

* * The Story Page. * *

Uncle Nelson.

BY BERTHA G. WOODS.

"I'm a pilgrim, and I'm a stranger,
I can tarry, I can tarry but a night."

It was a quivering old voice from an upstairs room. Grand-uncle Nelson sat there alone by the window. He and Aunt Martha had often sung the sweet old hymn together in the years when they wished that their pilgrimage might be a long one. She had reached the city of which her Redeemer was the light, and ever since her going he had been glad that he, too, could tarry but a night.

In the hammock, under the elm trees, a girlish voice hummed somewhat abstractedly the refrain. He leaned his white head from the window.

"That you, Barbie?"

"Yes, Uncle."

She looked up for a moment, then down again at the book in her lap. Its printed pages suddenly acquired new charms, for she was afraid that he was in a conversational mood, and she did not feel like listening to him just then. The day was hot, and she was tired. There had been so many things to look after. What a difference it did make when mamma was gone, if only for a day. Uncle Nelson was sometimes tiresome, especially in his reminiscent moments, and his memory was poor. He told the same thing over and over again. So she kept her eyes fastened on her book.

How pretty her brown head looked resting on the cushion of the hammock, Uncle Nelson thought, and her little slippered foot, too, as it touched the ground now and then, to keep up a gentle swaying motion. There was a soft play of light and shadow on her face, made by the thick, stirring branches of the elm trees.

"That's a snug little place you've got."

He wanted to get her to talking. He loved to watch her bright young face; somehow it rested his old eyes. "How are your posies getting along, Barbie?" he asked.

"Pretty well, Uncle Nelson. I weeded my garden this morning."

"Did you? I used to be a great hand to fuss about a garden myself. Your Aunt Martha and I always had a nice posy bed."

He adjusted his glasses and leaned a little further from the window.

"You've got your sweet pea vines all trained, ain't you? Did it all yourself, Barbie?"

"Yes, all myself."

"They'll be in blow soon, won't they? Sweet peas always put me in mind of the bunch I took your Aunt Martha one time when I was a-courting her, Barbie. I can see this minute how pretty she blushed when I said she was sweeter than the whole bunch of 'em put together."

He was quiet for a minute, with a far-away smile on his lips, then he began again.

"That's a nice little hammock you've got, isn't it, Barbie?"

"Yes, and this is such a good place for it. I got a headache from being out in the sun, and it's so cool here."

"So it is. If I didn't feel kind of weak myself, I'd come down and sit with you a while, Barbie. My head aches, too."

"Does it, Uncle?" and now Barbara looked up quickly. "I'll come up and sit with you in just a few moments, if you'd like to have me. I just want to finish this story first. It's a German story, you know, and I make it a rule to read something in German every day, so that I won't forget what little I know. Some of the girls come back in the fall with their tongues all out of practice and half the words they knew before forgotten. I'll come up and see you just as soon as I get through."

"I'd be real glad to have you, Barbie."

Uncle Nelson withdrew his head from the window, and sat back in his cushioned chair, an expectant smile upon his face. The German story was not quite finished, when the gate opened and Gail Wetherall came hurrying up the walk.

"Barbara, put on your hat just as quick as you can. Sue Merrill's home. She astonished all her family by walking in on them today. She said she got so homesick she couldn't stay away another hour. Rather is over there, and I promised to come and get you. She is wild to see you."

Barbara sprang from the hammock.

"Wait for me a minute, Gail, till I get my hat."

Half-way to the door, Barbara stopped short, a thought of Uncle Nelson and her promise to him entered her head. There was a moment's indecision, then she turned resolutely to Gail.

"I'm just as sorry as I can be, Gail, but there's something I forgot, something I've promised to do. I can't go to Sue's till I've done it."

"Oh, Barbara, can't you put it off?"

"Really, I oughtn't to, Gail, but I'll come over the

moment I can. You'd better not wait. She will be so anxious for you to get back, and you can tell her I'm coming just as fast as I can."

