



MY JOHNNY COCKHORSES.

(In Youth's Companion.)

In the year 1875 I was spending the months of September and October with my brother in Washington. All the birds of passage had flown elsewhere; the lawmakers had not yet assembled; the weather was perfect, and out of office hours we wandered happily about the uncrowded capital of the country.

My brother was a lone bachelor of tender years. He had taken for me two charming rooms opposite his boarding-place. Here my two babies, their nurse and I enjoyed every minute of the day.

Every day my brother came home with some new treasure for me or the children,—flowers, fruit or toys,—so that I was not at all surprised one day when I was in the back room to hear him come in and call out:

"Katy, come here quick! I've got something for you."

I hurried in to find him sitting by the table trying to shake something gently out of a small cigar-box. He looked up as I came in.

"I'm afraid she did not like the smell of the tobacco," he said. "She's all doubled up. I hope she isn't dead."

At that moment "she" tumbled out on the table, stretched her long neck, and gazed about in a manner not at all suggestive of death.

She was a slender, curious little green creature, such as I had never before seen. Those who have read Mrs. Miller's "Little Lady in Green" have her exact pen-portrait. She is called the praying mantis.

She turned her small cocked-hat of a head up, and looked at us in a way that was almost uncanny.

"One of the men at the office found it on a rosebush out at the Soldier's Home yesterday," my brother explained, "and I begged it for you. It eats flies—catches them and tucks them under its arm. I don't know what her proper name is. Our chief calls her a Pharisee, because she always appeared to be praying, and yet it's plain that the praying is only a form."

Of course the next thing was to catch some flies, and present them to the "pharisaical" young person. After some coquetting, she received them graciously, pulling off first the wings, then the legs, then the head, and keeping the body for a delicious last morsel.

We were still plying her with flies and she was growing quite friendly, when my Southern cousin Will arrived upon the scene with a "Hello! Where did you get your Johnny cockhorse?"

He told us they were old friends of his South Carolina boyhood, and added, "The negro children used to tame them—make pets of them. They say they learn to know their names."

Names! What a delightful thought! Our Pharisee was christened Peter Maria on the spot—"Peter" by me in honor of Dame Hickett's immortal cricket, "Maria" by my little daughter for some reasons best known to four-year-olds.

Will could not give us a detailed account of the taming process carried on by the South Carolina negro children, but he had a vague idea that "they tickled them."

So I took the little creature in my hand and stroked it very gently on its closely folded wings and down its long, slender, green neck. I was obliged to perform the latter operation with a pen handle, for my finger was much too large and clumsy for the delicate work.

At first she struggled, but after a time she lay perfectly still on my palm, evidently enjoying the operation. At last I could put her down and take her up again, turn her on her back or her stomach, and when I brushed her with a feather from the little duster she would move her long neck about as if perfectly happy.

When night came, my cousin advised that she be shut up in the cigar-box. But my affections were already sufficiently interested to make me protest against filling her substitutes for lungs with nicotine poison. So we left her on the table, free and untrammelled.

I was so anxious about her, though, that I rose twice in the night to see if she were safe. In the morning we found her perched on some flowers in a vase, and never, during her short life, did she ask for a more congenial home.

Each day found me more intimate with my small green pet. I continued the taming process, constantly repeating "Peter Maria" while I smoothed and stroked her. Unless she was very hungry she refused to take flies from any one else, but would always take them from my fingers.

Her taming progressed so rapidly that in three days, if I left my hand open on the table, she would mount into it. In five days when I called her she would come to my hand, and if I did not take her promptly she would rub her three-cornered head against my fingers, coaxing me to pet her. I had owned Peter Maria about a week, and she seemed almost as important as the babies, when I received a contribution to my family in the shape of three more "Peters"—a gentlemen and his bigamous household. These had been captured for me on the banks of the Potomac.

I cannot say that these new people were ever really rivals of my dear Maria, though I received them kindly and gave them a home among my roses and ferns. But they evidently belonged to a lower class than my Pharisee.

Neither "Peter Ann" nor "Peter Jane" was as large or as delicately green as Peter Maria, and as for "Mr. Peter," why he was as unpleasant a dried-up little brown specimen of a Mormon as I have ever had anything to do with.

It was a great trial to me to see how graciously my pet received this unworthy suitor; for such he declared himself at once. After a day or two, the former wives were quite afraid to come on the same side of the roses.

"Mr. Peter" did not make any effort to support himself. He had always I should judge, occupied the proud position in his family of an Indian warrior, accustomed to having his women folks wait upon him.

Even my dear Maria would hurry away from my fondling hand to catch a fly for this ill-tempered, insignificant little snuff-colored bridegroom. He would take the

fly, and eat it, hap-hazard, head-first without the least evidence of gratitude.

One morning, when I had been engrossing Maria's attention for some time, Peter Jane took advantage of her opportunity, came around the roses, and with an air of conciliation, presented her faithless spouse with a particularly large and tempting fly.

He took it ungraciously, I have no doubt. While he was devouring it, and Jane was looking on enraptured, Maria appeared.

She did not waste one minute, but flew, or rather sprang at Jane, seized her in a strong embrace, squeezed and bit her viciously, and as soon as she was quite dead, pulled off her head and devoured it. Then Maria presented a leg of the fallen rival to the widower, who, I blush to say, took it without reluctance and ate it.

After that Ann never even peeped round the corner. But I think Maria's soul had been disgusted by her easy conquest, and that she never quite forgave Peter for eating Jane's leg. One day she pounced upon him, I cannot say for what provocation, tore a large hole in his abdomen, and so killed him.

Then Ann appeared from her place of concealment. It mattered nothing to the faithful creature that she had been cast off and discarded. She came close to the dead body of the Johnny cockhorse she had once loved, and mourned over his untimely fate.

