

* * The Story Page. * *

Farmer Frisby's Christmas Gift.

BY HELEN FRANCES HUNTINGTON.

"Look sharp there, Rob, don't put no specked apples with the sound ones," Farmer Frisby cautioned, picking up the round, rosy apples that just rolled out of Rob's hand.

"It's a real pity about them apples; they're as fine a lot as you could wish for, an' the highest offer I got was ten cents a bushel over to Clayton, haulin' an' all. The market's chuck full, an' there ain't no call for fruit. I've a great mind to turn the whole lot into vinegar."

"Couldn't you ship them East?" Rob asked.

"Could if we had a combine and leased a whole car. 'Twould cost me more than I'd make to freight them alone. Countin' up the cost of harvestin', sortin', and workin' into vinegar, I won't make a dollar on them. They're the finest crop in Bascome county. It's a real pity."

"Soon be Christmas," Rob ventured after a long, industrious silence.

"Well, an' what of that?" demanded Frisby.

"Nothing much, only I s'pose people are looking forward to the holiday."

"Christmas don't make no difference out here," he answered grimly. "We don't have no time for foolishness, I can tell you."

Rob's face expressed surprise and disappointment. "Don't you celebrate at all?" he asked in dismay.

"Oh, some fool ranchers spend their money shootin' turkeys down to Bascome, or some other such foolishness. Rube an' Smiley goes home to their families an' we have to do double duty, that's all the Christmas for us. You needn't figger on frolickin' out here," he added grimly. "Christmas or no Christmas, it's all we can do to get things straightened out by time spring work begins. Sooner you get such fool notions out of your head the better for you."

Rob's lines seemed to have fallen in pretty hard places since he left the orphanage. He had started out full of joyous anticipation of the free life in the great West, only to meet the hard reality of farm life, which was all work and no play. Mr. Frisby was not unkind to him, but he had no conception of a boy's wants and ambitions; he expected Rob to take personal interest in farm affairs and work unremittently in return for his board and clothes and one dollar a month. The other men had certain hours of steady work, while Rob was called upon at all hours, from dawn till dark; he milked, did chores about the house, split fence rails, fed the stock, and after supper husked corn and sorted apples and potatoes until bedtime. On Sundays he fed stock, drew water, and helped Mrs. Frisby about the house until dinner, after which he wiped the dishes, dressed and drove to church, six miles across the prairie. And so the days passed full of work, and to crown it all he was to have no Christmas holiday.

The next morning at breakfast table Mr. Frisby said: "Rob, I'm figgerin' on takin' in the west corner lot for pasture next year; the drove's gettin' too big for the little pasture. It's got to be all fenced by New Year's, and you an' me's got to split the rails. Rube and Smiley's got all they can do about the farm from now till spring. I've figgered out the whole thing, an' it leaves us just seventy-five rails a day apiece from now till New Year's, not losin' a day."

That gave Rob a bright idea. He could do a day's stint at odd times and in that way get off on Christmas day, at least.

"Mr. Frisby, would you mind if I split rails these moonlight nights to make up for a day off on Christmas?" he asked hopefully.

"What do you want to loaf about a whole day for?" Mr. Frisby demanded testily.

"I'd like to go to town that day, for a change."

"An' get in with them turkey shootin' roughs, like as not! No, sir; I'm responsible for your conduct while you're here."

"I don't see no harm," Mrs. Frisby put in soothingly. "It'll be sorter lonely for Rob, seein' he's been used to makin' somethin' of the day. You'd promise not to go about the targets, wouldn't you, Rob?"

"Yes, ma'am," Rob answered gratefully.

"I'm surprised at you, Emily, fosterin' the boy's foolish notion!" Peter Frisby said severely. "Big boy like him! At his age I didn't go whinin' about for holidays; I worked straight through the year an' made my little pile too. If it hadn't been for another man's villany I'd been a rich man. Rob ain't got no call to complain of his treatment here, I reckon."

Mrs. Frisby plead so well in Rob's behalf that her husband gave his grudging consent. He made it as hard as possible for Rob by keeping him at work early and late, but there was almost three weeks' grace and the snow held off altogether, so he managed to split the required rails in good time. The farm hands went home

on Saturday night before Christmas Eve, and the bulk of the work fell to Rob, but the anticipation of his holiday helped him wonderfully. On Christmas morning he rose early and fed and milked by lantern light. It was a cold, crisp morning; the stars twinkled frostily in the brightening east, and the very air seemed fraught with Christmas cheer; the prospect of the seven mile walk to town was delightful when he thought of the whole long, free day before him.