Up the stairs to Uncle Nelson's room she hurried as soon as Gail was out of the gate. There was a bright little smile on her face. Uncle Nelson must not know how much she would rather be somewhere else. The faded old eyes answered quickly to the smile in the bright young ones.

"You're a good little girl, Barbie. Bring your chair up here to the window, where we can talk easier. There, that's right. Didn't I hear somebody talking to you a minute ago?"

"Yes, Uncle, Gail Wetherall was here just for a minute, but she's gone."

"Oh, then, I aint a keeping you from any of your friends. I was afraid mebbe I was, and I wouldn't want to do that, Barbie. I'm glad I aint, because somehow I wanted to see you more than common."

"And I'm glad to be with you, Uncle Nelson. How is your head feeling now?"

"Just aches a little, Barbie, nothing much."

His trembling hand had wandered to her hair, and rested there for a moment in the thick, wavy masses. She put up her own hand to meet it. Something in Uncle Nelson's face touched her strangely. How very old he looked and what was that vaguely floating through her mind. "Neither shall his place know him anymore?" Would that be true soon, of Uncle Nelson?

His voice broke in on her thoughts.

"You look a bit like your Aunt Martha, Barbie, every now and then; the way she looked sixty years ago."

"Do I, Uncle?"

Her "Aunt Martha!" No other topic of conversation was quite so sweet to him, Barbara knew.

"May I get out her daguerreotypes, Uncle, and look at them again?"

"Certainly, certainly," with pleased promptness, "you know where to find 'em, Barbie? In the little blue box in the dark—she had taken it out so often for Uncle Nelson to inspect the precious contents."

"Her face is very sweet, isn't it, Uncle? Her eyes look so bright and pretty."

"Bright—I should say so! They were just like stars, Barbie, when that first one was taken. She wasn't more than seventeen then. She was the prettiest girl in Springvale."

"I wonder what there is about my face that looks like her face," Barbara said, scrutinizing the quaint portrait gravely.

"I guess it's your whole expression, Barbie, a kind of pleasant, bright look."

The examination of the daguerreotypes and the reminiscences suggested by them occupied a half-hour at least.

"Would you like to have me read to you, Uncle Nelson?" Barbara asked, when the little blue box was at last put away.

"Thank you, Barbie, I don't care if you do. You might read a piece from John if you feel like it. The Bible's there on that little stand. My eyes didn't feel quite equal to it myself. You might read my favorite chapter, Barbie, the fourteenth."

"Yes, Uncle Nelson."

He listened with a dreamy, contented look on his face as the girlish voice read the beautiful chapter. His loud regular breathing made her look up just as she reached the closing verses. He had fallen asleep, soothed by her voice, and she laid the big Bible back on the stand, and stole noiselessly from the room.

There was kissing and embracing a half-hour later, when Barbara made her appearance at her friend's house.

"Put yourself in that chair," Sue commanded, "and let me look at you Barbara. You can't think how I've missed you. I feel as if I had been gone a year at least."

"It seems an age to me, too," and Barbara pressed her pretty lips again to Sue's cheek.

"It was queer the way I happened to come over here today," said Esther, "I was just passing by when it occurred to me that I would run in and ask Mrs. Merrill if she had any idea when Sue was coming back, for she hadn't said a word about the time in her last letter. When I came up on the porch, whom should I see but Sue herself."

How fast the time flew by! There were so many things to talk over that had somehow not found their way into the girls' voluminous correspondence, and just as the visitors were thinking that they really must tear themselves away, Sue proposed a game of tennis. It was late in the afternoon when Barbara reached home.

"I'll just run up to Uncle Nelson's room for a minute," she thought, "and take him these sweet peas. I don't see why Sue's should blossom so much earlier than mine."

