

* * The Story Page * *

One April Fool's Day.

BY ELIZABETH PRICE.

It was April Fool's Day, and the pranks that had not been thought of by Dick and Warren Mayfield are scarcely worth mentioning.

They began at 6 in the morning, actually getting up without being called to ring the rising bell a half hour earlier than usual, after which they hid the buckwheat batter till Dinah, the cook, was almost in tears, when it mysteriously reappeared. They locked Jake in the barn while he was milking, and yelled "April fool" derisively through the cracks while he fussed and fumed within. Even the family were not spared, for mother's napkin was sewed fast to the table cloth. Father's morning paper was nailed securely to the porch floor, and Daisy's high chair was not to be found.

At school the fun was high, and the morning seemed all too short for the carrying out of the many plans that fermented in the boyish brains.

Lunch was ready when they reached home at noon, and they took their seats in high glee. "What's the fun, boys? Let us share it, won't you?" asked mother, smiling in their roguish faces.

"I think you're acting silly," remarked Daisy severely from her recovered high chair.

"Oh, we've had the most fun! Prof. Orrison is so straight and dignified, you know; it was enough to kill you to see him marching through the halls with a piece of paper pinned on his back, saying 'Please kick me' in big, black letters. Then Miss Mason had a long, stiff turkey feather sticking up in her hair for a long time before she discovered it, and when she found it her face got red as fire. My sides ache with laughing."

"So do mine," sighed Warren. "I nearly exploded when little block Jem ran off with that package of sawdust. He thought he'd found a fortune. You see, mum, it was all done up neat and nice, and we laid it on the pavement and hid behind the hedge to see who'd come first. We meant to yell April Fool if anybody picked it up."

"Two or three people passed, but everybody was suspicious, though one man stopped and turned it over with his foot. We had begun to be afraid we were going to get left when down the street came little Jem Kelso. He was selling papers, or trying to, but I guess he hadn't much luck from the bunch under his arm. When he saw that nice looking bundle lying there his eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. He stopped, took off his ragged cap and scratched his woolly head; then he said out loud: 'Tain't mine, but 'pears lak 'tain't nobody else's neither. Spec I might as well have it as leave it lay for somebody else to find.' Then he picked it up, and the way his little bare feet did get over the ground wasn't slow. He forgot all about his papers, and headed for home. We wouldn't spoil the fun by yelling, but ain't he felt cheap since he examined his find?"

Both boys laughed again at the thought, but mother was quiet, and when they looked at her tears were standing in her eyes.

"Why, mum, what's the matter?"

"Oh, mother, you take things too serious; where's the harm in a little innocent joke?"

"Now, boys, but I can't make it seem as if that is the way to describe the one you've just been telling about."

"Yes, it is—all's fair on April Fool's Day!" insisted Warren stoutly.

"I'm sorry to hear you say so. To me the thought of poor Jem's disappointment is not amusing."

"He won't care; he's used to jokes."

"I have no doubt of the truth of that last statement, but it doesn't necessarily follow that he doesn't care," said Mrs. Mayfield, earnestly. "Suppose you put yourselves in his place, and then apply the Golden Rule. He is little, forlorn and poor; has few friends, a home not worthy the name; no one but his grandmother to care for him, and she is so old and feeble she is more of a burden than a help; then on this particular day an armful of unsold papers which he had to pay for."

"If I were planning an April's-fool-joke for him it would be of a very different sort from yours."

Warren's face was red, and Dick's eyes were bent on his plate, as he mumbled: "It does seem sort of mean when you look at it that way. We didn't intend—we didn't think."

"To be sure you didn't," interrupted mother; "I am sure you wouldn't intentionally do an unkind thing, but thoughtlessness is in itself a fault, not an excuse for wrongdoing."

Warren squirmed uncomfortably, then he said: "Say, mum, suppose you think up your kind of an April fool for Jem. Dick and I'll help you if you'll let us; won't we, Dick?"

"You bet we will," was the reply given, with more emphasis than elegance. "It's time we were off, Warren. It is a bargain, mum?"

