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17

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Job Turner's Declining Years

Continued from Page 8

"You ain't threatened with no shock. You jest overdone yesterday, that's all. What'll I get you for breakfast?"

"I don't feel much like eatin'," he complained.

"You've got to have somethin'," said she.

"Well," he yielded reluctantly, "you might fry me a couple of aigs and heat me up a piece of mince-pie. I'll try to stave it off with hearty vittles as long as I can, tho I don't believe I shall live to see the snow-fly."

For three days the old man kept his bed, stoutly maintaining that his head grew worse and his legs more benumbed.

"I'm jest a broken reed—a broken reed," he reiterated again and again, "an' I cal'late I shall make the fifth within the year."

On the third day of the old man's fancied illness Ben took his gun and tramped all the afternoon thru the woods. At dusk he came into the room where his father lay passively awaiting the impending "shock," and held out a plump partridge for old Job's inspection.

"Thought maybe you'd like a partridge stew, father," he said cheerily. "I knew you was uncommon fond of partridge stew."

The old man's eyes brightened. "That's a likely looking bird you've got, Ben," he said. "Where'd you git him?"

"Down Cedar Creek way," Ben explained. "Partridges ain't plentiful this year, neither."

"Oughter tried Giles's swamp," old Job declared.

"Ain't been no partridges there sence they cut the wood off."

"Ain't, hey? Well, I'll bet it's jest full of 'em! It's all growed up to alders, an' if there ain't no partridges in them alders, I'll eat every tarantulation one of 'em, leaves an' all!"

"Guess I know well's any one where what few partridges round here is to be found," Ben sniffed.

Old Job sat up in bed and smote the coverlet with a skinny paw.

"If I warn't in my declinin' years," he snorted, "I'd show ye where to git partridges, an' git 'em more'n one at a time, too!"

At that moment Cynthia hustled into the room.

"Think you could eat some of the stew if I made it for supper, father?" she inquired.

Old Job sank weakly back on the pillow and closed his eyes.

"I dunno," he said feebly. "I could try. My appetite's fair now, but there's no knowin' when I'll lose it, an' I intend to store up what little strength I can while it lasts."

III

It was on the fourth morning that Cynthia lost her patience. Old Job—after he had stowed away a hearty breakfast—became possessed of the idea that he would have a shock before night. There were prickling sensations up and down his spine, he averred, and his shoulder-blades seemed trying to get out thru his back. Uncle Bijah had been just that way.

It was then that Cynthia, to use her own expression, had decided to give him "a piece of her mind." She had expected to arouse the old man's ire. To her surprise, he listened quietly. When she had finished, he looked at her in reproachful silence.

"I know I'm a great trial to ye, Cynthia," he said at length; "but 'tain't goin' to be for long—not for long," he repeated.

Cynthia made a disgusted exit and sought the shed kitchen, where all the morning she busied herself cleaning up the accumulated debris of the preserving season. Just before noon, when she came into the house to prepare the mid-day dinner, she paid another visit to old Job's bedroom. Perhaps, in her momentary impatience, she had been too hard on his, she reflected.

She pushed open the bedroom door. The bedclothes were thrown back; the bed was empty. Old Job was gone. Cynthia went back to the kitchen, and there she noticed that the gun was not in its usual place in the corner. A sud-

den awful thought gripped her. She sank weakly into a chair, and, covering her face with her apron, fell to sobbing brokenly.

Ben, who had been fencing the lower pasture-lot, came stamping into the kitchen some ten minutes later. She raised to him a face wild-eyed and tearful.

"Oh, Ben," she cried, "have you seen father?"

"Father?" he said blankly. "No. Why?"

"I—I—oh, Ben, I lost my patience this morning," she sobbed, "an' I spoke out sharp to him, an' while I was cleanin' up the shed he slipped out, an'—an'—he's taken the gun with him!" she ended wildly.

Ben stood staring blankly. His was a slow mind, and it took some time for him to grasp the full significance of her words.

"I'll go over to the neighbors' see if any of 'em's seen him," he said very quietly, but with a note of apprehension in his voice.

In half an hour he was back. He had inquired at half a dozen houses along the road, but no one had seen old Job Turner pass.

"He said he knew he was a trial, but that he wouldn't be long," Cynthia confessed brokenly. "We got to find him. I'm going down to the woods back of the house. You git some of the men folks, an' feller soon's you can. Hurry, Ben—oh, hurry!"

She threw an old shawl over her head and went out by the back door, Ben close at her heels. Scarcely was she out of the house when, with a choking cry, she caught up her skirts and sped across the yard. Thru the orchard came shuffling an old man, a gun over his shoulder and four plump partridges dangling in a row from the barrel. Cynthia Turner rushed up to him and caught him by the arm.

"Father, father!" he cried in hysterical relief. "Wherever have you been?"

The old man grinned sheepishly as he turned to his son, who was coming up in Cynthia's wake.

"Ain't no partridges in Giles's swamp, eh?" he said, holding out the birds. "I could 'a' got twice as many if I'd had a dog along!"

Ben stood staring stupidly, with an expression of genuine relief in every line of his homely face.

"When I go gunnin'," old Job observed, "I don't cal'late to git a partridge, but some partridges. Plump ones, ain't they?"

"I never heard of such doin's!" Cynthia chided severely. The reaction of her recent mental strain was setting in strongly. "Gettin' out of a bed of sickness to go gunnin' in Giles's swamp! You come right into the house. You look all wore out!"

Old Job vented a throaty chuckle. A grim light came into his eyes while their corners wrinkled into a smile.

"I wouldn't worry, if I was you, Cynthia. I'm gettin' old, but I guess I shall last thru the partridge season, anyway," he said.

MOST UNFEELING



"Oh, Bob, dear, I got a lovely little morning frock at Madame Deargown's today for a hundred dollars."

"What did you go into mourning for—the hundred?"