

XII.

A HAPPY BIRTHDAY.

A CERTAIN fine old lady was seventy-three on the 8th of October. The day was always celebrated with splendor by her children and grandchildren; but on this occasion they felt that something unusually interesting and festive should be done, because grandma had lately been so very ill that no one thought she would ever see another birthday. It pleased God to spare her, however, and here she was, almost as well and gay as ever.

Some families do not celebrate these days, and so miss a great deal of pleasure, I think. But the people of whom I write always made a great deal of such occasions, and often got up very funny amusements, as you will see.

As grandma was not very strong, some quiet fun must be devised this time, and the surprises sprinkled along through the day, lest they should be too much for her if they all burst upon her at once.

The morning was fine and clear, and the first thing that happened was the appearance of two little ghosts, "all in white," who came prancing into the old lady's room, while she lay placidly watching the sun rise, and thinking of the many years she had seen.

"A happy birthday, grandma!" cried the little ghosts, scrambling up to kiss the smiling old face in the ruffled night-cap.

There was a great laughing, and cuddling, and nestling among the pillows, before the small arms and legs subsided, and two round, rosy faces appeared, listening attentively to the stories grandma told them till it was time to dress.

Now you must know that there were only two grandchildren in this family, but they were equal to half a dozen, being lively, droll little chaps, full of all manner of pranks, and considered by their relatives the *most* remarkable boys alive.

These two fellows were quite bursting with the great secrets of the day, and had to rush out as soon as breakfast was done, in order to keep from "letting the cat out of the bag."

A fine dinner was cooked, and grandma's favorite niece came to eat it with her, bringing a bag full of

goodies, and a heart full of love and kind wishes, to the old lady.

All the afternoon, friends and presents kept coming, and Madam, in her best gown and most imposing cap, sat in state to receive them. A poet came with some lovely flowers; the doctor brought a fine picture; one neighbor sent her a basket of grapes; another took her a drive; and some poor children, whom grandma had clothed and helped, sent her some nuts they had picked all themselves, while their grateful mother brought a bottle of cream and a dozen eggs.

It was very pleasant, and the bright autumn day was a little harvest time for the old lady, who had sowed love and charity broadcast with no thought of any reward.

The tea-table was ornamented with a splendid cake, white as snow outside, but rich and plummy inside, with a gay posy stuck atop of the little Mont Blanc. Mrs. Trot, the housekeeper, made and presented it, and it was so pretty all voted not to cut it till evening, for the table was full of other good things.

Grandma's tea was extra strong, and tasted unusually nice with Mrs. Hosy's rich cream in it. She

felt that she needed this refreshment to prepare her for the grand surprise to come; for the family gifts were not yet given.

The boys vanished directly after tea, and shouts of laughter were heard from Aunt Tribulation's room. What larks as they had up there no one knew; but every one was sure they were preparing some fun in honor of the occasion.

Grandma was not allowed to go into the study, and much tacking and rummaging went on for a time. Then all the lamps were collected there, leaving grandma and grandpa to sit in the parlor, talking tenderly together by the soft glimmer of fire-light, as they used to do forty years ago.

Presently something scarlet and gold, feathery and strange, flitted by the door and vanished in the study. Queer little yells and the sound of dancing feet were heard. Then there was a hunt for the cat; next, Mrs. Trot was called from the kitchen, and all but the boys came to escort grandma to the scene of glory.

Leaning on grandpa's arm, she marched first; then came Mrs. Coobiddy, the mother of the boys, bearing Aunt Carmine's picture; for this auntie was over the water and could not come, so, at grandma's desire, her portrait was borne in the procession.

Aunt Trib followed, escorted by Thomas Pib, the great cat, with his best red bow on. Mrs. Trot and Belinda, the little maid, brought up the rear. A music-box in the hall played the "Grand March" from "Norma;" and, with great dignity, all filed into the study to behold an imposing spectacle.

A fire burned brightly on the hearth, making the old-fashioned andirons shine like gold. All the lamps illuminated the room, which was trimmed with scarlet and yellow leaves. An arch of red woodbine, evergreen and ferns from the White Mountains was made over the recess which held the journals, letters and books of the family; for their name was Penn, and they all wrote so much that blots were found everywhere about the house, and a flock of geese lived in the back yard, all ready to have their quills tweaked out at a minute's notice.

Before this recess stood a great arm-chair, in which the father of grandma had been laid, a newborn baby, and nearly smothered by being sat upon by the fat nurse. This thrilling fact gave it a peculiar interest to the boys; for, if great-grandpa had been smashed, where would they have been?

In front of this ancient seat stood a round table loaded with gifts, and on each side stood an Indian

chief in full costume, bearing lighted Chinese lanterns on the ends of their spears, and war-clubs on their shoulders.

The arranging of these costumes had caused much labor and fun; for the splendid crowns, a foot high, were made of hen's feathers, carefully collected and sewed on to paper by Aunt Trib; the red shirts were fringed and bedecked with odd devices; leather leggings went above the warriors' knees, and all the family breast-pins were stuck about them.

