

JOINTINGS OF OLD LIM JUCKLIN

BY
OP
READ

ON
TANNHAUSER



A SPRING freshet and the washing away of a railroad bridge poured out an opera company upon the country town. Soon was spread about the news that the manager was going to give a performance of "Tannhauser." There was great excitement. No town of this size had ever been so distinguished. Surely the rain had come as a favor of the gods to the village of Purdy. And how fondly the community loved music! It could boast of many of the most active and tireless fiddlers in the State. Its singing societies were numerous, and it was not unusual to find a lad of 15 that had mastered the entire system of "buckwheat" notes. At church it was given out that the opera was to be enacted and sung on the following Tuesday night. Tom Balch, president of the North Run Harmony Club, rode about the neighborhood selling tickets. So great was the interest of the housewife that in several instances eggs were exchanged for pasteboard. Ah, at last the people were to be enlivened and elevated by that great harmony so often spoken of in the newspapers. Old Brizintine bought a ticket. He swore that there was not a man in the neighborhood that could catch a tune quicker than he. He never went to a revival that he didn't come away whistling a hymn. Once a flatboat concert company had tied up at a landing on his farm. He had not charged the company for the use of his land. He was more than paid in music. One of the company could sing high or low, just as the case might be; and his imitation of a foxhound beat anything ever heard in that part of the country. Dan Mahoney had heard it five miles away, and old Steve Hortner, two miles distant, had run to his door in the hope that he might see the fox. "And I reckon this company's got one to beat him all hollow," said Brizintine.

"I don't know," replied the postmaster. "Here comes old Limuel. Maybe he can tell us somethin' about it."

Jucklin came up, took a seat on the horse-block, democracy's common throne, told a boy to look out or he might hurt himself running along, showing a stick in front of him, and then inquired of Brizintine if he were going to the opera.

"Me? Well, I've got my credentials right here," Briz answered. "Couldn't keep me away with a ten-foot pole. And as soon as I hear that they were going to give us a chance to taste their fruit, I says to my wife, says I, 'Emeline, that means me. I haven't paid much attention to these circus, and I stayed home one night and shelled a turn of corn rather than go to the minstrels, but when they come with the grand opera, that means me.' That's what I said to her."

"Is your wife a-goin' with you?" Lim inquired.

"Well, no; she 'lowed she'd take her money and buy a new pair of quilting frames. She's a smart woman, Lim, but she don't care particular for music. I used to blow a flute before I lost so many of my teeth, and she always told me I'd better be a plowman. It fretted me at first, but we can't all be artistic. You like music, don't you, Lim?"

"I lick it up the same as molasses. Music is the syrup of the mind. It is energy gone to sleep, a dreamin'. If the soul is like a rose, music is the perfume."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Lim," Briz replied. "Me and you don't always agree, but when it comes to the great principles we stand pretty much on the same platform. Now some folks ain't educated up to high music. But it don't make no difference to me how high they sing, I can stand on tip-toe and reach the notes. I'll drop by for you, Lim, and we'll go together."

Never in an expectant neighborhood did time move slower. But Tuesday dawned and night finally spread over the earth. Old Lim and Briz were in front of the hall door an hour and a half before it was opened. Mrs. Juck-

lin had refused to come. "I have heard about them ballets and that high kick-in, and such carryin' on don't mix well with the church," she had said. "If Limuel wants to forget that life's serious, let him. I'll have none of it."

When the door was opened the narrow stairway was instantly jammed. Every seat in the house was taken. In the aisle a rocking chair was placed for the County Judge. When every one had been seated he, this ever-playing fountain of wisdom, arose and declared that he desired to say something. "We are assembled for a purpose," said he. This sage remark evoked not a murmur. "We are here," said he, "not to honor, but to be honored. The opera we are to see and hear to-night will, I have no doubt, soon establish itself as a favorite in our midst. It comes to us as a

reward for our love of music, and soon our young ladies will be playing it on their melodions. I move three cheers for these singers." Three cheers were given, and then the curtain arose. There was no orchestra. Sam Buck, fiddler, had offered his services, but as he couldn't play by note, and as he had never heard the tunes, his offer was passed up.

"Now I begin to feel that life's worth the livin'," Brizintine whispered to Jucklin.

