



"She comes from the past and re-visits my room: She looks on the did then, all beauty and bloom, So smiling and tender, so fresh and so fair, And younger she sits in my cane-bottomed chair."

NOTHING.

A SOUTHERN STORY OF ANTE BELLUM DAYS, BY JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH

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CHAPTER IX.

Abram, standing respectfully aloof from the little group of "white folks," showed a faultless set of teeth at this challenge, grinning with happiness. His adoring eyes had never once left Randal's face since that first ecstatic welcome. Between master and man obtained an indissoluble bond of mutual affection and mutual dependence. Each had need of the other.

"Mars Ran," he said in a voice of solemn rebuke, "I is ben had a mighty rough time sence you ben gone. I is dat. Mr. Foulksis, he put me to ginnin' w'en I git up frim de measles, an I don't know nothin' 'tall 'bout ginnin'. Den Mr. Foulksis, he put me to pickin' cotton, but de driver tell him I ain't wuth my salt as a picker. Den Mr. Foulksis, he put me to splittin' fence rails down closet to de woods, an de devil he peeps out'n a holler tree one mawnin, an he say, 'Abe, you kin sleep in here wid me ev' nights, an you kin scrimmudge 'roun fur 'simmous an papaws to live on tell Mars Ran git back.' An I say, 'All right, Mr. Sattin,' an I stick my ax in a nail an light out. Jus' so. But the 'simmous gittin' mighty scoreer, an the haws beats me getherin' papaws all holler, an I would er ben mighty holler inside right now, Mars Ran, ef little mistis hadn't gie me a whole paper full er vittles. I reckon dey worn' cook fur me doa. I ain't eet 'em all up yit. 'Fore I finish my dinner I yhere somebody cryin' sof' lak, outside er my dinin' room do', an I peeks out an thar was little mistis, jus' as white 'bout the gills as a fresh 'wite wash fence and a-cryin' 'cause she was los' and skeered. I done lef' er heaps er dem vittles in dat holler. Reckon I better go back arter 'em, Mars Ran!"

Randal laughed his lazy, indulgent laugh. Abram's irrepressible sense of fun was one of his highest recommendations in his master's eyes. He was the king's jester.

"No, sir. You can leave them three until you take to the woods again."

Abram rolled his eyes reproachfully until nothing but the whites of them were visible.

"Mars Ran, you oughtn't to lef' your nigger to be cuf' 'roun by de overseer lak a common fel'ban. You oughtn't's dat. I cyarn't 'bide you 'wite trash."

The amused look died out of Randal's face abruptly. Liza was fastening her hat on again with her back to him. Strong had gone to fetch his horse from the shed. A gulf had seemed to yawn visibly between them all in a second.

There was nothing to do, nothing to say. He stood stupidly by, looking at Strong helping Liza into his own saddle, and long after the gray had passed out of sight with his slight burden he stood there, pondering the nice things he might have said to cover Abe's infernal blunder if only he had thought of any one of them before it was too late.

Abram alone was supremely and ignorantly happy.

CHAPTER X.

Liza Martin, her cool composure under trying circumstances, her undesirable equipment of good looks, her educational disqualification for the humble stratum of society into which she had been born, and the deep obligation she had laid the entire Chambliss family under by rescuing its venerable head from what looked like impending destruction, came up for animated consideration at the Chambliss dinner table that afternoon.

Randal, the best of listeners on all occasions, sat picking out pecans with deliberate nicety and dropping the unbroken halves into his black coffee, staring into the cup all the while as intently as if the oracle of old supposed to rest among the grounds would come at his bidding and settle the question which was agitating the family bosom. Presently he lifted his head lazily and contributed an abrupt remark to the somewhat wordy discussion. "Well, said he, 'what are you going to do about her?'"

"Who?"

"You and Amy, mother."

"I am not quite prepared to say. The matter is really difficult."

Mrs. Chambliss absently shifted the sparkling rings on her long, white fingers with a soft, caressing touch. She hoped Randal was not going to complicate matters by becoming domineering. She liked things to move smoothly and softly and unburiedly, always in a refined groove. It was the only sort of motion she could endure with any degree of composure. The Randal—she was a Randal—had been running or rather moving—a Randal never ran—in a groove of elegant leisure for generations back and she did not propose to be jolted out of it by any boyish impetuosity on Randal's part. There was a delicate suggestion of rebuke in her soft answer to the quick asperity with which Randal repeated her own words, "The matter is really difficult!"

"Yes, quite so. Amy and I were talking about her yesterday. Of course we want to do just what is right."

"And handsome," his father added with vague liberality.

"And kind," said Amy, deprecating his hastiness with reproachful eyes.

Randal threw his head back hastily, to free his forehead of a misplaced lock of the waving black hair, which he wore longer than a city man would have found tolerable.