"I'll think about it and let you know after school. Be good, my boys; have all the fun you want, but let it be pure and innocent of harm."

"We will, mum, dear," said both boys as they hurried away.

That evening little Jem trudged home with several papers still unsold, for his evening work had been scarcely more successful than that of the morning. His bare, brown feet were cold, for there was a nip of frost in the air. He was very hungry, but he knew there was little at home to satisfy hunger, and that granny must share, for Jem was as loyal to granny as the day was long.

"Pears like I could most have et that sawdust ef I hadn't throw'd it away," he said to himself. "It might fill up some of the emptiness anyhow. Wasn't I a guy to be took in that way? But I plum forgot 'bout Ap'l fool when I saw that box asetting so pretty. 'Ef I'd a stopped to open it granny wouldn't a ben disappointed too, but me—I tuk it home a yellin'. 'Here's sump'n for us, granny,' an' we worked at the knot an' we lifted off the papah so keeful, and we found nothing but sawdust!"

"I was so mad I emptied it out-de-do an' I says, 'Jem, you's an Ap'l fool and every othah kind at oncel.' An' tears run out of granny's eyes an' she set the pong on the table an' she says, 'Dis heah's de las' of de cawn-meal, honey. Ef it had only been cawn-meal steddin' o' sawdust.'"

Jem sighed and hitched his solitary suspender into place.

It was quite dark when he reached the little cabin, and granny was dozing in her chair before the fire. A solitary potato was roasting in the ashes, and the remains of the pone lay in the plate on the table. Granny roused as Jem came in to say, "You eat the tatar, honey. I's done et all I wanted."

"What you et, on' whar'd you git it?" demanded the boy.

"Nemmine, honey. I ain't hungry tonight, no way." Jem turned away with a lump in his brave little throat. He did try so hard, and everything seemed very discouraging.

Just then came a loud rap on the door of the little shed behind the cabin. Jem went to open it, but no one was there. Before it was shut again another rap sounded on the front door. Granny started nervously. "It's Ap'l foolers, I reckon," she murmured. "Don't open de do, honey. Dey wants to scare us," and she shrank back in her chair.

"Don't you worry. I'll tek care of you," and Jem's little black fingers patted the frosty head reassuringly. Again the loud rap. The boy couldn't stand it. "I'll jes' open it an' tell 'em to go 'way. Dey shan't hurt you, granny," he said, as he lifted the latch.

No one was to be seen in the darkness, but a queer little figure sat on the doorstep, with a gay shoulder shawl draped about it and a brand-new cap on its head. Jem stared with eyes and mouth open, half shut the door as he remembered the sawdust, then opened it for another glimpse of the cap. By that time granny was peering over his shoulder. More tricks; shet de do, honey," she begged.

"But granny, if I do they might kerry off that hat." "So dey mought. Sponin' you bring it in den; it can't hurt no one, and dat shawl do look temptin'."

With some misgivings the queer looking object was lifted to the table and uncovered, while cap and shawl underwent an eager examination, and proving to be genuine, quite reassured their new owners. Then they discovered that the little figure was nothing less than a bag of meal, with a sack of beans for a head.

"Ef dat ain't de bes' Ap'l fool I ever see den I don't know what is," ejaculated granny, as she poured some meal in a pan and set the iron skillet to heat.

"I'm gwine look out some mo'. Seemed lak I saw sumpin' on the othah step," said Jem. Sure enough there was—a little procession of parcels stood on the step and down the path, headed by a big piece of bacon.

The next few moments were very interesting, for each article had been separately wrapped and tied, even to a pair of outgrown shoes of Warren Mayfield's, one of which stood directly behind the bacon, while the other was quite down at the gate. By the time the last package had been opened the inmates of the cabin were in such a state of excitement that the "cawn-pong" was nearly forgotten after all.

There was a comfortable suit which Dick didn't need any more, a cushion for granny's chair, beside little parcels of tea, rice, hominy and sugar. Jem danced a jig that threatened to rattle the old roof down about his ears, while granny's hands trembled so she had to have help in dishing the bacon.