Mr. Frisby met him at the kitchen door and took the milk pails from his aching arms. "You'll have to help mother with the work before you go," he said coolly; "she's took a stitch in her side an' ain't able to do much liftin'."

Mrs. Frisby protested warmly, but her husband insisted on Rob's help while he went about his work as usual, and Rob's heart was full of hard thoughts, and he very nearly hated Mr. Frisby for his injustice in spoiling the one holiday which he had so honestly earned.

It was nine o'clock when Mrs. Frisby sent him to his room to dress and he was so bitterly angry and disappointed that he had lost all his pleasurable enthusiasm in the holiday; but on second thought he knew that Mr. Frisby would find some work for him to do if he stayed at home, so he decided to go at all events. He set out in gloomy silence, but Mr. Frisby's voice stopped him at the gate.

"You can take Rocket, seein' as you've been delayed some," he said grudgingly. "I've saddled him ready for you."

Rob's anger vanished like magic, and his eyes shone with pleasure. Rocket was a beautiful spirited black pony with whom he had made friends by many kind little attentions in the way of apples and dainty tidbits. He whinnied joyfully as Rob led him out into the keen, frosty air.

"Be real careful of him, Rob," the farmer cautioned. "I'd as soon anything happened to me as to Rocket."

Rocket fairly flew along the smooth, hard road with head erect and nostrils quivering with delight. Rob's spirits rose with the fine, healthy enthusiasm of youth and by the time he reached Bascome his resentment had disappeared like dew before the morning sun. He stopped at the station to watch the incoming train; as it slowed up at the water-tank a gentleman stepped to the platform and called to the station master, "How's your apple crop this year, Ramson?"

"Pretty fair."

"Got any Baldwins?"

"Not one. Sold out the other day at fifteen cents a bushel; hard to keep this cold weather, you know."

"That's too bad. I want five hundred bushels by tomorrow morning, for an Eastern house. I'll pay forty cents a bushel for such apples as you sold Turner last year. Couldn't get them for me in time, could you?"

"Only wish I could."

Forty cents a bushel for five hundred bushels! There was a fine chance for Frisby. Rob knew it would mean the loss of his holiday for they would have to work till midnight to sort and pack them. He felt ashamed of his selfish impulses that made him hesitate between pleasure and plain duty and made haste to improve the opportunity.

"Farmer Frisby can let you have that amount of sound apples," he said courteously.

"He can? By tomorrow morning?"

"Yes sir."

"Can I trust you?"

"Oh, he's all right," the station master put in good-naturedly. "Frisby's as tight as a drum, but straight as a ramrod, and he'll do the square thing every time. He'll be glad of the chance."

"Very well then. Five hundred bushels of sound Baldwins to go by the seven-thirty train tomorrow morning, remember."

"I'll remember," Rob answered. He watched the train pull out of the station, then turned Rocket's head homeward and urged him into a brisk gait.

Farmer Frisby saw him coming and met him at the gate in open-mouthed wonder.

"I've come back to help get the apples ready for sale by tomorrow," he said. "Mr. Crosby wants five hundred bushels at forty cents a bushel, to send off on the seven-thirty train."

"Well, I declare! If that don't beat time!" he exclaimed in genuine delight. "I didn't expect to sell them apples at all."

They fell to work immediately, with a right good will; and presently Mrs. Frisby brought their dinner out and lent a hand while they made a hasty meal. The short winter afternoon passed swiftly and darkness fell, still the work went on steadily. By eleven o'clock the last bushel was safely stored for the early delivery. It was a very tired boy that sat down to a generous Christmas supper. Mrs. Frisby piled his plate with all the good things she had prepared and watched them disappear

with gratified amusement. It was a silent meal; the farmer made no mention of his good fortune, and did not even thank Rob for his faithful service. Presently he pushed his plate aside and rose stiffly.

"Rob," he said, "mother an' me has been talkin' about makin' you a present, seein' as you set such store by Christmas, an' we'll have to hurry up about it," nodding to the clock which pointed close upon the midnight hour. "It's rather too bulky to bring into the house, so you'll have to come outside."

