

The Coming of Uncle Byron

John Holman drew an envelope from his pocket and looked across the table at his wife. "A small surprise, my dear," he said.

"Not an unpleasant one?" John smiled a little ruefully.

"It depends on the point of view." He slowly produced a letter.

"We are to have a visitor," he said. "A visitor!" she echoed.

"Yes. He says he'll come if it's convenient."

"What did you answer him?"

"Nothing. He's on his way here now. He's coming in person to find out whether it's convenient."

"Who is he, John?"

"He's my great-uncle. I'd forgotten all about him, but he hadn't forgotten me. He's my mother's Uncle By, her youngest uncle."

"Uncle By?"

"Short for Byron. Uncle Byron Train."

"And what is he?"

"He neglects to say. Writes that he's been knocking around a good deal. Sort of rolling stone, I fancy. Poor, too, no doubt. Wants to renew his acquaintance with his dear nephew, and incidentally with his dear niece—if there is one."

"And where is he to sleep, John?"

"I don't think there is any necessity for worrying about that until we make up our minds whether we want him or not. He may be quite impossible."

"If he comes here, John, we are not going to turn him from the door. And I feel sure he wouldn't have written that letter if he wasn't fit to come. We'll keep him one night, anyway, John."

"You're all right, Clare," cried the young husband. "And if he doesn't prove to be too long he can sleep in the hall bedroom. And if he is too long we will have to give him our room and camp down in the hall bedroom ourselves."

"Read the letter, John."

"Sure. It isn't much to look at, but the spelling is fair and the writer seems to understand how to make himself understood. Here goes: 'My dear nephew John. You may have some difficulty in recalling me, but I am your great uncle, Byron Train, the youngest of your great-grandfather's sons. I want to come and see you, John, and if you have a wife I want to see her, too. I've been knocking around the earth for a good many years, and I want to have a little rest and get acquainted with my surviving relatives. If you can't keep me over night, John, tell me so frankly. I know I'm not much to look at, but I'm your great-uncle, and on your dear mother's account—she and I were playmates in our youthful days—I want to know you. I'll give you a call, anyway, and then you can let me know whether it is convenient or not for me to stay. So expect me most any time. Goodby until I see you, and my regards to Mrs. John—if there is one.'

Mrs. John smiled.

"Not much of an index to his character," she said. "Nor does it concur upon any picture of the man. We will have to see him before we pass judgment."

She was interrupted by a quick blast from the speaking tube.

"Eh!" said John Holman. "There's the man now."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. John as she reached for a wandering look of hair.

John looked around.

"Is he welcome?"

"He is."

John picked up the tube.

"A gentleman to see Mr. Holman? Send him up."

John's wife cast a hurried glance about the room.

"It's luck his letter reached us first," she said.

"There is something in that," John admitted.

A muffled creak and rattle from the hallway announced the stopping of the elevator. A moment later there was a light knock at the door.

"Sit down and try to look unconcerned," whispered John. Then he opened the door and extended his hand.

But the man in the doorway failed to notice this friendly overture. He was a tall man, very erect, with a white mustache, and a somewhat flushed countenance. He was irreproachably dressed and in his hand he bore a silk hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a slight inclination of his head. "I am looking for Mr. Holman, Mr. John Holman."

"I am Mr. Holman," said John. "Will you come in?"

The tall man accepted the invitation.

"I am Mr. Cuthbert Marsh," he said. "My wife, Mr. Marsh."

The tall man bowed a little stiffly.

"I am sorry to trouble you," he said, "but my errand will be a brief one. Thank you, I will not take a chair." He hesitated a moment. "I have called to meet a guest of yours, Mr. Byron Train."

"Mr. Byron Train," repeated John. "Yes. Is he here?"

"No," John replied.

"Pardon me, but have you seen him?"

"No. I have never seen him."

"Excuse my insistence. You know of his whereabouts?"

"Nothing whatever."

The tall man again hesitated.

"I am very sorry to have bothered you," he said, "I was led to believe

that Mr. Train was here. Good evening, madam. Good evening, sir."

And the tall man backed gracefully through the doorway.

John closed the door and put his back against it.

"What do you think of that?" he gasped.

"I think we are highly honored," Mrs. John replied. "I only hope that our neighbors across the hall saw the aristocratic Mr. Marsh when he darkened our portals."

"Be serious, Clare. What does that old blue-blood want of our great uncle?"

"You don't suppose, John, that he's done anything?"

"Well, nothing bad enough to call Cuthbert Marsh to the fifth story of an apartment house on a rainy night."

They both suddenly started. It was only the squeak of the speaking tube. John hurried to it.

"Well?" he called. Then he dropped the tube.

"I'm wanted on the house 'phone," he said.

