

Grandma's Mistake.

GRANDMA Freeman was very, very deaf. But the worst of it was that she did not know it, but always insisted she was not.

It was not often that grandma was trusted to entertain company alone; either Mrs. Freeman the younger, or one of her two pretty daughters, usually assisted in the business.

"Pretty well, I thank ye," squealed grandma; "though my rheumatic bothers me some. Walk right into the sittin' room."

"Take this chair," and grandma was surprisingly active in hauling up a big arm-chair for him; "now ain't that comfortable? That cushion is the best of hen feathers."

"There," said she, spreading it over his knees, "I did that all afore I was fifteen. Gals ain't what they used to be."

"Not but dreadful little of it at home, mostly done at school. Such things was taught in school them times, and I think if they were now in place of alzebray and bottomy and such nonsense it would be better, don't you think so?"

"I dare say," and while grandma carefully put away this souvenir of old times, he tried to study his way out of the fix.

"Where are Misses Belinda and Lucy?" he screamed, when she had settled herself in a chair.

"Yes, sir, Tryphena Newton has been at work here all winter, but she's gone home with a sore finger, and I'm afraid she'll have a fere on't. Anyhow, it begun just as James' wife's first husband's sister began—she was Sai Maria Gage—and she had a pretty hard time on't. She was keeping the district school and boarding with us when she took it. The gals do all the work now, but they're smart as 'lection, though Belinda's a trifle the best for business. Maybe you're a courtin' one on 'em," she continued, looking at him with what she meant for a regish smile.

"Hang it!" was Mr. May's mental ejaculation, "but the girls will probably be in soon. I'll relieve her mind of that notion. Oh! no, indeed!" he replied loudly, "I am only a young man, just studying law you know."

"Next Sunday morning!" cried the old lady, fairly starting out of her chair with surprise. "Now you don't say so! At meeting of course. Now howdy they have kept it from me!"

for your sake. Cause she would not say no to so good an offer. Belinda's a good gal, too. She's named after me, and perhaps that's why I like her a little better than I do Lucy, but I shall do what's right by her when she goes to housekeepin'.

"I tell you I'm not going to be married," he screamed so loud that it seemed to him all the neighbors must hear.

"Of course you want a home to be happy, anybody does, and I always did believe in young folks going to housekeeping as soon as they was married."

"You're altogether mistaken," he screamed in her ear, the perspiration starting from every pore.

"The house already taken? Now I never. And to think they was trying to keep it from me, and you've told me all about it! I shan't tell them, though, nor anybody else, so you needn't be afraid. I can keep a secret, if I am an old woman."

"I wonder who grandma is talking with?" said Lucy, as a lull in the clatter of dishes brought the sound of voices to their ears.

"Father, probably," replied Belinda. "I have heard no one come in."

Lucy put her last loaf of bread to rise, washed her hands, took off her big apron, and appeared in the sitting room, much to Mr. May's relief, just after grandma had pledged herself to secrecy. She started in surprise when she saw the guest.

"Why! Mr. May! you here. Come into the parlor," and Lucy led the way, leaving grandma alone. "You must have had an interesting visit with grandma."

"I think I did," replied the gentleman, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "She's very hard of hearing, isn't she?"

"Very," said Lucy; "but she doesn't realize it."

"I see it is so. I could not make her understand a word; yet from the answers she gave me I saw she thought she understood it all. I guess she will conclude I have told her some strange stories."

"Never mind, she is always making blunders, of course," said Lucy.

Meanwhile grandma had recovered from her speechless indignation at seeing Lucy carry off Belinda's beau to a private conference, and waddled out into the kitchen.

"Belindy," she squealed, taking the scrubbing cloth from her hand, "go right into the parlor. Mr. May's in there with Lucy."

"No matter, grandma," laughed Belinda, wondering much at her evident frame of mind.

"I'll finish up here, I tell you. You go right along," and grandma went to scrubbing at the shelves, while Belinda, to please her, went into the parlor.

Later in the afternoon, as the girls were in the kitchen getting supper, for they always worked together, Deacon Stiltsworth called to see Mr. Freeman on business.

"Walk right into the sitting-room, deacon," said Lucy. "Father will be in directly;" so in went the deacon.

"Are you pretty well, this spring?" he shouted to grandma.

"Oh! la, yes, our well and spring hold out wonderfully, though some of the neighbors was plagued for water most all winter. How is your folks?"

"Well as usual," nodded the deacon. "You haven't got out to meeting much, through the winter, have you?"

"Don't see much of Belindy? Well, she's pretty steady and industrious, and ain't allers gaddin' like some. Virtue is its own reward, the writing book used to say, and Lucy will have to dance in the pig's trough, for she's two year's the oldest, and Belindy's going to be married first."

