Uncle Terry

....By....

CHARLES CLARK MUNN

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the island coves and around isolated ledges where Uncle Terry set his traps passed all too quickly.

"Do you know," said Albert when they had returned to the little cove where Uncle Terry kept his boats and as he sat watching him pick up his morning's catch and toss them one by one into a large car, "that the first man who thought of eating a lobster must have been almost starved? Of all creatures that grow in the sea there is none more hideous, and only a hungry savage could have thought them fit for food."

"They ain't overhansum," replied Uncle Terry, "but fried in pork fat they go middin' good if ye're hungry."

That afternoon Telly invited Albert to row her up to a cove, at the head of which was a narrow valley where blueberries grew in profusion. "I want to pick a few," she said, "and you can make a sketch of the cove while I do." Helping her picking berries proved more attractive, and when her pail she remarked as she looked at the sketch, "but as they will never see me. I don't care."

"My friends will never see it," he answered quietly, "only my sister. And I am going to bring her down here next summer."

"Tell me about her," said Telly at once. "Is she pretty?"

"I think so," replied Albert. "She has eyes like yours, only her hair is not so light. She is a petite little body and has a mouth that makes one want to kiss her."

"I should like to see her ever so much," responded Telly, and then she added rather sadly, "I've never had a girl friend in my life. There are only a few at the Cape of my age, and I don't see much of them. I don't mind it in the summer, for then I work on my pictures, but in winter it is so lonesome. For days I do not see any one except father and mother or old Mrs. Leach."

"And who is Mrs. Leach?"

"Oh, she's a poor old soul who lives alone and works on the fish racks. She is worse off than I am."

It was a little glimpse into the girl's life that interested Albert, and, in the light of what he knew of her history, a pathetic one. Truly she was alone in the world, except for the two kindly souls who made a home for her.

"You will go away tomorrow, I suppose," she said with a faint tone of regret as they were rowing home. "Father said your boat was coming after you today."

He looked at her a moment, while a slight smile showed beneath his mustache. "I suppose I shall have to," he answered, "but I should like to stay here a month. I've not made a sketch of your house, even."

"I wish you would," she said with charming candor, "it is so lonesome here, and then maybe you would show me a little about painting."

"Could you endure my company every day for a month?" he asked, looking her full in the face.

"I don't believe you could endure ours," she replied, dropping her eyes, and then she added quickly: "There is a prayer meeting tonight at the Cape. Would you like to go?"

"Most certainly," he answered.

Albert had expected to see the Gypsy in the harbor when they returned that afternoon, but was happily disappointed. "I hope they will stay at Bar Harbor a week," he thought.

That evening when Telly appeared, ready to be escorted to the prayer meeting, he was certain that no fairer girl was to be found anywhere.

She was dressed in simple white, her masses of sunny hair half concealed by a thin blue affair of loosely knitted wool and had a cluster of wild roses at her throat. It was a new and pleasurable experience to be walking beside a well dressed young man whose every look and word bespoke enjoyment of her society, and she showed it in her simple, unaffected way.

That evening's gathering was a unique one in Albert's experience and the religious observances such as he never forgot. The place was a little square, unpainted building, and when Telly and he entered and seated themselves on one of the wooden settees that stood in rows not over a dozen people were there. On a small platform in front was a cottage organ and beside it a small desk. A few more entered after they did, and then a florid faced man arose and, followed by a short and stout young lady, walked forward to the platform. The girl seated herself at the organ, and the man, after turning up the lamp on the organ, opened the book of gospel hymns and said in a nasal tone, "We will naow commence our sarvices by singin' the Forty-third Psalm, and all are requested to rise an' jine." In the center of the room hung a large lamp, and two more on brackets at the side shed a weak light on the gathering, but no one seemed to feel it necessary to look for the Forty-third selection.

Albert and Telly arose with the rest, and the girl at the organ began to chase the slow tune up and down the keys. Then the red faced man started the singing, a little below the key, and the congregation followed. Telly's voice, clear and distinct, joined with the rest. A long prayer, full of halting repetitions, by the man at the desk followed, and then another hymn, and after that came a painful pause. To Albert's mind it was becoming serious, and he began to wonder how it would end, when there ensued one of the most weird and yet pathetic prayers he had ever listened to. It was uttered by an old lady, tall, gaunt and white haired, who arose from the end of a settee close to the wall and beneath one of the smoke dimmed lamps. It could not be classed as a prayer exactly, for when she began her utterance she looked around as if to find sympathy in the assembled faces, and her deep set, piercing eyes seemed alight with intense feeling. At first she grasped the back of the settee in front with her long, fleshless fingers, and then later clasped and finally raised them above her upturned face, while her body swayed with the vehemence of her feelings. Her garb, too, lent a pathos, for it was naught but a faded calico dress that hung from her attenuated frame like the raiment of a scarecrow. It may have been the shadowy room or the mournful dirge of the nearby ocean that added an uncanny touch to her words and looks, but from the moment she arose until her utterance ceased Albert was spellbound. So peculiar and yet so pathetic was her prayer it shall be quoted in full:

