

Old Lady Number 31

By LOUISE FORSSLUND

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SYNOPSIS.

Captain Abraham Rose and Angelina, his wife, have lost their little home through Abe's unwise purchase of Tensley Gold mining stock. Their household goods sold, the \$100 auction money, all they have left, will place Abe in the Old Man's home, or Angey in the Old Ladies' home. Both are self-sacrificing but Abe decides: "My dear this is the first time I've had a chance to take the rest of it. The old couple bid good-by to the little house. Terror of 'what folks will say' sends them along by paths to the gate of the Old Ladies' home. Miss Abigail, matron of the Old Ladies' home, hears of the ill fortune of the old couple. She tells the other old ladies, and Blossy, who has paid a double fee for the only double bed-chamber, voices the unanimous verdict that Abe must be taken in with his wife. Abe awakens next morning to find that he is 'Old Lady No. 31.' The old ladies give him such a warm welcome that he is made to feel at home at once.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

But what was this? Blossy, leading all the others in a resounding call of "Welcome!" and then Blossy drawing her two hands from behind her back. One held a huge blue cup, the other the saucer to match. She placed the cup in the saucer and held it out to Abraham. He trudged down the few steps to receive it, unashamed now of the tears that coursed down his cheeks. With a burst of delight he perceived that it was a mustache cup, such as the one he had always used at home until it had been set for safe-keeping on the top pantry shelf to await the auction, where it had brought the price of eleven cents with half a paper of tacks thrown in.

And now as the tears cleared away he saw, also, what Angey's eyes had already noted, the inscription in warm crimson letters on the shining blue side of the cup, "To Our Beloved Brother."

"Sisters," he mumbled, for he could do no more than mumble as he took his gift, "ef yew'd been gittin' ready fer me six months, yew couldn't have done no better."

CHAPTER V.

The Head of the Corner.

Everybody wore their company manners to the breakfast table—the first time in the whole history of the home when company manners had graced the initial meal of the day. Being pleasant at supper was easy enough, Aunt Nancy used to say, for every one save the unreasonably cantankerous, and being agreeable at dinner was not especially difficult; but no one short of a saint could be expected to smile of mornings until sufficient time had been given to discover whether one had stepped out on the wrong or the right side of the bed.

This morning, however, no time was needed to demonstrate that everybody in the place had gotten out on the happy side of his couch. Even the deaf-and-dumb gardener had untwisted his surly temper, and as Abraham entered the dining-room, looked in at the east window with a conciliatory grin and nod which said plainly as words:

"'Tis a welcome sight indeed to see one of my own kind around this establishment!"

"Why don't he come in?" questioned Abe, waving back a greeting as well as he could with the treasured cup in one of his hands and the saucer in the other; whereupon Sarah Jane, that ugly duckling, explained that the fellow, being a confirmed woman hater, cooked all his own meals in the smoke house, and insisted upon all his orders being left on a slate outside the tool-house door. Abe sniffed disdainfully, contemplating her homely countenance, over which this morning's mood had cast a not unlovely transforming glow.

"Why, the scallawag!" He frowned so at the face in the window that it immediately disappeared. "Yew don't mean ter tell me he's sot ag'in yew gals? He must be crazy! Sech a handsome, clever set o' women I never did see!"

Sarah Jane blushed to the roots of her thin, straight hair and sat down, suddenly disarmed of every porcupine quill that she had hidden under her wings; while there was an agreeable little str among the sisters.

"Set down, all hands! Set down!" enjoined Miss Abigail, futtering about with the heaviness of a fat goose. "Brother Abe—that's what we've all agreed to call yew, by unanimous vote—yew set right here at the foot of the table. Aunt Nancy always had the head an' me the foot; but I only kept the foot, partly becuz that wa'n't no man fer the place, and partly becuz I was tew sizable ter squeeze in anywhere else. Seem' as Sister Angey is sech a little mite, though, I guess she kin easy make room fer me t'other side o' her."

Abe could only bow his thanks as he put his gift down on the table and took the prominent place assigned to him. The others seated, there was a

solemn moment of waiting with bowed heads. Aunt Nancy's trembling voice arose—the voice which had jealously guarded the right of saying grace at table in the Old Ladies' home for twenty years—not, however, in the customary words of thanksgiving, but in a peremptory "Brother Abe!"

Abraham looked up. Could she possibly mean that he was to establish himself as the head of the household by repeating grace? "Brother Abe!" she called upon him again. "Yew've ast a blessin' fer one woman fer many a year; supposin' yew ask it fer thirty!"

Amid the amazement of the other sisters, Abe mumbled, and muttered, and murmured—no one knew what words; but all understood the overwhelming gratitude behind his incoherency, and all joined heartily in the Amen. Then, while Mrs. Homan, the cook of the week, went bustling out into the kitchen, Aunt Nancy felt that it devolved upon her to explain her action. It would never do, she thought, for her to gain a reputation for self-effacement and sweetness of disposition at her time of life.