"She!" said the deacon looking surprised.

"Yes, Belindy's going to be married in meeting next Sunday morning, to young Mr. May, that's reading law with Squire Willard. A dreadful nice young man he is, pooty as a pink. Now he come in here this afternoon, when the gals was at work in the kitchen, and just set down and visited with me as polite and attentive, talked all over all his affairs just as open-hearted. He's got a house all engaged and they're going right to housekeeping."

The deacon's ears were all agape to hear further particulars, but Mr. Freeman's entrance just then cut short the garrulous old lady, and as her son made no allusion to the coming event in the conversation which followed, the deacon would not seem inquisitive, and so received no more information.

"I've heard some news," he said to the family when he got home. "Belinda Freeman is going to be married."

"When? who to?" the questions rained down.

"Next Sunday morning in church, to that May fellow. He's got a house already engaged I didn't ask what one, but presume it's the Fox house, right next to the law office; that's empty now."

"He's called on the gals, and waited on them, too," said his daughter, Nancy Jane, "but I didn't suppose there was anything serious as yet."

"Well, it appears it's settled. The old lady gave me full particulars. She seemed as pleased as a child, and told how sociable Mr. May was with her. Old folks like to be noticed yet, you know."

When Nancy Jane went over that evening to carry Jerusha Speedwell, the dress-maker, her daily pint of milk she told the news.

"I guess it must be a mistake," said Jerusha doubtfully.

"Oh no it isn't," persisted Nancy Jane, "for we had it right from the family. And that explains those Irish poplin dresses the girls had this spring. Belinda's was pearl gray and Lucy's gold mixed, and I thought it queer they didn't have them alike, but I guess they thought pearl gray more suitable for the bride."

"Sure enough," said Miss Speedwell. "I fitted those dresses less than a month ago, but I never thought a thing." Miss Speedwell told her next customer that Belinda was to be married in pearl gray poplin, probably with bonnet and gloves to match.

That evening, while the Freeman girls were at prayer-meeting, and only their parents at home with grandma, the latter went into her bedroom and soon came out bringing a huge band-box, large enough to contain a score of bonnets in these degenerate days. Opening it, she took carefully out a huge old straw bonnet, dating a half century back, and trimmed with faded green gauze ribbon. Mr. and Mrs. Freeman looked on in quiet surprise as she turned the ancient article around and looked it carefully over.

"There!" said she, "I've had that bonnet forty-five years, and it's just as good as new to-day. The strings are a little soiled, but I can wash 'em out and then it will be already to wear to meetin' next Sunday."

Grandma hadn't been to church for years, so this announcement excited no little surprise.

"You shall have a new bonnet if you want to go to meeting," her son shouted in her ear.

"A new one to make fun, I dare say; but I don't care for that. This is a good sensible bonnet, worth a dozen of the little fiddlin' things they tuck on behind their ears now-a-days. I should catch my death of cold with one of 'em; I'd a great deal rather tie a handkerchief on my head than wear one."

"You should have a new one made large, you know," shouted Mrs. Freeman.

"Too far to go! La sakes! I ain't so feeble but what I can walk that little ways. My red shawl will be warm enough if it is a pleasant day, and my black alpacky dress is all the fashion now."

There was clearly no way but to let the old lady take her course, as when her mind was made up it was like the laws of the Medes and Persians. But Lucy and Belinda were wholly overcome the next morning when their mother told them of grandma's plan.

"What does make her do so?" cried Lucy.

"I'm sure I don't know, but she's bound to do it, and I see no way to prevent it."

"She hasn't been to church for years," said their mother soothingly, "the best way is to be independent and not mind it."

But girls at eighteen and twenty rarely possess the independence of mind that belongs to forty or forty-five so the church bells on Sabbath morning rang to them, secluded in their chamber, peeping through closed blinds at church goers. Not one of the family had chanced to hear the rumors which had been flying all over town the past two days, gaining volume with repetition, until full particulars of the bridal costumes, the house they were to occupy and the furniture already purchased, formed part of the regular story. "It comes from the family so it must be so," was the clincher that convinced all doubters.

Grandma had settled her huge skyscraper of a bonnet with many and long consultations of the mirror, and Mr. and Mrs. Freeman proposed to walk to church with her, both trying not to feel the ridiculousness of the situation. Grandma was formed somewhat like Mrs. Stowe's old ladies—"like a bag of feathers with a string tied around the middle," and the ample skirts of her black "alpacky" seemed to hang from a heavy and chubby cider barrel. An old fashioned red shawl covered her broad shoulders, and over and above all the crowning glory of the whole outfit, was that bonnet, her little wrinkled face appearing in the middle of its huge circumference in about the proportions of a bumblebee in the center of a pumpkin blossom.

