

The Runaway.

"Would they put her in the asylum," she wondered, "if they caught her?"

Folks would surely think she was crazy.

She stopped at the stone wall to rest, and looked back timorously at the old familiar scene.

Far behind her stretched the meadow, a symphony of olive and green in the late fall. Here and there the sunken boulder stood soldierly golden-rod, or berry bushes clothed now in scarlet and gold.

At intervals in the long slope stood solitary trees, when fluttering leaves fell in the gentle chill air.

In summer time she remembered well the hay-makers rested in the shade, and the jug with ginger water she made for the men as kept there to be cool.

She seemed as she sat there, to remember everything. The house was all right, she was sure of that; the key was under the kitchen-door mat, the fire was out in the stove, and the cat locked in the barn.

She held her work-hardened hand to her side, panting a little, for it was a good bit of a walk across the meadow, and she was eighty years old on her last birthday.

The cows feeding looked pleasant and home-like. "Good-by, critters," she said aloud; "meny's the time I've druv ye home an' milked ye, an' I'llus let ye eat by the way, nor never hurried ye as the boys done."

With a farewell glance she went on again, smooching as she walked the scattered locks of grey hair falling under the pumpkin hood, and keeping her black scant gown out of the reach of the briars.

Across another field, then through a leafy lane where the wood was hauled in winter, then out through a gap in a stump fence, with its great branching arms like a petrified octopus, to the dusty high road.

Not a soul in sight in the coming twilight. John, the children and the scolding wife who made her so unhappy, would not be home for an hour yet, for East Mills was a long drive.

Down the steep hill went the brave little figure, followed by an odd shadow of itself in the waning light, and by the tiny stones that rolled so swiftly they passed her often, and made her look behind with a start to see if a pursuer were coming.

"They'd put me in the asylum, sure," she muttered, wildly, as she trudged along.

At the foot of the hill she sat down upon an old log and waited for the train. Across the road, guarded by a big sign, "Look out for the engine," ran two parallel iron rails, that were to be her road when the big monster should come panting around the curve.

At last the dull rumble sounded, a shrill whistle, and she hurried to the track, waving her shawl to signal.

This, in the conductors' vernacular, was a cross-roads station, where he was used to watch for people writing articles frantically. The train stopped, and the passenger was taken aboard. He noticed she was a bright-eyed old lady, very neat and precise.

"How fur?" he asked. "Boston." "Git there in the mornin'," he said, kindly, waiting for the money, as she opened a queer little reticule, where, under her knitting, wrapped in a clean out-door handkerchief, was her purse with her savings of long years—the little sums Sam had sent when he first began to prosper in the West, and some money she had earned herself by knitting and berry-picking.

"Wal, wal, you're from New England, I'll be bound." "From Maine," she answered; and then she grew communicative, for she was always a chatty old lady, and she had possessed her soul in silence so long, and it was a relief to tell the story of her weary years of waiting to a kindly listener.

She told him all the relations she had were two grand-nephews and their families. That twenty years ago Sam (for she had brought them up when their parents died of consumption; that takes so many of our folks) went out West. He was always adventurous, and for ten years she did not hear from him; but John was different and steady, and when he came of age she had given him her farm, with the provision that she should always have a home, otherwise he would have gone away, too.

Well, for five years they were happy, then John married, and his wife had grown to think her a burden as the years went on, and the children were they grew big did not care for her; she felt that she had lived too long.

"I grew so lonesome," she said pathetically, "it seems I couldn't take up heart to live day by day, an' yit I knowed our folks was long-lived. Ten years back, when Sam wrote he was doin' fair an' sent me money, I begun to think of him; fur he was allus generous an' kind, an' the greatest best boy, an' so I began to save to go to him, fur I knowed I could work my board for a good many years to come. For three years he ain't hardly wrote, but I laid that to the wild kentry he lived in. I said 'bars and injuns don't skeer me none, fur when I was a gal up in Aroostook kentry there was plenty of both, an' fur butchers their horns, cattle don't skeer me none, fur I've been used to a farm allus. But the lonesomeness of these medders has softer up me and made me think every day Sam was further off than I ever calculated on."

"But what will you do if Sam ain't in Denver?" she asked the farmer. "I hev put my faith in Providence," she answered simply, and the stranger could not mar that trust by any word of warning.

He gave her his address as he got off at the Nebraska line, and told her to send him word if she needed help. With a warm hand-clasp he parted from her to join the phantoms in her memory of folks that had been kind to her, God bless 'em; and then the train was rumbling on.

But many of the passengers had listened to her story and were interested, and they came to sit with her. One pale little lad in the seat in front turned to look at her now and then and to answer her smile. He was going to the new country for health, an' he was poor, but he had had kind to her, God bless 'em; and then the train was rumbling on.