She had forgotten that she wasn't hungry by the time their supper was ready, and ate quite as if she hadn't "et all she wanted" before.

"Best Ap'l fool I ever had," declared Jem, as he soaked up the last bit of gravy with the last pit of pone.

"De good Lord made up to us fer de disappointment of de sawdust" said granny, reverently. "He'll allus do things that away, honey, ef we trus' him lak we'd oughter."

A few minutes later two figures outside the little uncurtained window, saw a sight which made them whip off their caps and bow their heads.

Granny and Jem knelt down in the midst of their riches, while granny's trembling voice thanked God for his providing care, and begged a blessing on the friends he had sent to help her and Jem.

Dick and Warren didn't speak on the way home, but each cleared his throat several times as if something wasn't comfortable. Mother was waiting for them, and listened with interest to each detail of the evening's exploit. How they had watched till Jem came home, and then arranged their gifts; how they rapped first on the back door so he wouldn't open the front one till they had time to hide; the joy and delight of the little toy and granny, and what a feast they had spread.

When they told of the last scene they had witnessed in the little cabin they almost broke down, but mother's eyes shone happily—her boys had learned their lesson, as she had hoped they would.

"Now, dears, which one of all this day's pranks has given you the most real happiness?" she asked when they had finished.

"The last," both answered. "We may as well own up, mother, that your April fool beat ours all hollow."

"Then let me tell you a secret, my boys. The pleasure that never leaves a sting, that always is the sweetest to look back upon, is that we have given to some one else. The thoughtless fun which hurts somebody's feelings or gives another pain is never worth what it costs."

"Don't ever let any one make you believe that doing right will interfere with your having a good time, for there are no people so happy as those who follow in their Master's footsteps, when he went about doing good."

"I believe you are right, mum. We have had a jolly time today, but I'd give more for the last April fool joke than all the rest put together."

"So would I. Let's keep it up, Dick, every day—making folks happy, I mean."

"It's a bargain, Warren, if mum'll be the silent partner in the firm," and two brown, boyish hands met in a hearty grasp, while the silent partner looked on and smiled.—Journal and Messenger.

* * Her New Maid * *

Young Mrs. Alden was all in a flutter as she sat in her dainty little parlor awaiting the advent of her new maid. It was also her first maid. Hitherto she and Jack had led an infatuated sort of an existence which had made the labors of their doll-like house as light as air. Then they lived in the suburbs, for economy, and maids objected to the suburbs. She walked to the mirror for inspection. Was she capable of inspiring due respect—such a slip of a girl?

A loud peal of the door-bell caused her to grasp the mantle with a shiver. She dimly remembered that Jack had said the maid's name was Mary, and that she was not young. "Good afternoon, Mary," she rehearsed, gravely. "That's easy to say." Still she grasped the unresponsive mantle. A second peal stimulated her to energy. As she opened the door her courage took a startling bound.

"Ah, good afternoon!" she said blandly, to the quiet-looking woman on the steps. "I suppose you are Mary? My husband said you would come out on this train. I will show you your room. When you have changed your dress I will acquaint you with your duties."

When Mr. Alden returned at night his wife flew to meet him. "She's a perfect treasure, Jack!" she cried, and knows more about serving a course dinner than I do. I told her that we didn't usually serve in courses, but as your aunt, who was used to such service, was coming soon to visit us, we would begin tonight for practice. There's but one thing I dislike—she's inquisitive."

"How so, Midget?"

"She asked if we expected this aunt's money, and if she was a disagreeable old woman."

"That's far ignorance," explained Mr. Alden, loftily. "Aunt Helen's appearance does not indicate her wealth, but I have rather a pleasant memory of her. Her fortune she has bequeathed to some charitable institution, and we shall not have a penny."

"So I told Mary, and—"

Mrs. Alden stopped confusedly, conscious that thus discussing family affairs with a menial was not in form, to say the least. The Japanese gong, which until now had served for ornament alone, sounded musically the hour of dining.

The soup was excellent. Mrs. Alden looked at her husband for confirmation of this fact.

Horrors! He had paused in the act of carrying a spoon