"The gals have gone, I 'spose," said grandma, pausing at the foot of the stairs in the hall. "Belinda," she squealed up the staircase, but there was no answer so she went. Her son dutifully gave her his arm, and his wife pattered meekly along behind, looking neither to the right nor the left. The girls peeped from the window and laughed till they cried.

"It's too ridiculous," said Lucy wiping her eyes. "Do you see mother trotting on after them, like a little dog?"

"Like a lamb to the slaughter, I should say. I'd like to be there and see how people look when they go in," said Be-

Huda, "that is, if I could without being seen."

"I hope she won't take a notion to go all summer," said Lucy.

"Oh, I hope not, indeed!" exclaimed Belinda. "It's too bad for even to-day, for they need us on that new anthem."

"Everybody but us is out to-day, and they all seem to be going to our church, too."

"There's Mr. May, and see, he's got on a new suit."

For that gentleman, hearing the rumors, and knowing well enough how they started, took no pains to contradict them, but rather helped them along by buying a new suit of clothes on Saturday. Black dress coat, lilac vest and gloves, drab pants and hat. He passed the slow paced Freeman family at the church steps, and entering the fast filling room, took a seat near the door, apparently unconscious of the scrutiny that rested upon him. Many curious glances went to Belinda's usual seat in the gallery, but the general opinion was that she would appear just in time for the ceremony.

The entrance of the Freeman's put an end to all doubts in any minds, as well as to sobriety in most. Little children giggled outright, the older ones tittered, and even the most sober minded found it hard to repress a smile. The church filled up rapidly, pews all full and crowded, and still they came. The somewhat prosy parson looked at the gathering multitude in quiet surprise, not having heard the flying rumors, and not knowing what power of his had brought the people. Truth compels me to state that he hardly received his share of attention from the audience however, Mr. May and grandma Freeman dividing it about equal. I grieve to add that at the other church the minister almost literally preached, that morning, to bare walls and empty pews, only a few of the staid fathers and mothers of Israel appearing in their places. But the minister with the small audience was the favored one, after all, for the large audience fidgeted uneasily all through the services, especially when prayer followed sermon, hymn followed prayer, benediction followed hymn, and still no hint came of the wedding ceremony. Slowly the audience filed out, looking extremely blank and puzzled.

"What does this mean, May?" asked one young man of our hero, as he stood coldly on the steps.

"Sold!" replied May, briefly, leisurely taking his way homeward.

The words flew from lip to lip "We're all sold," and one after another looked, and probably felt cheap; perhaps made the wise resolution, then and there, never again to put faith in flying rumors.

Grandma Freeman looked around in a dazed sort of way, as the people scattered.

"Where's the weddin'?" she squealed to her son. He looked blank.

"Where's the weddin'?" she repeated in a higher key. "Belinda and Mr. May was going to be married, you know." He shook his head in surprise, and all at once it seemed to burst on her that she had been deceived.

"He lied to me, he did, the miserable lyin' critter!" she burst forth in a flutter of excitement. In vain they tried to still her, for the vials of her wrath were uncorked, and she poured them out all the way home.

"The good people of this town have learned one lesson to-day, besides what they have heard in the sermons if I'm not mistaken," remarked Mr. May to Belinda, as he walked home with her that night, after the evening service.

"Why, yes," she replied, "I think they may have learned one if they will only profit by it. It isn't safe to believe all we hear."

"It has made a good deal of sport to see how easily people have been sold in this matter. I have been wicked enough to enjoy it, but I suppose your grandmother will never forgive me."

"I fear not. She persists in thinking you meant to deceive her."

"That would have been cruel indeed. As the matter stands, I know of no better way to atone for my crime than to make my supposed story true, and marry Belinda, after all."

As saith Sam Lawson—"Gals never do tell these particulars just as you'd like to hear 'em," so I cannot tell what Belinda said, but when fall came, and Mr. May had been admitted to the bar, there was a wedding at Mrs. Freeman's house instead of the church, and Belinda's dress, was pearl gray silk instead of poplin. Grandma had on a soft, neat tulle cap, in place of her big bonnet, and after the ceremony, as proof that she had forgiven Mr. May for his supposed deception, she waddled up to him and gave him a rousing kiss.

Mr. S. Koiser, living near Waynesboro, Va., recently ordered an old oak to be cut down, remarking that the cutters would find a rock in the body of the tree, which he had put there fifty-four years ago when he was a little boy returning from school one day. When the tree was cut, in the heart of it was found imbedded the identical rock which Mr. Koiser had put in the fork of the little sapling more than a half century ago.



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