"You don't suppose the office is on fire?"

"They wouldn't bother to tell me of it." He looked around in the doorway. "I'll bet it's some new development in the Uncle Byron mystery."

It was fully twenty minutes later when he returned to his room. There was confusion on the wires and he had trouble in finding out who had called him. Before he could leave the office he was called again.

But the time had passed rapidly with Mrs. John. Scarcely had the elevator bearing her husband gone down when a light rap at the door drew her attention.

An elderly man confronted her on the threshold. He was a man of less than medium height, quite gray and his wrinkled face had a weather-beaten look. He was very plainly dressed, the string tie about his old style collar was out of place and the soft hat he held by the brim was much the worse for wear.

"Then there is a Mrs. John," said his somewhat startling greeting.

Mrs. John suddenly laughed.

"Come in, Uncle Byron," she said, and drew him into the room and took his hat and shabby little bag.

"Uncle Byron, eh? That sounds good." He stared at Mrs. John. "Am I welcome?"

"Certainly, Uncle Byron."

"Talked it over with John, eh?"

"Yes."

"He agrees with you?"

"About you? Yes."

"Better think it over. I may want to stay."

"Stay as long as you like."

"Honest?"

Mrs. John suddenly laughed.

"Haven't I an honest face?"

"You have a very nice face, my dear. And a very nice voice. I hope John deserves you."

Mrs. John's face flushed.

"He thinks he does."

"That's different. How's John?"

"Quite well. He will be back in a few moments. Take this easy chair, Uncle Byron."

"I will. Saug little place."

"Rather too snug. It's the best we could afford. She suddenly laughed. "I'm glad you are not taller, Uncle Byron."

"Eh, Why?"

"Because we are going to put you into the hall bedroom. It's our only guest chamber."

"Rather close quarters, eh? But that's all right. I'm used to camping down anywhere. Is there a window where I can get lots of air?"

"Yes."

"Fine. How's John doing?"

"Fairly well."

"Takes good care of you, eh?"

Mrs. John was much amused.

"Do I look like an abused woman?"

"Not a bit of it. I wouldn't ask for a better recommendation for John. And you are quite sure I'm welcome?"

"Very sure."

"I'm not much to look at. You'll be ashamed of me."

"That's unkind."

"So it is. But I didn't mean anything by it. And there's to be nothing said about paying board?"

"Nothing. You are our guest."

"Good. That suits me." He suddenly fumbled in his pockets. "I'm awfully careless about money. Could you let me have a couple of dollars, my dear?"

She didn't hesitate, but opened a table drawer and drew out a little purse. He watched her closely.

"Here it is, Uncle Byron."

"I wouldn't want John to know about this," he said as he took the money.

"Then you mustn't tell him."

"Good. I like you still better, my dear. I can see that we are going to get along amazingly well. And I haven't said a word about paying back the money."

Mrs. John nodded at him.

"I'm not worrying about that." She paused with a little laugh. "I think you borrowed it just to test me?"

The old man laughed too.

"You're as sharp as tacks, my dear. But you'll never see this money again. Rest assured of that."

"Very well, Uncle Byron. Say no more about it. There, I mustn't forget to tell you that you had a caller this evening."

"A caller? Who?"

"Mr. Cuthbert Marsh."

"Oh, yes. Looking for me, is he?"

"He seemed quite anxious to find you."

"Very likely. He wasn't home when I called. I saw Mrs. Marsh. Very impressive woman. Kept me waiting too long in her grand parlor. I told her that Cuthbert was the son of my half-brother Robert. She wasn't a bit overcome by the information. If I expected to be asked to stay to dinner I was disappointed. She showed

too plainly that she wasn't pleased by my appearance. Told me flatly that I could find her husband in his office and turned me over to the butler who hustled me out. Fine woman, but a little hard and a little hasty."

"Mrs. Cuthbert Marsh is one of the queens of society," said John's wife. "Well, I'm not one of her subjects," the old man chuckled.

She looked at him reflectively.

"I don't understand you, Uncle Byron," she said.

"You'll understand me better if I stay here long enough," he cried and chuckled again.

And then the door opened and John came in. For a moment he didn't notice the old man in the high backed rocker.

"The mystery deepens," he said. "Somebody at The Sutherland is wild to find Uncle Byron; there are five telegrams awaiting him at The Grosvenor, and there seems to be a wild impression that I'm concealing him somewhere."

"Hallo, John," said the old man quietly.

The younger man started.

"Uncle Byron," said John's wife a sudden laugh.

The old man put out his hand.

"How are you, my boy? Taken possession, you see. Going to camp down indefinitely. Fixed it all with Mrs. John. What do you think of an incubus like that?"

A queer twinkle in the old man's eyes caught John's attention. Somehow he seemed drawn to this odd visitor.

