

Having Some Fun.

'I'll tell you how we can have some fun,' said Frank, one bright, moonlight night for sliding and snowballing.

'What? How?'

'Who has a wood-saw?' said Frank.

'I have.' 'So have I,' replied three of the boys.

'Get them, then, and you and Fred, and Tom each get an ax, and I will get a shovel. Let's be back in ten minutes.'

The boys started to go on their errands, each wondering of what use wood-saws and axes and shovels could be in play. But Frank was liked, and they believed in what he said, and were soon together again.

'Now,' he said, 'Widow Brown has gone to sit up all night with a sick child.'

'A man brought her some wood to-day, and I heard her tell him that, unless she got some one to saw it to-night she would not have anything to make a fire with in the morning.'

'Now we could saw and split that pile of wood just as easily as we could make a snow man.'

One or two of the boys said they did not care to go, but most of them thought it would be fun.

It was not a long job for seven strong and healthy boys to saw, split and pile up the widow's half-cord of wood, and to shovel a good path.

When they had done this, so great was their pleasure that one of them, who had at first said he would not go, proposed they should go to a carpenter shop near by, where plenty of shavings could be had, and each bring an armful.

The next morning when the tired widow returned from watching by the sick-bed and saw what was done, she was surprised, and, when a friend told her how it was done, her earnest prayer, 'God bless the boys!' was enough to make them happy.—Exchange.

Blin.

(By Constance Coniagh, in the 'Presbyterian Banner'.)

In the gray first light of the early winter morning Blin came out of the sod-house bare-headed and wearing a man's coat over her old red dress for warmth, for the wind that blew in from the arroyo threatened by its very chill to shift and become a norther. A moment she stood after she had shut the door behind her, bewildered in the ghostly stillness and emptiness, then her head seemed to clear a little and she ran to the corral whistling for Pedro. Pedro, the old pinto broncho, snuggled against the warm side of the haystack which both sheltered and fed him, turned his watchful eye upon her doubtfully. What did she mean by calling him at this unearthly hour? Blin had to whistle again and again before he would move and then he came ambling, loath to take the bit of the bridle she held. Blin climbed upon the fence and from thence to his unsaddled back, slapped his neck with her bare hand and was off to the nearest neighbor's.

Once fairly under way Pedro made good time. He was lean and hippy and gaited after a manner all of his own, but Blin sat on his back as safely as you sit in your rocking chair. She and Pedro were comrades of long standing, but never before had they set forth on so early or so anxious a journey together. They were going toward the east, which slowly lightened with the rise of the cloud-riden sun. Blin's eyes were fixed upon it. When at last a dark lump showed against the sky, a sob of thankfulness escaped her. A little later, still urging Pedro to his best, she rode in among the ranch-buildings to the ranch-house door. A startled face appeared at the window, the door sprang open and Blin was dragged from Pedro's back by a tall, lank man with a pipe in his mouth. He took her into the kitchen and set her down by the stove which was roaring with a fire just kindled. In a moment the house was astir. Night-gowned

children peeped out at different doors. Then came the ranchman's wife. Blin, half dead with cold and weariness and the experiences of that long night, looked up at her and spoke for the first time.

'Paw's gone,' she whispered.

The ranchman's wife set her hands on her hips and stared.

'Gone!' she repeated.

Blin nodded listlessly.

'He's dead,' she said.

Three days before he had been seized with a stitch in his side. Blin doctored him as best she could with the remedies at hand and they both thought he was getting better, for the pain had eased, when suddenly his breath stopped and he was gone without speaking. When the first agony of the shock had passed, Blin had left Cap, the old dog, to keep the house and watch while she went for help.

Well, they buried him as such things are done on the prairie where ministers are even less to be had than doctors, the sod-house door was secured with a nail against possible intrusion, and Blin, with Cap and Pedro and a valise packed with all her worldly goods of value of whatsoever kind, went home with Neighbor Bard. But there was no room for her in the ranch-house, already over-full of children, squabbling, shouting, romping all day long and little enough food to give her where pone and bacon was scarce even for the mouths that claimed them. What was to become of her?

'Hain't yo' got any folks anywhar?' the ranchman's wife asked.

Blin thought.

'Thar's a cousin of paw's up no'th some-whars that he used to write to. She's all, I reckon.'

She hunted through her belongings and found the last letter from this cousin. It was dated nine months before. Blin did not know whether her father had answered it or not, but she supposed he had. He was fond of this cousin, who seemed to be the last link left between him and the old life. He had told Blin about her, how they used to go to school together and how pretty she was. Blin had always wanted to see her.

The ranchman and his wife listened to the letter and considered it. They could not read but Blin could. Her father had taught her.

'Mebby now she'd let yo' come an' live with her,' the ranchman suggested finally.

