was my twenty-first birthday."

"You forgave my name," says Janet.

"I put my initial below, if you notice," replies Dick. And sure enough, there it was. "And our wedding will be just as soon as you can get ready."

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