"I need a little more evidence yet," Limuel replied. The County Judge set for a time with one hand behind his ear, to harvest and garner the sound, but soon discovered that this was unnecessary. They came a note, as if some one had struck a circular saw with a sledge.

"They seem to be rebuildin' that railroad bridge," said Jucklin.

Brizintine winced. "I'd like to tell 'em we ain't deaf," he replied.

Uproarious time went on. The people looked at one another. "And I gave up a settin' of eggs for this," an old woman whispered.

"Briz," remarked Lim, "if you find the tune passes it over to me."

"Oh, they'll git it to after a while," Briz replied. "That feller there in that auctioneer suit come in one of luttin' it then."

Old Limuel scratched his head. "There ain't a child that can sleep in this town to-night while this is a-goin' on," said he. "Why, confound it, they are makin' fun of us. I can't understand a word they say."

"Of course not," interposed the barber, sitting behind him. "They are singing in German."

"Well, what right have they got to do that?" Briz demanded. "I move we make 'em sing it out plain or lynch 'em. We don't know but they are talkin' about us. Jest listen at that feller whoop and bawl. I've got a steer that I could match against him."

An hour passed. Another act began. Briz arose. "Where are you goin'?" Limuel asked of him.

"Thought I'd go around to the livery stable to curry my horse."

"Don't need curryin', does he?"

"No, but I'd ruther do it than to stay here."

"Believe I'll go with you. I don't want to curry a horse, but as I want music I may find a cow somewhere that has lost her calf. I want her lowin'

to take this taste out of my ears."

They went out. On the sidewalk there were a number of boys, eager for a peep at the show. "Is it a good show, Uncle Lim?" one of them inquired.

"I won't say as to that, boys. But I will say that notwithstanding the fact that the railroad killed my colt, I'm sorry their bridge washed away."

The two old men went over into the Courthouse yard and sat down. "First night's work I've done in a long time," said Briz. "Lim, is that what they call music?"

"Yes, but don't come when they have called it. It just confirms a belief that I've always had, Briz—that the public is a liar. Whenever music tries to tell a story, except the sweet or sorrowful story of the heart, it has missed its office. And if what we heard to-night is education, let me take ignorance in my arms and kiss its warm lips. I like to hear a thunder storm, for that tells the story of the angry clouds. I don't dislike to hear cats a-fightin' out in the dark—I can stand a yard full of guinea hens—but I don't want any more music that they call educated. They might as well call rheumatism an enlightened emotion. Tuther day a feller out in the river a swimmin' was taken with the cramp and he hollored. They ought to get him to sing in this opera. Well, Briz, I reckon we'd better sneak on home."

"What are you askin' to tell your wife, Lim?"

"Why, when she asks me what it was like, I'll go out into the kitchen and knock down the dishpan."

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THE DOCTOR AND THE GIRL

By Frank H. Sweet

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HERE was a flash, so blinding that Dr. Tom Howard closed his eyes, and the horse threw up his head with a whinny of terror; then almost instantly came a crash as of a thousand cannon, which rolled across the mountains in a reverbation of receding echoes. After that all was as it had been before—inky black.

Dr. Tom bent his face to avoid the slant of rain, at the same time touching the horse's back encouragingly with his hand. But they could go no faster, as he knew, for the horse was picking his way down the mountain side step by step, with nose forward as though smelling the way, and with ears alert for sounds that might indicate their course.

Ahead were patients who might be needing him, to whom his coming might be the difference between life and death. Henceforth his life must be his work, with the first he had hoped to make his wife. At first he had thought she would reconsider, relent; but her sudden departure, without note or explanation, had meant it was to be the end. He did not even know to what part of the world she had gone.

He had already been away from home twenty-four hours, on a journey of forty miles into the mountains to save a man who had been accidentally shot; and now, against the advice of hardy mountaineers, was forcing his way back in

the very teeth of one of the fierce hill storms.

From time to time his hand went back to pat the horse's back encouragingly, and at every contact of the hand the horse started forward a little more briskly, in an effort to please him, only to return almost instantly, however, to the slow, cautious gait, as if realizing that it was absolutely necessary to their safety. Soon there came another blinding flash, even as the hand once more dropped upon the flank, and Dr. Tom's face blanched a little, for directly in front of them was a yawning fissure.