"The probably brought those boys up," he thought, "and denied her life for them. Is she to die unrewarded, I wonder? There cannot be any good in the world if that be so." He thought of her and took out his purse; there was so little money in it, too, every cent made a big hole in his store; but the consciousness of a good deed was worth something. "I mayn't have the chance to do many more," thought the lad, buttoning his worn overcoat.

He slipped off without a word at a station and sent a telegram to his father. "To Samuel Blair"—for he had caught the name from her talk—"Your Aunt Hannah Blair is on the W. and W. train coming to you."

It was only a straw, but a kindly wind might blow it to the right one after all. When he was sitting there after his message had gone on its way, she leaned over and handed him a peppermint drop from a package in her pocket.

"You don't look strong, dearie," she said, "hain't ye no folks with ye?" "None on earth." "We're both lone ones," she smiled; "an' how sad it be there ain't no one to fuss over ye. An' be keeful of the drafts, and keep Hannah allus on your chest; that is very good fur the lungs."

"You are very kind to take an interest in me," she smiled; "but I am afraid it is too late." Another night of weary slumber in the cramped seats and then the plain began to be dotted with villages, and soon appeared the straggling outskirts of a city, the smoke of mills, the gleam of the Platte River, and a network of iron rails, bright and shining, as the train ran shrieking into the labyrinth of its destination.

"This in Denver," said the lad to her, "and I'll look after you as well as I can." "I won't be no burden," she said brightly, "I've twenty dollars yet, an' that's a sight o' money."

The train halted to let the eastward bound express pass, there was an air of excitement in the car, passengers getting ready to depart, gathering up luggage and wraps, and some watching the new comers and the rows of strange faces on the outward bound.

The door of the car slammed suddenly, and a big-bearded man with eager blue eyes came down the aisle, looking sharply from right to left. He had left Denver on the express to meet this train. His glance fell on the tiny black figure.

"Why, Aunt Hannah!" he cried with a break in his voice, and she—she put out her trembling hand and fell into the big arms, tears streaming down the wrinkled face.

"I knowed Providence would let me find ye, Sam," she said brokenly, and no one smiled when the big man sat down beside her and with gentle hand wiped her tears away.

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stammered like a girl and did not want to take it. "I suppose you want a job," said the big man. "Well, I can give you one. I'm in the food commission business. Give you something light? Lots of your sort, poor lad, out here. All the reference I want is the little kindness of yours to Aunt Hannah."

"Here's the depot, Aunt Hannah, and you won't see 'bars and injuns,' nor the buffaloes; sunniest city you ever set your eyes on." He picked up the carpet bag, faded and old-fashioned, not a bit ashamed of it, though it looked as if Noah might have carried it to the ark.

They said good-by, and the last seen of her was her happy old face beaming from a carriage window as she rolled away to what all knew would be a pleasant home for all her waning years.—Patience Stapleton.

Frightening a Bear. It is well known that animals are easily terrified by that which is strange to them, or the cause of which they do not understand. This is probably the reason why nearly all animals are afraid of a thunder-shower.

Many houses are frightened by the noise of a railroad train which they cannot see, but will stand still while one goes by which they have a full view. An African traveler tells how he escaped death from a lion, which was about leaping on him, by barking like a dog.

The lion had never become acquainted with men who barked. A professor in an Eastern college tells a good story of a similar adventure of his with a grizzly bear in the Rocky Mountains.

One day he had been with a party to the top of a mountain in Colorado, and in coming down had separated from the party, with only one companion. As they were making their way down a spur of the mountain through a thick growth of scrub, the professor was leading, and stepped out into a small open space about twenty feet in diameter.

At the same moment there entered from the opposite side two immense grizzly bears, the foremost of which reared himself on his hind legs with that inviting gesture of his fore-paws by which bears manifest their affection for anything which looks good to eat. The professor was entirely without arms, except a bright, new tin dipper for drinking. In the imminent danger, hardly knowing what he did, the professor swung the dipper furiously in the air, and shouted at the top of his voice.

Astonished at this unexpected and singular greeting, the foremost bear fairly fell over his mate in his eagerness to get away. Both bears vanished quickly into the bushes, and the professor and his companion thankfully pursued their way to the camp.

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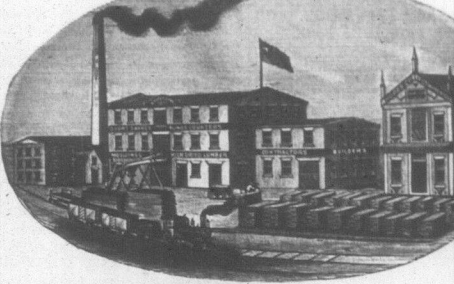
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