

You Never Can Tell

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After a lifetime spent in the labors of the farm, Grandpa Papkin appeared older than his sixty-five years. He had arrived at the odd-job stage of life; smoked much in shady corners; was beloved by dogs and cats, and dominated by his son James, with whom he lived.

With old Aunt Purvis, who lived in the square white house on the corner, he was great cronies. Sometimes this intimacy troubled grandpa's children no less than it did aunt's.

"Suppose them old folks was to take it into their heads to marry!" James Papkin said with a frown. "Wish we could do somethin' to discourage father from goin' there so much."

"Guess we could stop it, if worse came to worst," Martha replied confidently. "What would they live on, anyway?"

"Father's got close onto a thousand dollars saved up into the bank."

Mrs. Papkin peered out thru the doorway, wiping her hands on her apron the while.

"I declare," she said, "there goes a slick-lookin' feller drivin' by. Looks like one of them pictures into the magazines. Wonder where he comes from, and what he's a doin' here!"

James stretched his neck to get a better view.

"Looks to me like one of them sharpers or somethin'. I got my s'picious of fellers that dresses like that. A body that's so fixed up on the outside must do it cause he's lackin' within. Where'd father go to?"

"I declare"—with a glance at the clock—"if he hain't been gone more'n two hours! He went off down-town to git me a spool of sixty white and two pounds of sugar. Bet he's stopped to Purvis's—right in the middle of the day, too!"

James washed noisily in the tin basin outside the door, blowing and gurgling into the suds that he rubbed on his face, as if it were a most unpleasant function—which it no doubt was. Standing erect, he delved carefully into one ear after the last remnant of moisture, blinking down the road as he did so.

"Here he comes—just turnin' out o' Purvis's yard. Wouldn't say nothin' to him, if I was you, Marthy."

Shortly grandpa's bent shoulders were bobbing above the pickets of the fence. He reached over the gate for the latch, and came slowly up the sun-softened tar sidewalk.

"Should think you'd know better'n to be gallivantin' around in the sun sich a day as this," began Martha.

"That's so, that's so," agreed the old man. "And say, Marthy, I clean, plumb forgot that there thread and sugar—clean, plumb forgot 'em."

"Well, I never, Grandpa Papkin! What ever have you been doin' these two hours?"

"Had a leetle business with a feller down-town; and then I stopped a bit to Mary Purvis's on the way back. Mighty hot, ain't it?"

Thru the door grandpa could see Martha scurrying between the steaming hotness of the kitchen and the red-clothed table in the dining-room, carrying in the dishes of the midday meal. With one hand pressed to the rheumatic spot in his back, and the other braced against the step, he arose slowly and ambled to his place.

During the process of dining there was little conversation. The only sound was the stirring of spoon in cup, the clatter of knife and fork, and the occasional request to pass this or that which was quite beyond reach. While the pie was being brought, however, there was a brief interval, of which James Papkin made use to observe:

"You been spendin' quite a sight of time to the Purvis's lately, father."

The old man looked at his son, startled, then down at the table-cloth again.

"Yes," he admitted, "Mary Purvis an me takes a lot of pleasure in each other's company. Old folks feels a sort of drawin' together, I guess, Jimmy—a sort of drawin' together, like as if they have somethin' in common."

"If you was a young feller, now," James said jocularly, "folks would be sayin' you was sparkin' Mis' Purvis."

"Yes," interjected Martha, "and I

wouldn't be s'prised a mite if they was sayin' so anyhow!"

Grandpa appeared uncomfortable and sought to change the subject.

"Calc'late I'll potter round in the garden this afternoon," he observed.

"I calc'late you won't do no sich thing—not in this beatin' sun. You set right into the shade till four o'clock, anyway."

"Now, Marthy," expostulated grandpa, "don't you guess I'm old enough to look out for myself?"

"You ain't so young as you once was," she said shortly; "and you'd be overdoin', and gittin' a stroke or somethin', if I wasn't always at you."