After that, for a time, he allowed the horse to choose the way, with the reins hanging loosely across his neck. The horse's nose and ears and instinct were safer than the man's impatience. More than once a lightning's flash revealed a black hole in front or to one side, with jagged, precipitous slopes rising or falling beyond; but always under the horse's careful feet was firm footing, sometimes a narrow shelf scarcely wider than was necessary for them to pass, sometimes a declivity so steep

that the animal's haunches almost touched the rock as he picked his way down. But the progress was slow, slow—originally slow it seemed to the impatient doctor, who wanted to be at his work.

Presently, from brief glimpses obtained in the flashings, he realized they were swerving far out of their course, and he caught up the reins with a quick, determined grasp.

Obediently the horse turned back toward the straight line; but a few minutes later, when another flash came, he was heading in the old direction. Again he was turned, sharply, and again he went on in a straight course for a few steps, only to swerve once more to the chosen way in the inky blackness which followed the flashings.

Again and again did Dr. Tom swing him to the direct line, with increasing impatience and harshness, and just as often did the horse swerve promptly to his own course. With the rain and wind beating in his face, stumbling over rough ground and sometimes among trees where the branches almost

swept him from the saddle, Dr. Tom could only judge the course by the lightning; in the darkness the horse had his own way, and in the darkness the horse persisted in choosing the one which Dr. Tom believed to be wrong. But apparently there was no help for it, and at last, defeated, he allowed the reins once more to hang loosely upon the horse's neck.

Gradually, above the roaring of the storm, there had been rising another sound, peculiar, menacing in its persistency, and suddenly intelligible. Dr. Tom drew a quick breath, and his hand went to the horse's neck in caressing apology. The branch which had been easily forded on the way up had become a raging torrent with the gathering of the heavy rainfall, and was now tearing down the mountain, unloosening rocks and uprooting trees in its wild course. Had they stumbled into its mad waters in the darkness there would have been little chance of emerging alive. And the horse's nerved course meant that he was picking his way toward the bridge at the ferry road, the only way to get beyond the branch and river, and so home.

An hour went by and the steeper slopes were left behind. They were coming to a more level country that could be crossed with greater speed. Dr. Tom was mentally counting up the miles and the hours it would take to traverse them when he saw a light twinkling just ahead. Apparently it was a man with a lantern, going in the same direction, and running as well as he was able to in the darkness. Dr. Tom urged his horse forward.

"Hello!" he shouted cheerily, as he drew near. "What are you doing out in a night like this? Better go back to your bed!"

In the storm's roar the voice sounded hoarse and unnatural. The man put his hand to his ear inquiringly and waited for the horse to approach. Dr. Tom could see the figure dimly by the lantern's light, but was himself almost invisible.

"Goin'—for—a—doctor!" the man yelled, as the horse came opposite. "My daughter's hurt an' must have help at once. Are you p'inted toward the ferry bridge?"

"Yes."

"Well, with what sounded like a great sob of thankfulness, 'spose ye

send a doctor up to my place quick—Bill Saybrook's on the slope, a half mile from here. Ye can go a lot quicker'n I can. Send anybody. Mollie said Dr. Tom Howard. She wants him, but he ain't so handy's Dr. Peters, an' we must have somebody at once."

Dr. Tom had caught his breath sharply and leaped forward. He placed a hand upon the man's shoulder.

"I am Dr. Howard," he said. "Is it Mollie Saybrook you mean—the one who taught school at the Corners?"

The man held up his lantern, and now the sob was unmistakable. Tears were streaming down his face.

"The Lord sent ye," he choked. "Tain't no man's work in this—it's a miracle. I knowed in my heart I couldn't get no doctor here in time, but I would kill myself a-tryin' to come."

He caught the bridle in his hand and struck directly into a thicker growth of trees, straight toward his cabin, crying and laughing in the same breath, and talking incoherently to himself and the doctor.

Mollie was sleeping peacefully, out of danger, when Dr. Tom left the cabin at daylight and turned his horse toward the bridge at the ferry. As he rode along at a brisk pace there was a rapt look on the young doctor's face.

"Perhaps it was the Lord," he said to the horse, as his hand went softly to the animal's neck. "Who knows? But you were the messenger and forced me into my happiness."