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When Things Hummed

By Amy Harris

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"Now, then, Hannah, things are going to hum!"

It was Aunt Judith Wellman who spoke. She had arrived from Indiana for a visit with her sister in Michigan, and the pair had been talking for the last hour on the veranda, while Farmer Henderson was doing up the chores at the barn.

"What do you mean, Judith?" was asked.

"I mean several things. I mean that I have never heard of a case like it. Your Minnie has been old enough to marry for these last three years, and you've let a feller dawdle around here and make sheep's eyes at her and keep all other fellers away and yet hasn't asked her to be his and maybe three more years doing it. I call it a mean shame. When I say that things are going to hum I mean that somebody has got to toe the mark mighty soon or get out. You and Elisha ought to have put your foot down long ago."

"You wouldn't do anything to embarrass Minnie?" pleaded the mother.

"That's according. I guess the embarrassment will all be on the other side, however. Embarrassment is all right in a girl, Hannah, but it shouldn't be carried too far. Both of us were embarrassed when we were girls, but we weren't so much so as to kill our prospects of getting married. We knew when our beaus had hung around long enough. Has Minnie ever given this chap a jog?"

"Mercy, no!"

"Have you or Elisha ever given him a jog?"

"Never!"

"Then it remains for Judith Wellman to do it, and she's right on deck, with both elbows stuck out. It won't be a week before we'll know whether Joel Davis means business or is just sitting around like a bump on a log."

"But you won't—won't!"

"I don't know what I'll do, except to decide the case one way or other, and you needn't ask questions. I don't believe in folks getting married within a week, and I don't believe in courting for half a lifetime. A fellow either wants a girl or he don't. If he does, let him take her; if he don't, let him shy off and give some one else a chance."

Minnie Henderson was twenty years old and a recognized belle for ten miles around. Everybody was agreed that she would make somebody a good wife. She had been "keeping company" with Joel Davis for nearly three years. Joel was a bachelor of twenty-seven, living on the next farm west. He was steady, sober and industrious, and everybody said that he would make some girl a good husband. But Joel was also bashful and retiring. He was in love with Minnie, to be sure, but that very fact made him tremble in her presence. A hundred times over in the last two years he had resolved to propose, but on each and every occasion his courage had oozed out of his fingers' ends. He felt that the time must and would come, but whether it would take an earthquake or a cyclone to bring it about he wasn't sure.

It was three days before Aunt Judith saw Joel. She liked his looks, and that changed her plans somewhat. She hadn't been going to say a word to Minnie, but now she changed about and opened fire with:

"Well, I am astonished! So that's the feller that has been hanging around here for half his lifetime and will probably die of old age on your father's doorstep!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'hanging around,'" retorted Minnie, with a blush and a toss of her head.

"Why, coming over here two or three times a week to talk about grasshoppers and tater bugs. I am surprised at you. What can you see in such a feller to encourage him? I suppose he knows pumpkins from squashes, but I'll bet a big apple that if you asked him when the pilgrim fathers landed he'd fall off the veranda. Minnie Henderson, if you are the girl I take you to be you will send that feller packing this very evening."

"You misjudge him, aunty. He does not push himself forward, but I assure you that—"

"I've got eyes in my head," snapped her aunt. "It never takes me over five minutes to size up a man. Joel Davis is an 'it'! He'll always be ten days behind the Fourth of July. It's a wonder your father and mother have allowed it."

Minnie choked down a sharp answer and went off to her room to cry, and Aunt Judith sauntered into the kitchen to say to her sister:

"There, now, I've got the thing started, and you and Elisha have got to turn in and help me. Minnie will cry and then get mad and then see Joel, and there'll be a wedding before you know it. Don't you weaken when the

time comes?"

Next day Joel came to the house to bring back a bushel basket he had borrowed. Minnie was upstairs and Aunt Judith hiding behind the door, so it was left for Minnie's mother to say:

"Joel, I've been wanting to speak to you for some time. I don't think you ought to come here as often as you do."

"W-what?" gasped the lover as he turned very red.

"Your coming here so often keeps other young men away and does not give Minnie a fair chance. Of course she has no thought of marrying you, so it isn't right to waste her time on you."

Joel stared with open mouth, but to save his neck he couldn't say a word in reply. After making several vain attempts he walked off. On his way home he turned aside and climbed the fence to speak to Farmer Henderson, working in his field. Minnie's father had been posted and was waiting for his opportunity. Joel had stammered out that it was a hot day and that corn seemed to be looking up and that he was afraid that one of his cows had the hollow horn, when Elisha finished hilling up a hill of corn and slowly said:

"Joel, they say that there's going to be a heap of windmill and wire fence men along here this fall, and if any of 'em want to board with me for a week or two I shall take 'em in."

"W-why?" asked Joel.

"Well, there's Minnie, you know. It's time she was thinking of getting married. Some of those windmill fellers are smarter than chain lightning and well off to boot. I've always kinder thought I'd like one of them for a son-in-law."

"Mr. Henderson"—began poor Joel, but he had to halt at that. The change in the attitude of the farmer and his wife brought a great fear to his heart and started chills up and down his back.

"Minnie ain't looking for a husband, you know. She don't have to do that, but when the right feller comes along I guess a match will be made. A piano agent the other day asked me if she was engaged, and I told him there wasn't anybody around here good enough. Yes, it's a purty hot day, Joel, and I shouldn't wonder if tomorrow would be hotter."

Joel didn't do any work the rest of the afternoon. He simply sat and thought. The result was that when evening came he headed for the Henderson homestead. He was going to see Minnie and find out what had happened. It was Aunt Judith who was at the gate when he came up, and she didn't lose any time, saying:

"Young man, I guess you've heard of me. I'm Minnie's aunt. Walk along the road with me while I talk to you. You don't want to force yourself upon a family where you are not wanted, do you?"

"Has something happened?" he anxiously asked.

"Well, Minnie's father and mother have got their eyes open at last. She has been praised so much that they realize she can make a good match. I don't care to tell you what the sewing machine man said today, but you can bet it was something nice. You know you ain't just the sort of man the Hendersons want for a son-in-law, Minnie may like you in a way, but when it comes to real love, that's another thing. If I was you, I wouldn't waste any more time here."

"But I love Minnie!" blurted out Joel, as he was driven to desperation.

"But if she don't love you what are you going to do about it? Better give the thing right up and look for some other girl. Going home, are you? Well, good night. Try and think I have told you this for your own good."

Next day a farmer's little girl brought Minnie a note, and half an hour after receiving it she was down in the hickory grove talking with Joel. When she returned to the house, she looked pale and acted in a nervous manner, but she was not questioned. Soon after supper she pleaded a headache and went to her room, and Aunt Judith and Elisha and Hannah winked at each other. At 9 o'clock the house was quiet. At 10 Aunt Judith entered the spare bedroom, where husband and wife sat waiting, and said:

"Well, it's over with. Joel came to the gate and whistled softly ten minutes ago, and Minnie, who was all dressed, slipped downstairs and joined him. He had a buggy down by the barnyard gate."

"And—and?" gasped the mother as she began to sob.

"Hannah Henderson, don't be a goose. They'll drive to the preacher's and be married and be back here before the breakfast dishes are washed. Joel's got a wife, Minnie's got a husband, and you've got a son-in-law, and that's all there is to it."

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