"You are heartily welcome, Uncle Byron," he said. "What Mrs. John says always goes."

"I took that for granted. She said I was welcome and that was enough. A little too good for you." And his eyes twinkled as he nodded toward the young wife.

"Not a bit of doubt of it," the young man heartily agreed.

The old man drew a quick breath.

"You looked just like your mother when you said that, John." He sighed and was silent for a moment. "That seems a weary while ago. But there—I know more about you than you think, my boy. Give me your hand again. There are but two of my kin left, and one of them—oh, well, let that pass."

"And your telegrams, Uncle Byron?"

"Never mind them. They will keep."

There was a rap at the door. John looked at his wife with a conical smile. Then he turned the knob. There stood a police officer in all his panoply.

"Good evening," he said, as he stepped across the threshold. He was a fine looking officer, his gold badge indicating the rank of captain. "My errand can be briefly stated. I am looking for an elderly man, by the name of Train, Byron Train."

"What's the charge, officer?" the old man drily interrupted.

"Kidnapping," he answered. "The party is supposed to have kidnapped himself. A particular friend of mine who stands pretty high in the financial world is very anxious about the matter and applied to me personally. We learned that Mr. Train had entered this apartment house and I decided to follow the trail myself." His gaze rested on the old man. "You are Mr. Train?"

"Yes."

"And you are all right?"

"All right, thank you, and very comfortable."

"Glad to know it," said the big captain. "Sorry to have troubled you. Good evening all."

And he was gone.

John looked at Mrs. John and they both looked at the old man.

"What a lot of meddling people there are in the world," he chuckled. "Oh, you are going to find me a regular nuisance."

And then came another knock at the door.

This time the caller was a trim young man with keen, gray eyes. He made a sweeping little bow as he entered.

"Good evening," he said in a quick, nervous fashion. "I am looking for Mr. Byron Train."

"I am Byron Train," said the old man.

"Thank you," the young man said with a quick nod. "I am from the 'Daily Argus' and the 'Argus' would like to know why the owner of the famous Byron zinc mines and the Byron silver mines and the Utah Southern railway, and numerous other noted enterprises, who has kept his identity so long concealed, is in the city."

"That's very kind of the 'Argus,'" said the old man. "But I haven't much for your readers to-night. I'm looking the ground over. There are several wildcat mining companies that will do well to get under cover—companies that have been trading on the strength of my developments. You may also say that I am going to organize a company to open up certain new mining properties that look very promising. And I want you to mention that I am the guest of my nephew, John Holman, and his wife. That is all right."

"Thank you," said the reporter, and turned toward the door.

"One moment," the old man called to him. "In your reference to that new company you may say that the secretary and assistant manager will be John Holman."

"Good night," said the reporter. "John and Mrs. John exchanged swift glances.

"I'm pretty tired," said the guest. "Too many details for one old man. I'm going to rely a good deal on you, John. And now I wish Mrs. John would show me to that little hall bedroom."—W. R. Rose in Cleveland Plain Dealer.

BIG BLAST IN ARIZONA.

Side of a Mountain Broken Up to Supply Railroad Ballast.

One of the biggest things in the blasting line ever done took place the other day near Stein's Pass, Arizona, when the whole side of a mountain was dislodged to ballast 100 miles of track, all in one explosion.

Preparations for the blast had been going on for several weeks under the direction of G. W. Kearney, powder expert for the Southern Pacific, and A. B. Crane, an expert for the company which furnished the powder. In making the blast 78,000 pounds of powder was used.

The object was to obtain rock for ballasting the Tucson division of the Southern Pacific. The sight when the powder was touched off was one of the most remarkable ever witnessed in this part of the Southwest. The whole side of the mountain was lifted about twenty-five feet and then settled back with a groan, a broken mass of stone.

It is estimated that a body of rock weighing 775,000,000 pounds was dislodged by this explosion.

Thoughtless Speech Brings Sorrow.

A man will never be sorry for hearing both sides before passing judgment, for thinking twice before speaking, for holding his tongue when he is angry, for closing his ears to the recital of gossip, for discrediting evil reports, for being kind to those in distress, for being patient with those who make mistakes, for apologizing to those whom he has injured, for being courteous to those around him, or for doing his duty every day. If we shun what we would be sorry for, we will be happy in almost any sphere or condition of life.—Scottish Reformer.

Catch Phrases.

People catch up striking phrases and work them until they become very tiresome. The pulpit and the prayer-meeting are especially in danger of such over-doing. It is well for the preacher and for the leader in prayer to watch themselves, and if they find that one certain phrase is becoming very common in their utterances to call a halt at once. The more striking the phrase the greater need to use it rarely if its significance or force is to be held.—Presbyterian of the South.



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