

Our First Prize Story

What Came of an Unexpected Meeting.

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It was the day after Commencement in a popular Ladies' College, a short distance from Ontario's Metropolis. Two girls sat near one of the windows of their *Alma Mater* watching the departure of their schoolmates. They were to be amongst the last to leave, one, Lina, taking the 4 p.m. train for a northern town, and the other, Nettie, an orphan, the night train for an eastern city where she was to spend her vacation with an uncle, at whose house she had made her home since earliest infancy.

"You'll be sure to spend next summer with me, won't you, Nettie?"

"I thought you were going to Sturgeon Lake."

"So I am and I want you to come too. Why it's just lovely out at Uncle Ben's, where we boarded last summer. I'm sure you'll like it. Of course he is not my uncle, but every one calls him Uncle Ben."

"I fully intend to come, Lina, and I dare say I shall like the country well enough; but I don't suppose I shall go into ecstasies over it as you do. One would think to hear you talk that by next summer you would be ready to don a pink sunbonnet and a blue check apron and become a permanent resident in some delectable little spot adjacent to Uncle Ben's. I imagine I see you. What a precious little farmer's wife you would make! Just fancy it!"

"If either of us acts that role it will be you. Have you forgotten?" she added, pointing to a diamond ring "that" thereby hangs a tale."

"Well, I can safely say there is no danger in this direction. I have not the least intention of wasting my sweetness on the desert air."

Just then the dinner bell rang and the girls proceeded to the dining hall.

A year has passed by; Commencement day has come and gone once more, and again Nettie is sitting by a window beneath which blossoms a bed of mignonette, and its fragrance, mingled with that of the hay which Uncle Ben is making up in a field close by, is wafted in through the open casement. The cool breeze rustling the leaves of the scarlet runners that shaded the window fanned the cheek of Nettie as she sat and viewed the beautiful landscape. "It is nice here," she soliloquized, leaning back in her chintz-covered easy chair "far better than I expected; the air is so bracing and everything is so clean and tidy; not a bit like the farm Uncle Reuben took me to once, when he went to buy a horse. I'll never forget that place nor how afraid I was of those horrid little black and white pigs that were playing hide-and-seek among the hen-coops in the door-yard. What an abode of despair the whole establishment seemed to be? But I am actually beginning to like it here. I do wonder why Lina stays so long. Oh, here she comes!"

"We are going, Nettie. Uncle Ben says we can have old Toby and I can drive."

"You stayed so long that I thought perhaps you were helping Uncle Ben make the hay. You might have done the raking with the assistance of old Toby. I tell you what it is, Lina, I almost think you made the mistake of your life when you became

engaged to that parson *en aspect*. You ought to marry a farmer, I'm sure."

"You may allay your fears on that score, Nettie, the parson, *en aspect*, as you call him, meets my views exactly, and I will leave the farmers to your tender mercies. You might do worse than marry one of them."

"Yes," replied Nettie, "for instance I might marry a parson."

"Well come, Nettie; let us get everything in order for our jaunt to-morrow. We will have to start early. It is nearly twelve miles distant and we won't be able to drive very fast."

"Don't think we can drive at all; I'd be afraid for us to go alone."

"Nonsense, I can drive well enough. I never did, but then I've seen women do it and I know how. Toby is quiet and won't run away. I asked Uncle Ben about it and he said, 'Quiet, Miss, why bless you, he won't go a step farther than you want him to.' You need not fear, we'll get along all right. I do hope it will be fine," and she glanced at a streak of gray cloud behind which the sun was just setting. "We must go to the rapids and the cave and I want to take a sketch or two, besides gathering a few Botany specimens."

Thus talking and laying plans for the morrow the two girls spent their evening.

Early next morning found our young tourists tucking the afghan around them in Uncle Ben's covered carriage, which contained beside the two young ladies a well-filled lunch basket, a tin box for botany specimens, a basket destined to be filled with petrified moss, a waterproof each, for it looked a little like rain, and lastly Uncle Ben had placed under the seat a two-bushel grain bag containing a half gallon of oats for old Toby.

"I dare say, Miss, you'll get along all right," Uncle Ben was saying in answer to Nettie's anxious inquiries as to the probability of Toby's running away. "He's not given to them sort o' tricks. I reckon you're all ready now, Miss Lina," he added, giving a tug at the breast-strap.

Hereupon, Lina gave the lines a shake and old Toby with head erect trotted down the lane. Everything went well for the first half of the journey. The weather was threatening but as yet no rain had fallen. They were going down a slight incline on the side of a hill which had been cut away, leaving a high bank rising abruptly on one side and a deep declivity on the other. They were too busy talking to notice the road and all at once to their surprise, Toby came to a stand-still. He had reached the foot of the incline where was a washout in the road over which he refused to go.