"Of course, of course. All that goes without saying, or ought to. But when are we going to do those right and handsome and kind things? If Miss Martin had been as deliberate in her movements as we are, father might not have taken much interest in this discussion."

"As soon as we have decided what to do, we will do it promptly."

"Call," said Randal dictatorially, "and at once."

"Call! Who?"

"Not you, mother, but Amy there. It might prove awkward, you see, to call six months hence and remind Miss Martin of a piece of forgotten heroism. Warned over enthusiasm is about as nourishing as warmed over potatoes."

"Don't be unreasonable, Randal. We had not thought of calling at all. I am really not prepared to take the entire Martin family into an embrace. It is really dangerous to give such people an opening wedge."

"I don't believe the girl is that sort, wife, but fix it up between you all. It is none of my lookout. I will foot the bill when you have settled it among you."

"Foot the bill?" Randal's indignant glance was traveling rapidly over the family circle.

"Yes," said his mother, calmly ignoring his evident disapproval. "I had thought of writing Miss Martin an appreciative note, in which I could assure her of the warmth and sincerity of our gratitude, and then—as she's quite a horsewoman herself, I am told—I mean to send with it a handsome riding whip. Amy has ordered a lot from Burrow's to select from. We would like you to help us."

Randal turned his mocking eyes full upon her.

(To be Continued.)



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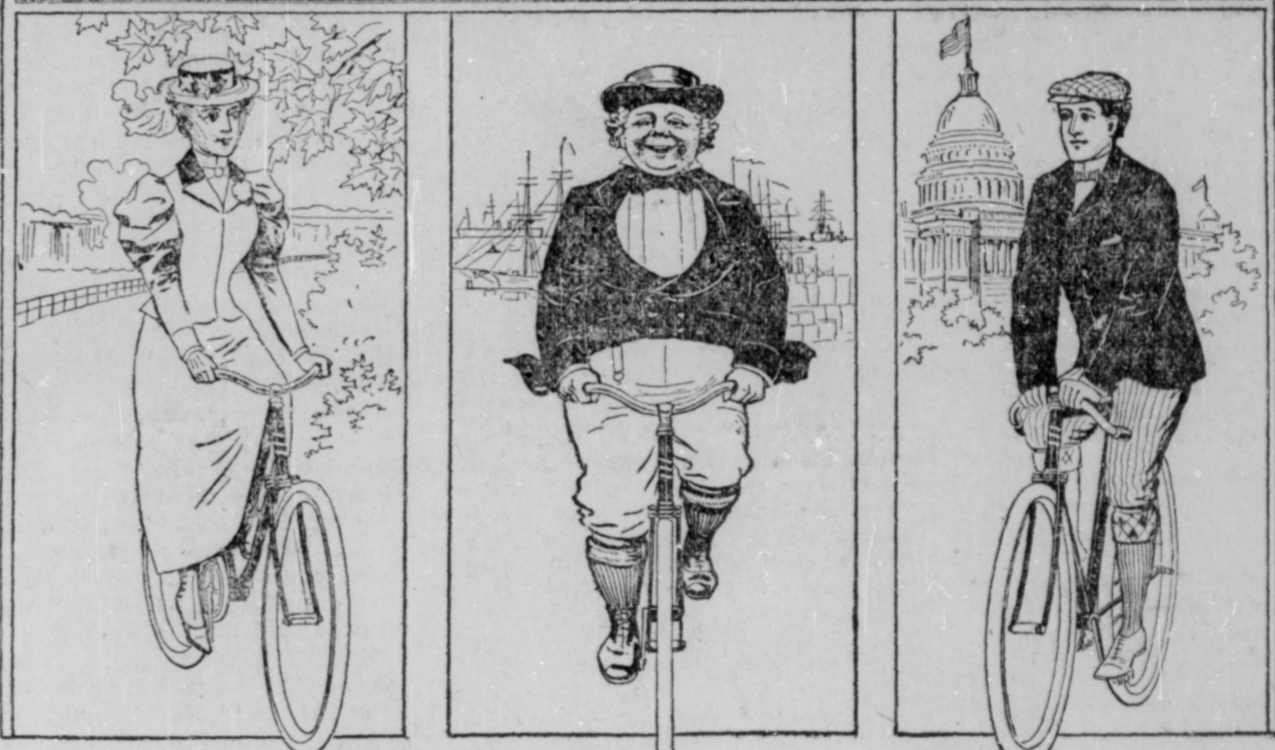
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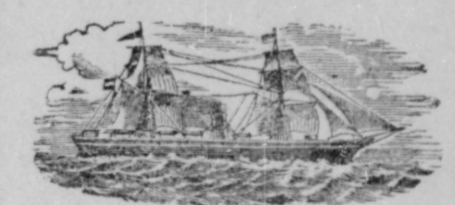
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