"Son, I want yew to understand one thing now at the start. Yew treat us right, an' we'll treat yew right. That's all we ask o' yew. Miss Ellie, pass the radishes."

"I'll do my best," Abe hastened to assure her. "Hy-guy, that coffee smells some kind o' good, don't it? Between the smell o' the stuff an' the looks o' my cup, it'll be so temptin' that I'll wish I had the neck of a gi-raffe, an' could taste it all the way down. Angey, I be afraid we'll git the gout a-livin' so high. Look at this here cream!"

Smiling, joking, his lips insisting upon joking to cover the natural feeling of embarrassment incident to this first meal among the sisters, but with his voice breaking now and again with emotion, while from time to time he had to stee his handkerchief to his old eyes, Abe passed successfully through the—to him—elaborate breakfast. And Angey sat in silent raptude, but with her face shining so that her quiet was the stillness of eloquence. Once Abe startled them all by rising stealthily from the table and seizing the morning's newspaper, which lay upon the buffet.

"I knowed it!" caviled Lazy Daisy sotto voce to no one in particular. "He couldn't wait for the news till he was through eatin'!" But Abe had folded the paper into a stout weapon, and, creeping toward the window, despatched by a quick, adroit movement a fly which had alighted upon the screen.

"I hate the very sight o' them air pesky critters," he explained half apologetically. "Thar, thar's another one," and slaughtered that.

"My, but yew kin get 'em, can't yew?" spoke Miss Abigail admiringly. "Them tew be the very ones I tried ter ketch all day yiste'day; I kin see as a fly-katcher yew be a-goin' ter be with a farm ter me. Set down an' try some o' this here strawberry preserve."

But Abe protested that he could not eat another bite unless he should get up and run around the house to "joggle down" what he had already swallowed. He leaned back in his chair and surveyed the family: on his right, generous-hearted Blossy, who had been smiling approval and encouragement at him all through the repast; at his left, and just beyond Angey, Miss Abigail indulging in what remained on the dishes now that she discovered the others to have finished; Aunt Nancy keenly watching him from the head of the board; and all the other sisters "betwixt an' between."

He caught Mrs. Homan's eye where she stood in the doorway leading into the kitchen, and remarked pleasantly:

"Ma'am, yew oughter set up a pancake shop in York. Yew could make a fortune at it. I ain't had sech a meal o' vittles sence I turned fifty year o' age."

A flattered smile overspread Mrs. Homan's visage, and the other sisters, noting it, wondered how long it would be before she showed her claws in Abraham's presence.

"Hy-guy, Angey," Abe went on, "yew can't believe nothin' yew hear, kin yer? Why, folks have told me that yew ladies— What yew hittin' my foot fer, mother? Folks have told me," a twinkle of amusement in his eye at the absurdity, "that yew fight among yerselves like cats an' dogs, when, law! I never see sech a clever lot o' women gathered together in all my life. An' I believe—mother, I ain't a-sayin' nothin'! I just want ter let 'em know what I think on 'em. I believe that thar must be three hundred hearts in this here place 'stid o' thirty. But dew yew know, gals, folks outside even go so fur 'ter say that yew throw plates at one another!"

There was a moment's silence; then a little gasp first from one and then from another of the group. Every one looked at Mrs. Homan, and from Mrs. Homan to Sarah Jane. Mrs. Homan tightened her grip on the pancake turner; Sarah Jane uneasily moved her long fingers within reach of a sturdy little red-and-white pepper pot. Another moment passed, in which the air seemed filled with the promise of an electric storm. Then Blossy spoke hurriedly—Blossy, the tactician—clapping her hands together and bringing Abe's attention to herself.

"Really! You surprise me! You don't mean to say folks talk about us like that!"

"Gander is a dretful long-legged critter," amended Miss Abigail, smiling and sighing in the same breath.

"Sary Jane," inquired Mrs. Homan sweetly, "what's the matter with that pepper pot? Does it need fillin'?"

And so began the reign of peace in the Old Ladies' home.

CHAPTER VI.

Indian Summer.

Miss Abigail had not banked in vain on the "foresightedness of the Lord." At the end of six months, instead of there being a shortage in her accounts because of Abe's presence, she was able to show the directors such a balance sheet as excelled all her previous commendable records.

"How do you explain it?" they asked her.

