

GOLDEN DAYS

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

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Old Hector's Dog

L. M. Montgomery

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His name was Tray, and Old Hector truly thought, I believe, that he was the most wonderful dog in the world, as well as the handsomest—for love is blind, and Old Hector loved Tray. The dog was all he had to love.

Nobody in Swamp Hollow knew very much about Old Hector, as he was commonly called, although he had lived among us for more years than we boys could count. He was always Old Hector to us—nothing more—a morose, surly old man, with a gruff voice and a chronic scowl.

He lived by himself in a little cabin on a back road, and made his scanty living by day labor in summer and shoe mending in winter. He had no kith or kin in the world, as far as we ever found out, and the only living creature that belonged to him was Tray—a dog so unlovable that nobody but Old Hector could have endured such an animal about his premises.

We Swamp Hollow boys had vowed mortal enmity to Tray—partly because we all heartily detested Old Hector, and partly because Tray himself never lost an opportunity of being disagreeable.

He was a lank yellow cur, with torn ears and the merest apology for a tail. He had fought with and maimed nearly every other dog in Swamp Hollow, and was even accused of sheep raiding. But this was never proved, and I think we did Tray an injustice there.

Wherever Hector went Tray followed him, shuffling along, with his ears hanging down, and his eyes watching out for stray cats or any other promising game.

We boys had discovered that the surest way to annoy Hector was to tease Tray. Nothing made him so angry—and to “make Old Hector mad” was one of our objects in life. Nevertheless, we were rather frightened of him, and took care to keep out of his reach.

Why we detested the poor old man so would be hard to tell, for he had never done us any harm, or interfered with us in any way, except by abusing roundly any one he caught shying a stone at Tray. I, for my part, am now thoroughly ashamed of the pleasure I used to take in tormenting the old fellow.

But I had got in that summer with a certain crowd of Swamp Hollow boys who were not the best companions in the world for me. They were locally known as “Roaders,” from the fact that they all lived along what was known as the Swamp Hollow Road—a locality somewhat off caste—and numbered about a dozen, all between twelve and fifteen years of age.

They were a rowdy set, and at the bottom of most of the mischief that went on in Swamp Hollow.

If anybody in the village offended one of them, he generally found his windows

broken, or his orchard raided, or his cows turned into his wheat field, not long after. The guilt could seldom be brought home to any one in particular, but the Roaders came to be in bad repute in Swamp Hollow.

It is not to my credit that I got mixed up with them, but the fact remains that I was, although I was always regarded with suspicion by most of them. They thought me off color and "Miss Nancyish," and I was only tolerated among them on account of my chumship with Ted Thompson.

Ted was the ringleader of the gang, and, to a certain extent, they were under his control, although Ted was really not at all responsible for their worst outrages. He was fond of playing pranks, but he was always against wanton destruction of property.

Ted had a bad reputation in Swamp Hollow, and perhaps he deserved it, but I always liked him. He was about fifteen, and had had a rough bringing up. He was generally in mischief, and got the blame of all the Roaders' outrages, whether he was a sharer in them or not.

Still he was kind-hearted in his own way, and generally stood up for the weaker side manfully. He certainly had considerable influence over the Roaders. He was a good friend, but a bad enemy, and he had taken a bitter hatred against Old Hector.

One night somebody had thrown a stone through Old Hector's window, while he was at supper, smashing the panes and some of the few dishes on the table.

It probably was a Roder, but it certainly was not Ted. He denied it stoutly, and I never knew Ted Thompson, with all his faults, to tell a deliberate lie.

But Old Hector had seen him prowling around the road that evening at dusk, and fixed on him as the culprit. The next evening several of us were hanging around the blacksmith's forge, Ted among the rest, when Old Hector and Tray came along.

I do not think the old man intended to stop; but Ted could not resist the temptation to shy a stone at Tray, who promptly yelped, and Old Hector turned furiously on Ted.

He stormed at him for fully five minutes, and finally ended up by dealing him a stinging cuff on the ear.

Ted attempted no reprisal at the time, for there were no Roaders handy to back him up, and he knew that public sympathy was against him. But he laid himself out for the remainder of the summer to make Old Hector's life a burden to him.

I am bound to say he succeeded. He was never at a loss for some new and original device, but his main idea of revenge centred in Tray.

He had made up his mind to get possession of Tray by fair means or foul, and though he refused to tell us what he would do with him, we all supposed that Tray's

career would be abruptly closed.