'I know she would,' Blin said, confidently. From a mere shadow Cousin Favor was fast becoming a delightful substance, affording idealistic possibilities as her starved, imaginative little soul craved. Her father had never said that in case he died she could live with Cousin Favor, for neither of them had ever thought of his dying. But now that he was dead and she was left, what better thing could she do? The ranchman and his wife agreed with her.

'Yo' know, honey,' the little brown-faced woman said, laying a gentle hand on Blin's shoulder, 'we-uns would keep yo' with us allus and treat yo' like yo' was our own, but yo' cyan see fo' yo'self how it is. When thar's nine children and three dawgs in a house o' this sizen it don't leave mo'n enough room fo' the grown-ups.' She sighed deeply. 'I 'low ef that thar woman will take yo' an' do well by yo', yo' better go to her.' Howsoever that's fo' yo' to jedge. Yo' know mo' bouten her than we-uns do.'

Blin did not know much more about her really but she had imagined a great deal and believed what she had imagined. She made up her mind to go at once. But how? A railroad ticket cannot be had for nothing. The ranchman pondered. He even went clear to Crystal City to get information from the agent there. Blin had a little money and he managed to get the rest somehow, she never knew how, for he would not tell her.

'Jes' yo' take it an' never min', honey,' his wife said. 'Ef we-uns had mo' yo' should have mo'. We hain't a-begrudin' it to yo' any. I 'low yo'll pay us back ef yo' ever cyan.'

'I shore will,' Blin said, crying over their generosity and the pain of parting, which was very near now. She left Pedro for security.

As for Cap, the ranchman's wife said another dog more or less did not matter, and she 'lowed he could hunt enough to help out his living. Then one morning, bright and early, the ranchman took Blin and her valise to Crystal City, forty miles away. Blin was crying. She was leaving all that was dear and true and tried in her life and at the last she would have drawn back if she could. But it was too late now. There was nothing to do but to face the future bravely and hopefully and her faith in Cousin Favor helped her to do this.

The ranchman, who knew a little something about the ways of railroads, put her aboard the train, told the conductor her story and asked him to see to her. The conductor had girls of his own and he pitied this big-eyed, bewildered little girl from nowhere, who was taking her first ride on the cars. When she left his train he put her in charge of the next conductor, who likewise kept an eye on her. Thus she was passed on at each change and aside from the conductors no one spoke to her.

It was mid-afternoon of a snowy day when she reached her destination. She stumbled down to the platform, tugging her old valise, as strange-looking, travel-stained a figure as had ever alighted there. Everybody stared at her, but she had grown used to staring eyes. She asked a man who seemed familiar because he wore boots and a slouch hat, where Cousin Favor lived. He scratched his head.

'Favor who?' he asked.

Blin did not know. She had utterly forgotten the needful last name. But the man set to work to help her. He inquired of a dozen people before he got the right answer.

'I guess you mean Favor Smith,' he said to Blin. 'I'll take you right to her house.'

Blin went with him thankfully and let him carry the valise. They walked a good ways and at last came to a still side street and a small house from which the paint was pretty well washed off. The man stopped.

'Here's the place,' he said. 'You better go to that side door.'

Blin obeyed. She felt as if she were in a dream. What would Cousin Favor say at seeing her? Would she kiss her? She knocked tremblingly and the door opened. A middle-aged woman with a bald spot on top of her head and a nose too large for her face stood there. She looked at Blin up and down. 'Well?' she demanded.

'Does Cousin Favor live hyar?' Blin asked, faintly.

'Favor Smith lives here and I'm she, but I don't know as I'm cousin to anyone.'

Blin stood paralyzed, her poor little dreams which had heartened her all the way from the prairie country, melted bubble-wise. All the beauty and sweetness possible for her to imagine had gone to fashion her ideal of Cousin Favor. And now here was Cousin Favor homelier than the homeliest prairie woman she had ever seen.

'Who are you and what do you want? Who—' the question was being put to her the second time before she found voice to answer it.

'I'm Blin,' she said. 'I'm Jim Thayer's gal. He's dead, and I've come—' she broke down.

Cousin Favor fell against the door-casing.

'For the land's sakes!' she cried. 'You ain't come all the way from Texas to live with me?'

'Yes, I have,' sobbed Blin.

It was Cousin Favor's turn to be paralyzed, but she recovered sooner than Blin had. This was the last thing she had ever expected. She pulled Blin into the room beyond. It was an old maid's room, but the rag carpet and plants and bird cage made it look cheerful.

'Sit down,' she commanded.

Blin dropped limply into a chair. Cousin Favor stood in front of her and looked at her. 'How old are you?' she asked.

'I'm turned fourteen.'

'You're real small for your age. And black as can be. I don't know—well, so Jim's dead, is he?'

Blin's chin quivered.

'What took it into your head to come way up here?'

Blin looked up.