The sweet peas and the tender thought of Uncle Nelson brought back his favorite hymn:

"I'm a pilgrim, and I'm a stranger"

she hummed, as she ran up the stairs.

"I can tarry, I can tarry but a night."

Of that City to which I journey"

The door was open. She gave a light tap to announce

her coming and crossed the threshold. He was still sitting by the window, his face turned toward the tall, blowing trees. His mind must be far away, thought Barbara, not to hear her coming. She would slip softly to him and put the sweet peas in his hand, and a kiss on his forehead. He was so fond of her it would please him.

Still he did not stir, though she came close up to his side, and the hand into which she gave the flowers were very cold. His mind was far away. His soul had slipped out from the tired body. The night of his tarrying was over.—New York Observer.

Grandma Holden's Debut.

BY CORA S. DAY.

John Holden had at last snatched a week from business and come from his distant Western home to spend the vacation with Mr. and Mrs. Richard Holden, Grandma Holden and the little Holdens, and though the latter—there were four of them—voted him the best of uncles and listened with delight to the Western yarns he told, somehow he managed to spend most of his time with grandma in her little, old-fashioned sitting room, beside the open fire which she loved to watch as her still nimble fingers made her knitting needles fly and shine in its light.

Perhaps it was only natural that he should feel most at home there, for he was grandma's youngest son—"her baby" she had called him when he first came. They had only caught a glimpse of the tears in her fond old eyes, for "the baby" had folded her small form in his big, strong arms as if he would never let her go, while his own eyes grew strangely bright.

So most of the time while Mrs. Holden was busy with household affairs, Mr. Holden with the business of the big farm, and the children at school, John sat in grandma's room. He almost felt that he was a boy again, as they talked of the days that he had spent in work and play on this very farm which his oldest brother now owned and tilled.

He told her, too, of his life since he had been grown up and away from the old home; and asked her many questions of how the years had gone with her.

From her answers he learned something that he had already more than half suspected, though never a word of discontent or complaint passed her lips.

He had asked her if she did not get very lonesome sometimes, and she had answered:

"Yes, of course. But I always have my fire and my knitting and Bible, you know. And the children are so good to me."

A little quiet observation showed John that the children's "goodness" consisted in coming to her when they wanted something done for them that their mother was too busy to attend to; and in being a little less noisy (under strict orders from their father) when she had a headache or was taking a nap.

John came to the conclusion that while unkindness or neglect were farthest from the thoughts of these people who really loved her, grandma must nevertheless often be dull and lonely in her cozy sitting-room. Here she spent most of her time "so that she would not interfere with the housework or the children's play," as she innocently told him.

When the end of the week drew near he boldly proposed that "mother" go home with him for a visit, which should be as long or short as she might wish.

The family was speechless with astonishment, and the little old lady was really frightened at the rashness of the plan. But gradually, as he talked more and more about it, she grew accustomed to the idea, and the long journey seemed a little less dreadful when she told herself, "John would be there with her to take care of her."

Almost before she realized it she had consented to go, her simple preparations were made in a flutter of nervous excitement, the good-byes were said over and over again and at last they were off.

A pang of regret seized her as the train steamed slowly out of the familiar home village; but John guessed the feeling, and made himself so entertaining that it soon wore away.

He took such good care of her that the long, unaccustomed journey tired her very little. Even that little was forgotten in the warm welcome that met her at the end from the daughter-in-law and grandchildren whom she had never before seen.

John had explained things in a letter sent on ahead, and he, his wife and two bright young daughters fairly vied with each other in gentle, kindly attentions to their guest.

Grandma Holden was at first slightly overawed by the luxurious city home, with its elegant appointments and the fashionable dresses and fashionable friends of the inmates.

But, beside from their desire to make her happy and comfortable, the dear little old lady, with her refined, old-fashioned manners and sweet gentleness, soon won

their hearts and friends who were town could be and before long innocent surprise select and quality honor.

All her soul were around quiet, uneventful success.

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