Daggers, hatchets, clubs, and spears were made by the lads themselves, and red army blankets hung gracefully from their shoulders. They had planned to paint their faces blue and red, like the Feejee Islanders at Barnum's show; but Mrs. Coobiddy would not consent to have her handsome boys disfigure themselves; so the only paint they wore was nature's red in their cheeks, and heaven's blue in their eyes, as they stood by grandma's throne, smiling like a pair of very mild and happy little chiefs.

It really was a fine sight, I assure you, and grandma was quite overcome by the spectacle. So she was introduced to her gifts as quickly as possible, to divert her mind from the tender thought that all these fond and foolish adornments were to please her.

Every gift had a poem attached, and as the presents were of every description, the verses possessed an agreeable variety. Here are a few as a sample. A small tea-kettle was one gift, and this pleasing verse seemed to be bubbling out of its spout:—

"A little kettle, fat and fair,
To sit on grandma's stove,
To simmer softly, and to sing
A song of Freddie's love."

Another was this brief warning tucked into a match-box:—

"On this you scratch
Your little match.
When the spark flies
Look out for your eyes!
When the lucifer goes
Look out for your nose!
Little Jack gives you this
With a birthday kiss."

A third was rather sentimental, from Mrs. Coo-biddy:—

"Within doth lie
A silken tie,
Your dress to deck;
Soft and warm
As daughter's arm
Round mother's neck."

Mr. Pib presented a mouse-trap all set; and in order to explain his poem, I must relate an incident in his varied career.

Pib had long been one of the family, and was much respected and beloved by them all. In fact, he was so petted and stuffed that he grew as fat and big as a small dog, and so clumsy that he could no longer catch the mice who dodged about among the dishes in the kitchen closets.

In vain had Mrs. Trot shut him up there; in vain had Aunt Trib told him it was his duty to clear the cupboards of such small deer. Poor fat Pib only bounced about, broke the china, rattled down the pans, to come out with empty paws, while the saucy mice squeaked scornfully, and pranced about under his very nose.

One day Trib saw Pib catch a squirrel, and having eaten it he brought the tail to her as a trophy of his skill. This displeased his mistress, and she gave him away, after a good scolding for killing squirrels and letting mice, his lawful prey, go free.

Pib was so depressed that he went into the bag without a mew or a scratch, and was borne away to his new home in another part of the town.

But he had no intention of staying; and after a

day under the sofa, passed in deep thought, and without food or drink, he made up his mind to go home. Slipping out, he travelled all night, and appeared next morning, joyfully waving his tail, and purring like a small organ.

Aunt Trib was glad to see him, and when he had explained that he really did do his best about the mice, she forgave him, and got the trap for him to give grandma, that she might no longer be annoyed by having her private stores nibbled at.

“ Dear madam, with respect
 My offering I bring ;
 The hooks all baited well,
 And ready for a spring.
 No more the cunning mice
 Your biscuits shall abuse,
 Nor put their babes to sleep
 Within your fur-lined shoes.
 The trap my work must do ;
 Forgive your portly cat,
 For he, like you, has grown
 For lively work too fat.
 All larger, fiercer game
 I gallantly defy,
 And squirrel, rat and mole
 Beneath my paw shall die
 So, with this solemn vow,
 T. Pib his gift presents,
 And sprawling at your feet
 Purrs forth his compliments.

Which he actually did, and then sat bolt upright on the rug, surveying the scene with the dignity of a judge and the gravity of an owl.

Such funny presents ! A wood-box and a water-carrier ; a blue and gold gruel-bowl, and a black silk apron ; a new diary, and a pound of remarkably choice tea ; a pretty letter on birch bark, sealed with a tiny red leaf ; and a bust of the wisest man in America, were some of them.

How the dear old lady did enjoy it all, and how grateful she was for the smallest trifle ! An old friend sent her a lock of her mother's hair, and the sight of the little brown curl made her forget how white her own was, as she went back to the time when she last kissed that tender little mother fifty years ago.

Fearing that tears would follow the smiles too soon, Aunt Trib announced that the famous Indian chiefs, Chingchangpopocattepattle and Pockeyhockeyclutteryar, would now give a war-dance and other striking performances to represent Indian customs.

Then all sat round, and the warriors leaped into the middle of the room with a war-whoop that caused Mr. Pib to leave precipitately. It was a most excit-

ing spectacle; for after the dance came a fight, and one chief tomahawked, scalped, and buried the other in the space of two minutes.

But the ladies mourned so for the blond little Pockeyhockeyclutteryar that he had to come alive and join in a hunting expedition, during which they shot all the chairs for buffaloes and deer, and came home to roast a sofa pillow over their fire, and feast thereupon with the relish of hungry hunters.

These exploits were brought to an end by the arrival of more friends, with more gifts, and the introduction of the birthday cake. This was cut by the queen of the *fête*, and the panting chiefs handed it round with much scuffling of big moccasins and tripping over disarranged blankets.

Then all filled their glasses with water, and drank the toast, "Grandma, God bless her!" After which the entire company took hands and danced about the big chair, singing in chorus:—

"Long may she wave, and may we all
Her dear face live to see,
As bright and well at seventy-four
As now at seventy-three."

The clock struck ten, and every one went home leaving the family to end the day as they began it.

round grandma's bed, with good-night kisses and the sound of her last words in their ears:—

"It has been a beautiful and happy day, my dears, and if I never see another you may always remember that I thought this one my best and brightest birthday."

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