"We cast our bread on the waters," she answered, "an' Providence jest kept a-sendin' 'em the leaves." Again she said, "Twas grinnin' that done it. Brother Abe he kept the gardener good-natured, an' the gardener he jest grinned at the garden sassa until it was ashamed not ter flourish; an' Brother Abe kept the gals good-natured an' they wa'n't no nassy about what they eat; an' he kept the visitors a-laughin' jest ter see him here, an' when yew make folks laugh they want ter turn around an' dew somethin' fer yew. I tell yew, ef yew kin only keep gritt enough ter grin, yew kin drive away a drought."

In truth, there had been no drought in the garden that summer, but almost a double yield of corn and beans; no drought in the gifts sent to the home, but showers of plenty. Some of these came in the form of fresh fish and clams left at the back door; some in luscious fruits; some in barrels of clothing. And the barrels of clothing solved another problem; for no longer did their contents consist solely of articles of feminine attire. "Billed shirts" poured out of them; socks and breeches, derby hats, coats and negligees; until Aunt Nancy with a humorous twist to her thin lips inquired if there were thirty men in this establishment and one woman.

"I never thought I'd come to wearin' a quilted silk basque with tassels on it," Abe remarked one day on being urged to try on a handsome smoking jacket. "Dew I look like one of them sissy-boys, er jest a dude?"

"It's dretful becomin'," insisted Angey, "bewtiful! Ain't it, gals?"

Every old lady nodded her head with an air of proud proprietorship, as if to say, "Nothing could fail to become our brother." And Angey nodded her head, too, in delighted approval of their appreciation of "our brother" and "my husband."

Beautiful, joy-steeped, pleasure-filled days these were for the couple, who had been cramped for life's smallest necessities so many meager years. Angey felt that she had been made miraculously young by the birth of this new Abraham—almost as if at last she had been given the son for whom in her youth she had prayed with impassioned appeal. Her old-wife love became rejuvenated into a curious mixture of proud mother-love and young-wife leaning, as she saw Abe win every heart and become the center of the community.

"Why, the sisters all think the sun rises an' sets in him," Angey would whisper to herself sometimes, awed by the glorious wonder of it all.

The sisters fairly vied with one another to see how much each could do for the one man among them. Their own preferences and prejudices were magnanimously thrust aside. In a body they besought their guest to smoke as freely in the house as out of doors. Miss Abigail even traded some of her garden produce for tobacco, while Miss Ellie made the old gentleman a tobacco pouch of red flannel so generous in its proportions that on a pinch it could be used as a chest protector.

Then Ruby Lee, not to be outdone by anybody, produced, from no one ever discovered where, a mother-of-pearl mantle set for the delight and mystification of the hero; and even Lazy Daisy went so far as to cut some red and yellow tissue paper into squares under the delusion that some time, somehow, she would find the energy to roll these into spools for the lighting of Abe's pipe. And each and every sister from time to time contributed some gift or suggestion to her "brother's" comfort.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

How the Rain Bore Holes.

When rain falls it does not actually soak into the earth, but bores its way in, forming tiny tubes, says the Rebooth Sunday Herald. These tubes are so small that it would be impossible to insert a hair in one of them without bursting its walls. Sometimes the tubes are bored down to a depth of four or five feet. When the surface dries the water evaporates from the tubes, just as it would from a pipe. If the tube is twisted it takes longer for the water to evaporate.

If one takes a rake and stirs the ground after each rain he breaks the tops of the tubes and the water will stand in them for months. In this way the farmers of the West, on semi-arid lands, store the rainfalls one year and raise a crop of wheat every other year, there being sufficient water in two years, but not enough in one, to raise a crop.

Church, State and Poor.

A book on "The Church, the State and the Poor" has been written by an English vicar. The book is comprehensive, tracing the subject of pre-reformation days. The author regrets that during the growth of collectivism, under which he classifies what is called "Christian socialism," the church has trusted too much to the state to better the conditions among the poor. Now there is a revival of interest in the welfare of the poor on the part of the church. The writer's contention is that a firm belief in the Christian creed is the only inspiration and guide to any effort to solve "the social problem."

USE and ABUSE of ITALIAN TRAVEL

By CARL SCHURZ VROOMAN.

UPON entering Italy every traveler is confronted by a question, upon his answer to which depends in large measure the success or failure of his trip. That question is: "What are you willing to omit?"

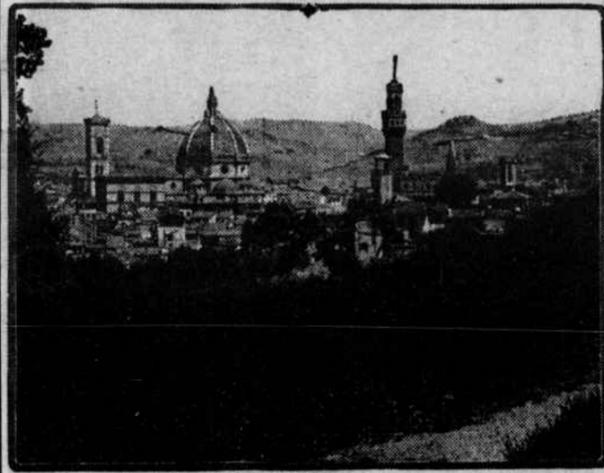
Not in a lifetime can one see everything, and if his stay is limited to a few short months he must be discriminating during those months or disappointed at the end of them. The most rational plan, therefore, would seem to be to devote approximately half the allotted time to one city in order to know at least one small region intimately. With the insight into Italian life and the sympathy with the Italian spirit thus gained, the rest of the country ought to prove an open book which can be glanced through, even hurriedly, with both delight and profit.