II

An hour later Martha put her head out of the door to summon grandpa to some trifling service, but he was not to be seen.

"Huh!" she sniffed. "Over to Purvis's agin, I'll bet a cent!"

And so it was. Grandpa Papkin and Aunt Purvis occupied the shady porch of the big white house. The old lady was knitting with subconscious art, her eyes and her thoughts far from the black stocking in her lap. Grandpa was smoking



DONALD HUGH, CECIL ROY AND JOHN GRANT
Triplet sons of Mr. and Mrs. R. L. McMillan, Parry, Sask

placidly, his back against a pillar, and a yellow cat purring on his knees.

"Mary," the old man was saying, "folks is beginnin' to suspect I'm courtin' you."

Aunt Mary Purvis was a tiny, pert old lady, with keen black eyes that snapped with quick anger or twinkled with deep humor.

"We-el, you be, ain't you?" she drawled, and the twinkle was not hidden by the iron rims of her spectacles.

"Reckon I be." He paused and stroked the cat, which purred loudly in approval and gratitude. "I don't see why old folks ain't as much entitled to do what they like as young folks be."

"I opine it's because they ain't got no sperret left to stand up for themselves and fight their own battles. When your hair gits white, it seems as if your courage sort o' oozes out."

"I'm goin' to speak right out about it perty soon," declared grandpa. "I'm goin' to tell Jim and Marthy that you and me is goin' to marry; and then"—he smote his knee so vehemently that the yellow cat jumped with fright and arched its back—"and then, by gum, we'll do it!"

"They won't never let us."

"We'll elope!" said grandpa.

He was awed at the boldness of his own proposal. Aunt Purvis, however, had an eye for practical things.

"What would we live on, I'd like to know? You ain't able to work stiddy, and if we was to go elopin', and git our folks mad, where'd we be?"

"I got more'n a thousand dollars saved up into the bank."

"Drawin' most a dollar a week interest," said Aunt Purvis dryly.

"We could live up the princ'pal."

This impious utterance made them look at each other and gasp. It was not to be thought of.

"There must be some way," urged grandpa.

"When you diskiver it, you come 'round

and tell me," said aunt, "and we'll go keepin' house right sudden."

Grandpa shook his head dolefully, and got painfully to his feet.

"Reckon I'll git along down to the post-office. Maybe somebody's left me a fortin' G'by, Mary!"

He walked off toward with an assumption of spryness that cost him a twinge at every step.

III

The teakettle was singing over the wood fire in the Purvis kitchen when grandpa turned again thru the whitewashed gate toward the porch where aunt sat, still knitting. This time there was a real spring in his step. He chewed exultantly on a straw, and his eyes, not yet dulled by years, twinkled and glowed with excitement. Panting, he sank on the top step, and the cat had time to install itself on his knee before he found breath to speak.

"Mary," he puffed, "we're a goin' to make it! You and me kin git married and nobody to say a word—nobody. I've found a way."

"Ben Papkin!" exclaimed aunt.

"I've done so," grandpa exulted. "It's

an investment. I got money into the bank, like I told you, and I'm a goin' to invest it so's it'll bring us enough to live on fine and not be beholdin' to nobody."

"What be you goin' to invest into, Ben?"

"The manufacturin' business—auty-mobiles." The old fellow was so delighted, so full of his project, that he could not sit still, and in resentment the cat-stepped off his lap to find a more stable resting-place. "I met a young feller down-town, and got to talkin' with him about things—crops and politics and fishin' and sich. I took a shine to him, an' fore I knowed it I told him 'bout you and me; and he seemed to understand that somehow old folks ain't allowed to do what they want to."

"Once," he says to me, 'I had a grandmother. I know how 'tis!'

"So I told him the whole thing."

"Well, I swan, Ben Papkin!"

"And I told him I didn't have but what little money I got into the bank. When I told him how much, he set, thinkin' a minute, and then he says:

"I guess, grandpa, it'll do."