"Go on," said Lina, giving the lines a little jerk. Toby stood still.

"I'll try to pass on the right side; some one else has; I see the wheel marks."

Lina pulled the reins, whereupon Toby began to back.

"Get up! get up!" and she tugged at the lines still harder.

Toby answering to the pull still continued to back.

"Dear me! Lina, I'm afraid he is going to upset us."

"Whoa, whoa, Toby!" screamed Lina, loosening the reins a little as she reached forward for the whip.

Toby obeyed instantly and turning his head took a look at the frightened girls.

"Couldn't you get out and take hold of his head, Nettie? You could lead him while I drove."

"Oh I couldn't! I couldn't! I couldn't go near him; see how wild he looks. Look at him now," she added as Toby began to paw the ground and shake his head impatiently.

"I believe we had both better get out and I'll try to lead him around the end of the bridge."

"Whoa, Toby! Whoa!"

"I do declare, Lina, it is dropping rain. What-ever shall we do?"

Just then they heard a step and in an instant a hand seized the bridle.

The stranger was a young farmer from a neighbor-

ing field, who, hearing the excited voices of the girls, hastened to their aid.

"Can I assist you, ladies?" The tone and manner were those of a gentleman.

"We want to go across the bridge," explained Lina.

"I will lead him over," said Mr. Hargrave.

"Thank you very much," said Lina. "I feared we would have an accident."

"Pardon me ladies, have you far to go?"

Again Lina answered, "We are on our way to Lonely Hollow."

"Then I think you had better seek shelter, as there is every appearance of a heavy shower. I live across there," he said, pointing to where some chimneys showed themselves among the trees. "My mother will be delighted to have you call," and thus urged they drove on while the young man crossed the fields toward home, to apprise his mother of their intended call and to be ready to receive them.

They were kindly welcomed by a sweet-faced elderly lady, whom the young man introduced as his mother, and who ushered them into a capacious and well-furnished drawing room.

While the rain spattered and splashed outside the three ladies chatted pleasantly.

"You must play for me, please, Miss Bronson," said Mrs. Hargrave, addressing Nettie and rising led the way to where the piano stood.

As she made preparations for opening it, the girls busied themselves looking at some pictures on a table near by, amongst which were a number of daguerreotypes, relics of those days when picture-taking was in its infancy.

When Mrs. Hargrave turned towards them, Nettie was standing gazing at one of those pictures, a look of blank astonishment on her face.

"See! see, Lina!" she gasped. "It's my mother." "Where and how did you get it, and who is the other lady?" and Nettie turned excitedly to Mrs. Hargrave.

Mrs. Hargrave was no less surprised than Nettie. Explanation followed inquiry and Mrs. Hargrave found in Nettie the daughter of her dearest friend and schoolmate, of whom she had heard nothing since a few years after they parted. There was not time to say much then for the rain had ceased and the girls hastened on their journey, promising Mrs. Hargrave to make her an all-day visit early the next week. How Nettie looked forward to that visit! At last she had found some one who had known her mother.

Nettie had no recollection of either mother or father. Before she had reached her second year both parents succumbed to the ravages of a terrible disease and she, the only surviving child, had been taken to the home of a bachelor uncle and maiden aunt, her father's brother and sister.

One of the great longings of her life had been to know something about her mother and no one seemed able to tell her much, only that before her father married her, she maintained herself as a governess.

She had not been very kindly received by the members of her husband's family and but little intercourse existed between them.

Once when Nettie was about five years old, while playing with an old work-box of her mother's, she had found a daguerreotype of two ladies (the exact counter-part of the one at Mrs. Hargrave's) one of whom her aunt said was her mother and the other was most likely some schoolmate.

The remainder of the day was all that could be desired and was enjoyed to its fullest extent by our young pleasure-seekers.

Tuesday found Nettie and Lina paying their promised visit to Mrs. Hargrave's and many such visits were made during their six weeks' stay at Uncle Ben's.

"Farm life is not what I then thought it was. The use of the many labor-saving implements which are found both in-doors and out on every well-regulated farm, greatly lessens the work."

It was Mrs. Hargrave, the Nettie of five years ago, who spoke, in answer to a question of Lina's, who, with her husband, lately stationed as pastor of the village church near by, is visiting her friend, now mistress of Elmwood Villa.

"Do you know, Lina," continued Nettie, "it is five years to-day since we drove Uncle Ben's old Toby to Lonely Hollow and I so unexpectedly met my mother's friend."

"And also your fate," said Lina.