Of course when it comes to deciding which city shall thus be studied at leisure and made the key of the rest of Italy, one can only say, as did Schopenhauer when told that the Jews were God's favorite race: "Tastes differ."

Florence Inspiring.

Venice rising from the sea, clad in mystery and beauty, Venice with her unrivaled school of colorists, truly is a name to conjure with. On the other hand, from the standpoint of universal history, present day politics and comparative art, Rome's advantages are incomparable. But it is to Florence, the home of Giotto and Dante, of Petrarch and Boccaccio, of Savonarola and Michael Angelo, that one should go to find the most intimate and characteristic expression of the soul of Italy.

On arriving in Florence one is apt at first to be not so much inspired as dazzled and bewildered by the art treasures on all sides. Every church, hospital, orphanage, monastery or municipal building is crowded with priceless frescoes and adorned with inimitable creations in marble and bronze. On every crumbling wall or ceiling where to early Italian or renaissance artists had been given a few square yards of available space, one is amazed



VIEW OF FLORENCE.

to find a complete history of Israel, the life of St. Francis, or an entire system of philosophy presented with a dramatic power, an emotional intensity and a beauty of coloring which make a direct appeal to the profoundest depths of one's being.

As a rule, however, during the first few days this appeal touches no responsive chord in the majority of people. The ideas expressed and the mental attitude involved belong to a bygone age. Before the average man can come to have any real and proper appreciation of Mark Twain's "squeezed Madonna," those primitive yet quaintly charming creations of the Byzantine and early Siennese schools, or even of the poetic productions of the renaissance, he must rebuild in his imagination the mental world of those romantic epochs.

This can be done most agreeably by reading the annals of old Florence, the legends of her saints, the tales of her warriors and statesmen, the wild bohemian lives of her artists, the marvelous history of her workmen guilds, the "divine" and human comedies of her poets and the story of the life and death of her reformer-prophet, Savonarola.

The most valuable guide-book as a supplement to Baedeker is that of the late Grant Allen. Mr. Allen had a sound historical sense and a contagious love of the beautiful. As a hand-book, Kugler's "Italian Schools of Painting," having no competitors, is a necessary evil. But travelers today are particularly fortunate in possessing the illuminating little series of volumes on the "Italian Painters of the Renaissance" by Mr. Bernard Berenson.

With these writers and numerous lesser lights available for cloisonne it is difficult to understand the willingness of so many travelers to limit themselves to the prosaic, not to say archaic guidance of Baedeker. Unquestionably Baedeker makes a valuable servant, but I can affirm from experience that he makes a bad master.

To his myriad disciples, however, on all matters, from a knotty question in history to a judgment on art, he is consulted as final authority. His asterisks are their guiding stars. Where he puts two stars there they pause and admire; where he puts no stars darkness reigns for them.

A more serious blunder, however, than that of these conscientious "stargazers" is made by sightseers who, in their efforts to take a short cut to culture and see galleries wholesale, deliver themselves body and soul into the hands of the misinformation dispensers commonly known as guides—those blind leaders of the blind.

The hordes of these disgusting creatures who haunt the museums, churches and galleries of Europe are made up for the most part of the refuse of the more difficult or more crowded professions. They are disabled day laborers, hotel waiters out of a job, retired cab drivers or other unfortunates.

On the Wrong Side.

I once heard of a guide, provided by a well-known tourist company at Paris, who, after having conducted a party two-thirds through one of the rooms of the Louvre, explaining about every fifth picture as he went, suddenly stopped, consulted some notes and said:

"I beg pardon—you'll please retrace your steps. I've—er—made a slight mistake. I've explained the wrong side of the room."

The statement, "I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like," is one which seems to come automatically to the lips of the initiated traveler on finding himself called upon to discuss pictures with an artist or art critic. These knowing creatures dread this little prefatory remark as much as a sea captain does that equally absurd query of passengers: "Captain, how many times have you crossed?" A famous Scotch artist, on hearing this artistic credo for about the four hundredth time, said, "Dinna say that! Dinna say that! The beasts of the field ken as mooch!"

Nevertheless, whatever professionals may say to the contrary, the atti-

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