"Then he tells me how other folks had invested not more'n me into the auty-mobile business in Detroit, and got rich—rich and owned hosses and carriages and houses and everything."

"And," he says, 'I'm int'rested into that very business, and if you'll trust that money to me I'll invest her for you. Maybe 'twon't make you rich, but I think I can promise you it'll make enough for you to live on.'

"Wa-al, I looks close into his eyes, and they was stiddy and clear and seems honest to me, so I puts out my hand and says: 'Young feller, the money's yourn.'

"That's what I done"; and grandpa leaned back against the pillar and beamed.

"Did he promise?" asked aunt.

"He done so. He said it wasn't on my account he was takin' the trouble, but on yourn, 'cause of that there grandmother of his'n

"I'd 'a' liked to have been able to do it for her," he says."

Aunt's eyes were moist.

"I guess you dast trust him all right, if he talks like that there." She nodded several times, pondering the matter. "You know I got a leetle money myself—three hundred dollars, to bury me with. If your money'll keep us good, yours and mine together'll keep us better. To-morrow I'll git it out o' the bank, and we'll invest the whole thing."

Grandpa beamed more delightedly than ever.

"We'll do it, Mary, we'll do it. He says it'll be six months before we git any divy-dends; but we ain't so old we can't wait. Six months! And won't our children be s'prised—won't they jist!"

IV

At supper that night grandpa's son and daughter-in-law were again discussing the young man who had driven past the house in the morning—the one who was arrayed so modishly as to raise their mistrust.

"I seen him settin' on the hotel steps," announced James, "dressed fit to kill. Marthy, I bet he had them clothes made special for himself. And what d'ye s'pose he had stickin' into his tie?—A diamond bigger'n a shelled pea! And yaller shoes that come no higher'n his ankles; and sich socks! Marthy, them socks would 'a' stamped him a sharper, if nothin' else had. They was silk, and gray. B'lieve me or not, but I seen 'em close!"

"I wonder the town marshal don't put him into the lockup! Be you sure them clothes was made special for him?"

Here grandpa entered the conversation.

"Them clothes was made special for him, by a tailor; and they cost sixty-five dollars. And that ain't all—his shirts was made special, and they cost four fifty a shirt; and he laid out twenty-five dollars in that there wiggly straw hat."

"How come you to know so much about him?"

"Oh, him and me is friends. He's into the auty-mobile business—makes seads of money."

"That's what he says," interjected Martha. "Jim, you see the doors is locked tight to-night and the winders fastened!"

V

In due course a beautifully engraved stock certificate arrived. Grandpa exhibited it to aunt surreptitiously, with the pride of possession.

"We're stockholders, Mary! I reckon there ain't more'n half a dozen of 'em in this here town. I guess this makes real folks of us, eh?"

Aunt held it in her hands to get the feel of the thing, and experienced all the sensations of the capitalist.

"I wonder how much it'll pay us," she mused.

"Enough—maybe five hundred dollars a year. The young feller said so."

"We kin live fine on that—fine!"

So passed the days; and each one was checked off on the calendar with business-like care, for its flitting brought nearer the dawn of happiness and independence for the old couple.

Finger-marks appeared on the certificate; it showed the soil of frequent handling. Indeed, grandpa's gnarled fingers were touching it more often than not; and aunt held it in her lap under her knitting for hours at a stretch. It was their talisman; for them it spelled a second youth; a freedom from daily supervision; a home of their own—and, besides, some little honor and credit and standin' in the community, for the capitalist is a man apart in the village. Other men work for their money—his money works for him.

Frequently Martha and James alluded to grandpa's sharper friend, and read to him from the city newspaper descriptions of slick young fellows who, by wiles and stratagems, mulcted the credulous of their savings. All wore tailored suits, diamonds abounded in the fellowship, and silk socks were not unknown; but grandpa never wavered.

When five months were gone, signs of impatience manifested themselves in Grandpa Papkin. It was hard to wait.

"It's only a month now, Mary," he de-

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