"O Lord, I come to thee, knowin' I'm as a worm that crawls on the airth; like the dust blown by the

old and weary o' waitin' an' left o' kin. I'm me. I eat the nk the cup o' n' my staff an' yet fer thy infinite y on me I d my feet an' yet I l the cross the burden o bear, an' y shall my an' praise t thou not e believers Hast thou e cross fer I am An' ite mercy an' drink ot a spar- n' lead an' ome e

"I thank thee, O Lord, fer the sunshine every day, an' the comin' o' the birds an' flowers every season. I thank thee that my eyes are still permitted to see thy beautiful world, an' my ears to hear the songs o' praise. I thank thee, too, that with my voice I can glorify an' bless thee fer all thy goodness, an' fer all thy marcy. An' when the day o' judgment comes an' the dead rise up, then I know thou wilt keep thy promise, an' that even I, poor an' humble, shall live again, jinin' those that have gone before, to sit at thy feet an' glorify thee fer life everlastin'. Fer this blessed hope, an' fer all thy other promises, I lift my voice in gratitude an' thankfulness an' praise to thee, my Heavenly Father, an' to thy Son, my Redeemer, tonight an' tomorrer an' forever an' forever. Amen."

To Albert, a student of Voltaire, of Hume, of Paine, and an admirer of Ingersoll, a doubter of Scriptural authenticity and almost a materialist in belief, this weird and piteous utterance came with peculiar effect.

When the prayer meeting was concluded with an oddly spoken benediction by Deacon Oaks, and Albert and Telly were on their way back to the point, Albert asked:

"Who was the poor old lady that prayed so fervently? I never heard anything like it since I was a boy."

"Oh, that's the Widow Leach," Telly responded. "She always acts that way and feels so, too, I guess. She is an object of pity here and very poor. She has no relation living that she knows of, lives alone in a small house she owns and works on the fish racks summers, and winters has to be helped. Her husband and two sons were lost at sea many years ago, and father says religion is all the consolation she has left."

"Does she always pray as fervently as she did tonight?"

"Oh, yes; that's her way. Father says she is a little cracked about such matters. He pities her, though, and helps her a good deal, and so does most every one else here who can. She needs it." Then, after a pause, she added, "How did you enjoy the meeting Mr. Page?"

"Well," replied Albert slowly and mentally contrasting it with many Sunday services when he had occupied a pew with the Nasons at their fashionable church in Boston, "it has been an experience I shall not soon forget. In one way it has been a pleasure, for it has taken me back to my young days." Then he added a little sadly, "It has also been a pain, for it recalled my mother and how she used to pray that I might grow to be a good man."

"You are not a bad man, are you?" responded Telly at once, looking curiously at him.

"Oh, no, I hope not," he answered, smiling. "I try to do as I would be done by, but the good people here might think I was, maybe, because I am not a professor of religion. For that reason I should be classed as one of the sinners, I presume."

"Well, so is father, but that doesn't make him one. Deacon Oaks calls him a scoffer, but I know he trusts him in all money matters, and I think father is the best and kindest man in the world. He has been so good and kind to me I would almost lie down and die for him if necessary."

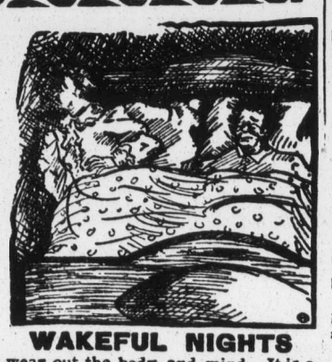
"How do you feel about this matter of belief?" Albert asked after a pause. "Are you what this old lady would call a believer, Miss Terry?"

"Oh, no," she replied slowly, "I fear I am not. I always go to meeting Sundays when there is one—mother and I and once in awhile to the Thursday evening prayer meeting. I think it's because I enjoy the singing."

When they reached the point Albert could not restrain his desire to enjoy the society of this unaffected, simple and beautiful girl a little longer. The moon that Frank had planned to use was high overhead, and away out over the still ocean stretched a broadening path of silvery sheen, while at their feet, where the ground swells were breaking upon the rocks, every splash of foam looked like snow white wool.

"If it's not asking too much, Miss Terry," said Albert with utmost politeness, "won't you walk out to the top

(To be continued.)



Albert was spellbound.

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