

Just Like an Old Friend

Always the same, smiling a welcome across the breakfast table every morning. It looks good and is good, and it improves on acquaintance. The introduction is easy, too —

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"No," he told her. "No, I'm going back East again. And I've come to say good-bye."

She gave him both her hands. "Good-bye, Harry, and good luck," she said. "You're sure to enjoy yourself. It was only last Sunday that you were sighing to see a play again."

So they shook hands, and her last words were: "Don't forget us all here, Harry."

To which he laughed back, "No danger, Little Pal"—and the look she gave him nearly made him cry out with the very want of her.

And so she watched him go, and not until she had seen him grow a mere speck in the distance did she realize the truth.

The days that followed were unhappy ones for the girl. There was no one to whom she could turn for comfort or guidance except the foreman's wife, and had this worthy woman offered her advice I know that Little Pal would have instantly rejected it.

"Why doesn't she write to him," said Mrs. Murphy to me and Baldy one day. "Why doesn't she write to him and tell

losing all the roses out of your cheeks these days."

"I'll come," she said, "you're two good friends!"

And so we started off in a kind of strained silence. You see we knew, and the girl knew that we knew, and yet her pride wouldn't let her speak.

Presently Baldy pointed to some moving dots in the distance.

"Have you forgotten your range-lore, Little Pal?" he asked, "or do you know what stock that is?"

"Cows," said the girl.

"Horses," said Baldy.

And when we got nearer it was horses sure enough.

"You're very wise, Baldy," said the girl, half bantering. "Are you always right?"

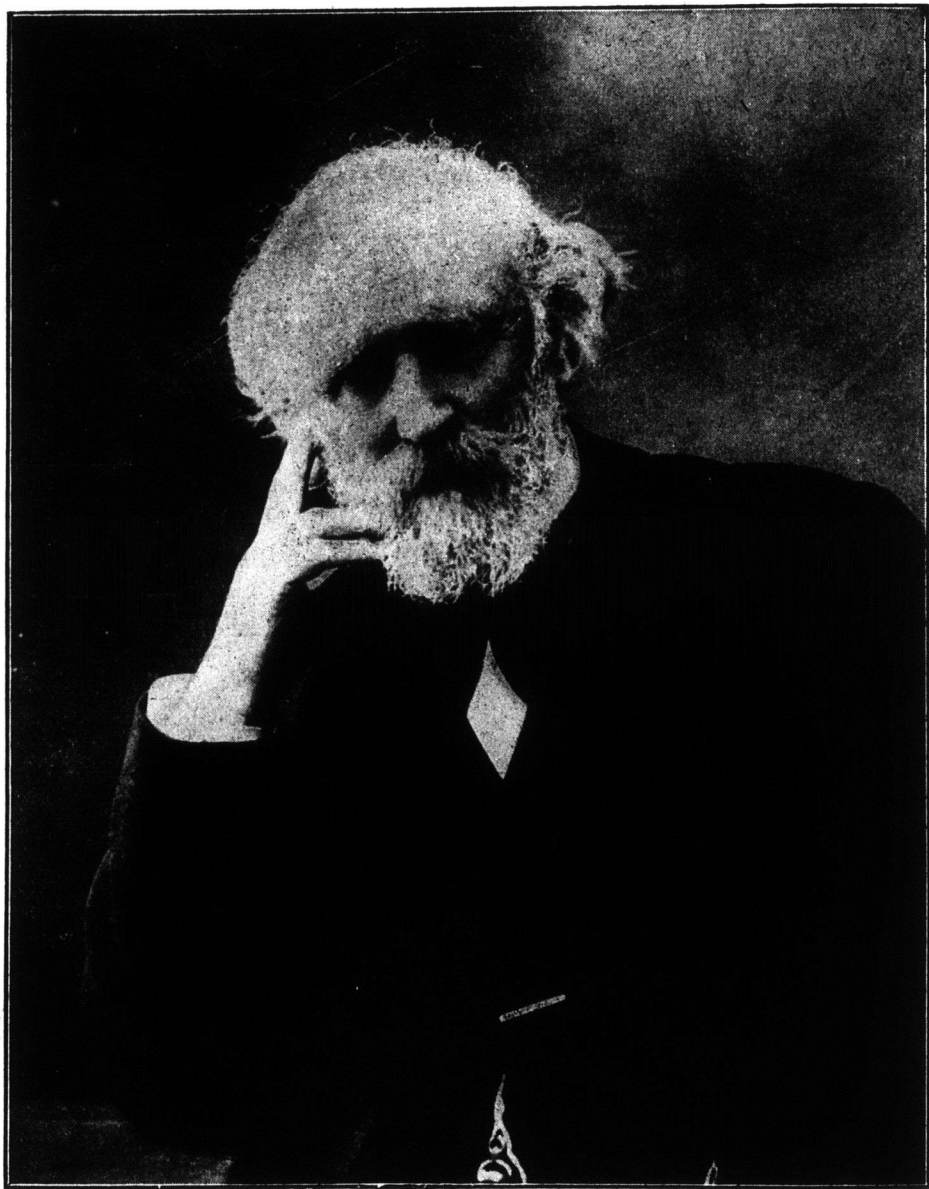
"No," says Baldy, very slowly. "I make mistakes sometimes."

Little Pal seemed to be taking a great deal of interest in the horses.

"What do you do when you make a mistake?" she asked casually.

"Admit it like a man," replied Baldy promptly.

"But you're different Little Pal" I



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him that she's changed her mind. Sure, anybody can see that she's just miserable these days."

"Mrs. Murphy," I said, "you and me and Baldy got the Kid married off. Can't we do anything for Little Pal?"

"No," she says. "No. This girl's too different. You can't do anything if she's too proud to write to him."

"She's very proud," said Baldy wisely.

It was the pride that was making the girl so miserable and as the weeks passed she seemed no nearer doing the only sensible thing and writing and telling the Prodigal that her feelings had changed.

Things would have been easier, of course if there had been any letter for her, but the Prodigal wrote no word either to her or to any of us in the bunkhouse.

So the days came and went until it was June, and Little Pal's birthday, and Baldy and I decided that it was time for us to act.

"Little Pal," says Baldy, "we're going over Little Canyon way to-day, and we'd like it fine if you would come with us."

"I'm not keen," she said, with a sad little smile.

"I know you're not," I told her, "and that's why we want you to come. You're

said, "because you're a girl, and girls look at things differently. Baldy and I were figuring on writing a letter—weren't we, Baldy?"

"This very night," said Baldy innocently.

"And we wondered," I went on, "if you had any message."

She half turned in her saddle and looked at us.

"You dear old friends," she said. "No, I've no message to send."

Well, that seemed to settle things, because we couldn't very well say any more without hurting Little Pal's feelings—and there's no man on the ranch that would do that.

That night, just before we got back to the ranch-house, she said: "I've been very happy to-day."

"You should be happy every day, Little Pal," said Baldy.

"I know," she replied, "—and I've changed my mind, too. When you write your letter, you can send this flower as well, if you like."

She took a sprig of buffalo bean out of her hat band and gave it to me.

"And you can say that I've worn it all day," she added with a smile.