Never again did Ann eat a fly. For two days she was coaxed and petted, but to no avail. The third morning we found her shrunken and dead, lying on her back by the side of her unburied husband. Marion dug one grave for the two in the tiny courtyard below the window.

Now once more my Maria reigned alone. By prompt obedience and charming antics, she endeavored to banish from our minds her cruel deeds. When I wrote my daily letter, she would walk over my paper, or mount the penhandle, grasping it with her legs, and letting himself be carried on it to and fro. She would sit on my finger, or very daintily on the top of my ear.

Once, to the great amusement of the children behind me, I wore her to church as a hat decoration, never knowing it till I reached home, and found my family waiting timidly to inform me that, as they supposed, my Maria had escaped.

One night, after an impromptu party, some one had left an empty beer bottle on the table, with a little beer spilled by its side. In the morning I found Maria deaf to my calls. When at last she was persuaded to come, she hunched herself up, declined to be touched and lost two flies that were presented to her.

At last she sat in a heap, with her comical little head on one side, the most painful and ludicrous specimen of an inebriated Johnny cockhorse that one could possibly imagine.

The next day she was as cheerful as ever, sat on the rim of the bottle, ate an unusually hearty breakfast, and when I drove out to the arsenal I left her at her liveliest and best. When we returned, a couple of hours later, I was greeted with wails from Marion and her little cousins.

"O Cousin Katy," and "O mamma," they cried in concert, "Peter Maria has busted! See! She ate seventeen flies—and the last two she ate so slowly we thought maybe she was sick. Just as Benjie was going to give her another beautiful one—she busted!"

Alas! it was true. I spare you the details. But the children were quite right; she had burst.

I covered her unsightly remains with rose leaves, and I am not quite sure that my eyes were entirely dry.—Kate Woodbridge Michaelis.

APRIL FOOL.

BY PANSY.

(Concluded.)

There came a bright spring day toward the close of April, and they went to the woods together, Aleck and his sister Trudie, and her dear friend, Lora Greenwell. Young Willis Stone happened to be at the woods on that same afternoon, and, as they rested on the ground, he jumped a mossy log, and sat down beside them. He was older than they, but a very good friend of theirs for all that. He had news to tell.

"There's a jolly plan afoot," he began,

pulling tufts of moss and tossing them at Trudie, by way of amusement, while he talked.

"There's to be a May party, don't you think! A real, old-fashioned, jolly time. All the boys in the first grade are to be asked, and all the girls in Miss Nelson's class; so that takes in all of you, doesn't it? There's to be games, and a May-pole, of course, and a regular old supper on the lawn, and a magic-lantern in the evening. What do you think of that?"

"Who gets it up? Where is it?" said girls and boys in the same breath.

"But there's the funniest 'if' to be put in the invitations," went on Willis, paying no attentions to their questions. "They are to be printed on real note paper, and gotten up in style; but they're to say that every boy is put on his honor—I suppose the girls are too, or else he thinks they are above needing it, but I don't—some of 'em. Well, they are to think over everything they said and did on the first day of April, and the boy who told a lie for fun, or did a mean thing for fun, is on his honor as a gentleman to decline the invitation. Now, did you ever hear the like of that! Luckily, it doesn't put me out, for my father is awful strict about such things; how is it with you?"

Aleck looked gloomy, and both of the girls stared hard at him.

"I'm safe, so far as the lying goes; I don't tell lies," he said, quickly; "but about the meanness; well, I don't know; there's that one scrape; I can't say as I think there was anything so dreadful mean about it; it's given us lots of trouble; I think we ought to stand about square on that; I don't know what the other boys will think, but it seems to me we won't be obliged to say that it was exactly mean."

"What was it all? I was away, you know; and I only know the story in snatches."

"Why, you see—" began Aleck, but just then Trudie made her ringing voice heard:

"Do, for pity's sake, Willis, tell us where this wonderful party is to be. If we girls are to come in, we might at least be allowed to know who gets it up."

"Didn't I tell you?" asked Willis, good-naturedly. "Why, it's Judge Markham; the old judge, you know. The party is to be up in his grounds; that's a prime place for a party, and the judge does things up in style, I tell you."

Aleck gave a long, loud, disappointed whistle. "It's all up with me," he said, "and with the rest of those fools who helped me; we can't go."

"Why not? You say it wasn't mean."

"Oh, well, you see, why it was the old judge himself; the law papers were his, you know, and of course we can't go to his party; he remembers the whole story."

"But, Aleck," persisted Trudie, "what of it, so long as you don't think it was a mean thing to do? What difference does it make because the party is at Judge Markham's?"

"Oh, dear!" said Aleck, shaking himself, "girls are such muffs! Of course it makes a difference; we can't go, and that's the whole of it; and I hope there won't be another April fool in forty years; let's go home." And the May party came off, and those four boys got their elegant, gilt-edged invitations, and stayed at home, every one of them! But to this day those two girls can't understand, since the boys were sure that their April performance was not mean, why they could none of them appear at Judge Markham's! Can you?

POVERTY AND LIQUOR.

Dr. Edward Everett Hale, who knows Boston so thoroughly, and who always speaks so judiciously, says:—

"I like to put myself on record also as saying that all the poverty, all the crime, and all the vice which attract public attention in Boston among what we call the poorer classes, may be ascribed to the free use of intoxicating liquors. I have said a hundred times, and I am willing to say it again, that if anybody will take charge of all the poverty and crime which result from drunkenness, the South Congregational Church, of which I have the honor to be the minister, will alone take charge of all the rest of the poverty which needs 'out-door relief' in the city of Boston."—*Zion's Herald*.