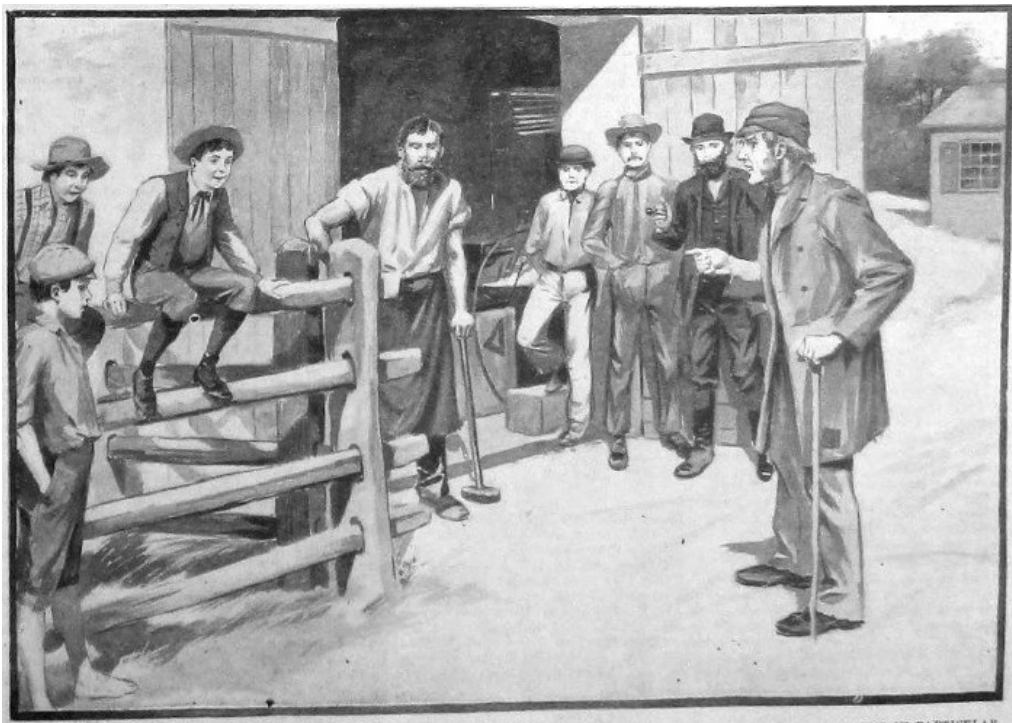
It was, however, no easy matter to ensnare Tray. He was never seen abroad without his master, for he seemed to be instinctively aware of his unpopularity, and no one, not even the most reckless Roader, dared venture within twenty yards of Old Hector's dwelling in daylight. Tray was never seen outside after dark, and slept on a mat by the old man's bed.

But Ted declared that he would get him if it took all summer. Some of the Roaders suggested putting poison around where Tray would find it, but Ted scorned this idea. It was "sneaky," he said. Ted had his own code of honor, and, such as it was, he lived up to it, although he did plenty of things I thought shady. Between abducting and drowning Tray—as I believed Ted meant to do, although he had never said so—and poisoning him off, I did not see a great deal of difference. But Ted appeared to, and stoutly refused to have anything to do with such a proceeding.

"And don't any of you chaps try it on, either," he warned the Roaders. "This is *my* affair. I've got the grudge to settle against Old Hector, and I don't want any of the rest of you poking in and spoiling my fun. D'ye hear that?"

The Roaders heard and governed themselves accordingly, while Ted bided his time with a patience worthy of a better cause.

One day Old Hector made a trip to town to buy some of his scanty supplies. For a wonder he left Tray at home, owing, as we afterwards found, to the animal's having a sore foot, locked up in his little kitchen.



“DID ANY OF YOU-UNS SEE MY DAWG HEREABOUTS?” DEMANDED OLD HECTOR, GLARING SAVAGELY AT US ALL, AND AT TED IN PARTICULAR.

Ted Thompson found this out in some way and had no idea of letting so good a chance slip. He hunted up a Roader or two, who could keep a secret, and with their assistance got into Old Hector’s kitchen by the shed window, secured Tray with a rope and gunny-bag and lugged him off with them.

I was not with them, so I knew nothing of the affair until Old Hector came down to the forge that night to hunt for Tray. He had missed his pet whenever he got home and was in great distress of mind.

As usual there was a crowd about the forge, and Ted Thompson his black eyes shining with some secret delight, was sitting on the fence. Several Roaders were hanging around to see the fun.

“Did any of you-uns see my dawg hereabouts?” demanded Old Hector, glaring savagely at us all, and at Ted in particular.

The smith replied:

“No! Haven’t laid eyes on him. Have you lost him?”

