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WHEN JIM CAME HOME

By M. QUAD.

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Jim Baker was lazy and shiftless as a young man. He didn't drink, and he was good tempered. He had the reputation of being truthful and honest, but everybody said he would die in the poorhouse. At the age of twenty-four, to the surprise of everybody, he got married. No young woman in his locality would have looked at him twice, but one twenty miles away actually fell in love with and married him. A thousand different times in after years she tried to explain to herself and others how it came about, but she never satisfied any one.

The father of Jim's wife gave her thirty acres of land with a cabin on it, and the couple went there to exist. For the first five years Jim was appeased to, protested at and complained of for his laziness. Then the hard-working wife realized that it was no use and gave it up.

Jim Baker read and heard of the civil war when it broke out, and he saw many of his neighbors enlist and go marching away. He had no particular interest in war. He was a patriot, but he didn't say much about it for fear he would be asked to swing his hat and cheer. That would have been hard work for him. It was only when the days of the big bounty came that he sat down under a tree for serious thought. He was thinking when a recruiting officer came along and sat down beside him and said:

"Jim, if you want to enlist I can get you \$700 bounty money. It looks now as if the war would be over in thirty days, and just think of earning all that money in a month."

"I'll think it over," replied Jim after a long time, and that evening his wife noticed that he was looking very serious. When she asked if he felt ill he answered:

"Num. Say, Bet, I'm thinking of going to war."

She smiled at the idea, and he continued:

"I allus thought it was mighty hard work, but that feller told me today it was dead easy. All you've got to do is to eat and sleep and shoot rebels. You have a nigger to cook for you and load your gun. I believe I could stand that, and I'll get \$700 for going."

Nothing more was said about the matter that evening. Next morning the wife started for the fields, and Jim started for the village. She missed him at noon when she returned to the house, but she didn't worry. When he came home at sundown he tossed a big roll of greenbacks into her lap and said:

"I've enlisted for a soldier and am going away tomorrow."

She counted the money over slowly, laid it upon the clock shelf and re-

plied:

"Jim, there's wuss husbands than you. I'll be mighty careful of the money, and I hope you'll come back all right."

There was very little said next morning when he started off. She went to the plow and he to town, and the talk was all among the neighbors. After getting down to the front Jim wrote home now and then, but briefly. Sometimes he was mentioned in other soldiers' letters, but also briefly. The wife lived on alone. She missed the husband, and yet she didn't. Sometimes she wished him back, and sometimes she didn't feel to care whether he returned or not. She was in this neutral state of mind when the war came to a close at last. The soldiers who survived it returned home, and one evening as she sat on her steps with her pipe in her mouth a veteran in uniform turned in at the gate to say:

"Mrs. Baker, have you heard about Jim?"

"Not a word."

"He didn't come back with us."

"No?"

"Because he was killed in the very last battle. I was right near him when he fell. Mighty sorry to have to tell you."

"Thankee for coming," she said. And not a dozen more words were said. In her way the woman felt her loss, but she shed no tears over it. It did not keep her from her work next day. After two years she began drawing a widow's pension, and a sister came to live with her. After the sixth year she was asked to marry again, and again she was a wife. It was seven years almost to a day since she had been told of Jim's death when she sat alone in the house one day and a stranger entered. He was lame and dusty and grizzled and asked for a cup of water. As he drank it she looked at him more closely and then sunk into a chair and was speechless for a moment.

"Is anything wrong?" asked the man.

"My God! But you are Jim Baker, my husband that went to the war!" she whispered.

"You called me Jim Baker," said the man after awhile.

"Of course I did. You have changed, but you are Jim. Why didn't you write? Why didn't you come home sooner?"

"Madam, I beg you to excuse me, but you are laboring under a great mistake. My name is Langford—George Langford. I am a stranger to you and to this part of the country. The resemblance to Mr. Baker is simply a coincidence. Thanks for the water. It has refreshed me. Good day."

And Jim Baker, who was not killed, but whose long silence was not explained, went out of his house and away from his wife and was never heard of again.

VERY STUPID OF HIM.

By THOMAS KENT WATERMAN.

[Copyright, 1909, by American Press Association.]

A girl sat on the porch of a farmhouse knitting. Up the road came a man. He stopped before the girl, who sat meditating with her eyes on her work. Presently she looked up. Seeing him, a glad smile was about to break out on her lips, but she repressed it.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed. "Where did you come from? I'd as soon have expected to see your ghost as you."

"I should have been very much disappointed," replied the man, going up on to the porch and taking a seat, "to see your ghost. I prefer to see you in the flesh."

"Let me see. It must be seven or eight years since you left. You went away the day after—after I saw you last, didn't you?"

"Yes. I left you standing on this very porch. It was twilight, with a moon in the first quarter. I went down the road there determined that you should never see me again."

"And what brings you back now?"

"I came to get married."

He was looking her in the eye. Though inwardly she winced at the information, she succeeded in appearing indifferent to it.

"Who is the happy woman?" she asked.

"I've answered a question. It's my turn to ask one. Are you married?"

"No."

He sat looking at her inquiringly, and she continued:

"There's never been any one here who wanted me."

"Nor any one you wanted."

"That's right."

"Same here. I've remained single since I left you because there was no one I could get that I wished to marry."

ing for these beautiful hills?"

"I'd try not."

There was silence for awhile between them, broken by the man.

"Seems to me that if you had got to the state I have, tired of living alone and didn't care whom you married, and I could give up my interest out there you'd fill the bill."

"If I married you I wouldn't let you give up your interest out there, wherever that is—not on my account."

"But you said you'd do that if you loved the man."

"Yes; that's what I said."

"But if you didn't love the man?"

"I wouldn't marry him at all."

Another silence. The man sat tapping his boot with a stick he had cut beside the road.

"I'm sorry about that," he said presently. "I didn't know but that if you felt the same as I do it wouldn't be necessary for me to go any farther for a companion."

"But I don't feel as you do. In your case the romance has passed away, and you merely want some one to keep you from being lonely. I will marry no man I don't love."

He sat for awhile with a disappointed look on his face, then rose to go.

"Singular," he remarked, looking at the sky. "There's the half moon up there, and the twilight's coming on, just the same as when I left you before."

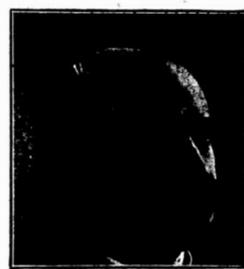
"And you haven't improved a bit since then. In another eight or ten years you'll come back again and talk just as stupidly as you did when I saw you last and as you are talking now."

"Myra, what do you mean?"

The only reply he received was a passionate burst of weeping.

"Myra, sweetheart, do tell me!"

"You went away and have been gone eight years. Why didn't you come back the next day? I expected you and had a little present for you."



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