He led the way to the barnyard, Rob and Mrs. Frisby following silently. "What's in there is yours," he said pointing to the door of a newly painted stall.

Rob opened the door and looked in curiously, but saw only Rocket nibbling daintily at his late supper. "You don't mean Rocket?" he gasped incredulously.

"Just so," the farmer answered, "I know you will use him right!"

Rob answered never a word, but stared at the costly gift in unspeakable delight, dimly conscious of the two expectant faces in the doorway.

"It's no use trying to thank you," he stammered at last. "I can't do it. I'd rather have Rocket than anything else in the whole world."

"I'm glad of it," said Peter Frisby cheerfully. "I think I'd a little rather you'd have him than any one else I know of."—Our Young People.

How to Keep from Swearing.

Over and over men have asked: "How can I keep from swearing?" says Mr. Moody, and then goes on with the answer and the illustration:

I will tell you. If God puts his love into your heart, you will have no desire to curse him. If you have much regard for God, you will no more think of cursing him than you would think of speaking lightly or disparagingly of a mother whom you love. But the natural man is at enmity with God, and his utter contempt for his law. When that law is written on his heart, there will be no trouble in obeying it.

When I was out west about thirty years ago, I was preaching one day in the open air, when a man drove up in a fine turn-out, and after listening a little while to what I was saying, he put the whip to his fine-looking steed, and away he went. I never expected to see him again but the next night he came back, and he kept on coming regularly night after night.

I noticed that his forehead itched—you have noticed people who keep putting their hands to their foreheads?—he didn't want any one to see him shedding tears—of course not! It is not a manly thing to shed tears in a religious meeting, of course!

After the meeting I said to a gentleman: "Who is that man who drives up here every night? Is he interested?" "Interested! I should think not! You should have heard the way he talked about you to-day."

"Well," I said, "that is a sign he is interested." "If no man ever has anything to say against you, your Christianity isn't worth much. Men said of the Master, 'He has a devil,' and Jesus said that if they had called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household."

I asked where this man lived, but my friend told me not to go to see him, for he would only curse me. I said, "It takes God, to curse a man; man can only bring curses on his own head." I found out where he lived, and went to see him. He was the wealthiest man within a hundred miles of that place, and had a wife and seven beautiful children. Just as I got to his gate I saw him coming out of the door. I stepped up to him and said:

"This is Mr. —, I believe?" He said, "Yes, sir; that is my name." Then he straightened up and asked, "What do you want?"

"Well," I said, "I would like to ask you a question, if you won't be angry."

"Well, what is it?"

"I am told that God has blessed you above all men in this part of the country; that he has given you wealth, a beautiful Christian wife, and seven lovely children. I do not know if it is true, but I hear that all he gets in return is cursing and blasphemy." He said, "Come in; come in." I went in. "Now," he said, "what you said out there is true. If any man has a fine wife I am the man, and I have a lovely family of children, and God has been good to me. But do you know, we had company here the other night, and I cursed my wife at the table, and I did not know it till after the company had gone. I never felt so mean and contemptible in my life as when my wife told me of it. She said she wanted the floor to fly open and let her down out of her seat. If I have tried once, I have tried a hundred times to stop swearing. You preachers don't know anything about it."

"Yes," I said, "I know all about it; I have been a drummer."

"But," he said, "business man tormented the."

"Oh, yes," it. I used to swear?" he stopped."

understand. But I can't want to swear."

I began to that would be."

"Well," he right down he said, "I've been cursing."

or what to p to have to c used his nam away. Ask given."

Then the sentences; b all, which b he got up ar Go down to want to be."

that," he sa funeral." thing else."

After a w what the pe meeting, th him. He st he trembled."

He said: "My frie save a wre salvation."

That was back in th in Californi I told him engagement told me his ever sworn room and replied, "I"

It was all t He was n active Chr God. That of the divi a book."

Mr. Jaco "Merry Ch A few do block. W about it. Come a merry Ch was not r be on stairs of voices bur expected. "This is the laudin hope to re papers giv what is pr the story about the."

The do evening s stove disc perched o squatting woman's hands fol across the."

"Be we note of ch pastor? house, wh girls mov "

"Jeani clergyma Some day then she "

The lit disfigure day," ab not long the dark cracked blest! I re day."

"Who asked th an exceec sat burie the Hon response "

"Robi nothin' t "