“He’s gone,” said the old man in a strange, piteous tone. “I dunno whar. I left him when I went to town to-day, and when I come home he was gone. He never

went off of his own accord, I'm sure. Poor Tray! I b'leeve some of you boys thar know whar he is. Ef you do, tell me whar. He ain't never done you any harm."

The old man's appeal touched me. I had never seen Old Hector in so gentle a mood before. His distress and grief were very real and keen, but Ted's eyes only glistened more maliciously.

"I guess you won't ever see that old yaller dorg of yours again," he called out, tauntingly. "He's gone for good, he is."

Old Hector made a quick step towards him, but the wary Ted dodged.

"What have you done with him, you imp of evil?" cried the old man. "I might a-known it was you. Tell me whar he is!"

"Well, I guess I don't. I ain't responsible for the whereabouts of your old cur. You can go and hunt him up."

"Oh, tell me whar he is," pleaded Old Hector, with wonderful patience. "He never harmed you—the poor dawg! Surely you hain't killed him, have you?"

Ted winked with inexpressible impudence.

"Tray is gone—you can make up your mind to that—and he won't come back in a hurry, neither. Next time you box peoples' ears that haven't done anything to you, you can think of Tray."

"So you did it out of spite," said Hector, his anger mastering his grief. "I'll learn you!"

He made a dash at Ted, but the latter leaped from his perch with a mocking whoop and went flying down the road.

The Roaders, finding themselves deserted, also took to their heels and disappeared after their leader in a cloud of dust.

The other men sympathized with the old man and promised to help him find his dog if they could. Some eyed me suspiciously, for my intimacy with the Roaders was well known, but I was not molested.

I, too, felt sorry for Old Hector. That evening I met Ted about dusk, and tried to find out what he'd done with the dog.

Ted grinned.

"You'd like to know now, wouldn't you, sonny? What'd you do if I told you—run and blab?"

I indignantly disclaimed all intention of blabbing, and after awhile Ted became more communicative.

"You won't tell?"

"No, I'll never breathe a word."

"Honest?"

“Honest.”

“Well, the dog’s alive. I’ve got him chained up in a safe enough place—never mind where. I ain’t going to tell you *that*, because you’re too soft-hearted. Old Hector’s mind would be kind of at rest if he thought Tray was dead, so I mean to keep him stirred up. Look here! I’m going to stick this up on Hector’s door after dark.”

“This” was a half-sheet of paper, upon which Ted had scrawled the following:

“TO OLE HECTOR: My deer sir, your dog ain’t dead, but heed be a heap better off if he was: he ain’t very happy. You won’t ever see him again.
Yours respectfully,

“TED THOMPSON.”

“That will make the poor old man feel bad, Ted,” I objected. “He’ll think you’re ill-treating the dog. You’re not, are you?”

“No, I ain’t, you silly. The dog’s as well off as ever he was. I just wrote that to tease Hector. It’ll put him in a stew.”

“What are you going to do with Tray?”

But Ted, not having found me as sympathetic as he expected, got on his dignity. He refused to say more, and we parted.

For the next week, Old Hector’s state of mind ought to have satisfied the most inveterate seeker after revenge. He could do nothing but go about mourning for his loss and seeking pitifully for some trace of Tray. Ted and the other Roaders kept well out of his way. I had not seen one of them since my last recorded interview with Ted.

There came a change at the end of the week. As I was not one of the parties interested, I think I had better give you the story in Ted’s own words, as he told it to me, when I went to see him.

He was lying on the sofa, with his ankle bandaged up and another bandage around his head.

“You see, Hal, it happened this way:

“Last Monday night, after dark, I went up to take that wretched Tray something to eat. We had him chained up in that old barn of Maloney’s, back of the woods. Nobody ever goes near it, because they say it’s haunted. So it is, I guess—by us Roaders.

“Well, we had him there, and I fed him well, anyhow. I’ll bet he’d better meals, and more of them than he ever had at home. I really meant to let him go back after a

while, when I'd made Old Hector miserable long enough.

"Coming back, I took a short cut across the fields, back of Hector's. It was awful dark, and I had to go through Patterson's sheep pasture. You know he had a well dug down in the hollow for his sheep. It ain't a very deep one, but just the same a fellow wouldn't jump down it for pure fun. It went dry this summer, and before that he kept it covered up with boards.

"I'd clean forgotten all about the well, and I was running full tilt across the hollow, when—ker-blunk! I just felt myself pitching headlong, and when I came to my right senses, there I was, at the bottom of Patterson's well.

"It wasn't very deep, as I've said, and nothing in it but mud, so I wasn't killed; but my head and face were all cut and my ankle felt dreadful.

"I didn't know what I had done to it, but I was afraid it was broken. The blood was running all over my face, and I thought I'd die there, all alone in the dark.

"I knew I couldn't get out, and I might yell all night and nobody'd hear me. I tell you, Hal, I felt pretty bad, and, upon my word, the thing that worried me most was that poor old Tray!

"I did wish I'd never touched him, I can tell you. It seemed an awful mean trick, all at once, especially when I remembered poor Old Hector's trouble about him.

"I huddled up there, feeling as if I was going to die right off. I shouted as loud as I could, now and then. Nobody came, of course. I think I was there about an hour. I couldn't move, because my ankle hurt so; and, oh, how my head did ache!

"All at once, just as I'd had another spell of shouting, a light flashed overhead, and next minute I saw—who do you suppose? Why, Old Hector, peering down at the top, with a lantern close to his face.

"I was glad to see any one, but you'd better believe I thought my chances for getting out of the well weren't very much better than before, and small blame to him if they hadn't been.

"'Who's down thar?'" he asked.

"I hollered back that it was Ted Thompson and that I'd tumbled down and broke my ankle. I honestly expected to see him march off, then and there; but the old fellow said:

"'You poor boy! How am I to get you up out o' that? Can you hold on till I run down home and get a ladder? I'll be as quick as I can.'

"I said I could, and off he went. In no time he was back with a ladder. He poked it down just as careful, and down he came, too.

"'Poor little chap!'" he said.

"And he picked me up as if I'd been a baby—you know how strong he is, Hal

—and so carefully and tender-like, he hardly hurt me a bit, and, somehow or other, he climbed up with me and we got out.

“Then he carried me all the way down to his cabin and laid me on his bed. He was just awful good to me, Hal. He got hot water and washed the blood off my face, and then he poked around my ankle and said he didn’t think any bones were broken, and he bound it up. And—do you know?—when I’d flinch, there’d actually be tears in his eyes. He couldn’t have fixed me up better or petted me more if I’d been Tray himself.

“I didn’t dare to mention Tray at first. You bet I felt small. Here I’d been plaguing the life out of Old Hector for months, and breaking his heart by stealing his dog—and this was how he was paying me back. I just felt mean—there’s no use in talking. I’d never have believed Old Hector could be so kind. He wasn’t a single bit cross or gruff. He did everything he could to make me easy, and then he said:

“Now I’m going to run down and let your father know what you are and how you’re fixed. How’d you come to fall into Patterson’s well, anyhow?”

“I just made up my mind to make a clean breast of it there and then. I said I’d been up to Maloney’s barn to feed Tray.

“Old Hector gave a big jump.

“Is Tray alive? Is he—is he?”

“You bet he is!” I said—‘and likely to live. I’ve looked after him well, and I’ve doctored his foot, too. I’d never have taken him if I’d known—I’m awful sorry—but he’s all right. Please do forgive me!’

“Just fancy, Hal, if any of the Roaders had heard *me* asking Old Hector’s pardon!

“Do you know, the tears actually ran down his face!

“Poor old Tray! Safe—safe!’ was all he could say at first.

“He was just overcome with joy, and he didn’t say a cross word to me. He went down to our place, and dad came after me with a cart and got me home somehow.

“I gave Hector the key of Tray’s padlock, and he shuffled off to Maloney’s barn to get him. I’d have given a pile to see the meeting. Anyhow, he’s got Tray again.

“Do you know, the old fellow has been down every day to see how I am getting on, and he’s not a bad sort at all? I’m ashamed of my cuttings-up, and I’m going to reform, sure’s you’re alive! Don’t blab all this to the Roaders, though, Hal.”

Ted kept his word. Indeed, he really became quite intimate with Old Hector, and frequently accompanied him on his fishing and gunning expeditions.

The rest of the Roaders also, although they always remained shy of their ancient enemy, were influenced by Ted to such a degree that they gave up molesting Old

Hector.

Hector himself, perhaps through his liking for Ted, grew much more sociable, and we found that under his gruff exterior was hidden a warm, kindly heart. He never had much use for any Roader except Ted, but to the more respectable of the Swamp Hollow boys he became quite friendly.

Ted gradually weaned himself away from his old associates, and eventually became such a peaceable, well-behaved boy that people forgot that he had ever been a Roader at all.

As for Tray, I regret to say that his disposition remained the same. He was snappish and unamiable till the end. But as that was his constitutional misfortune we overlooked it and refrained from molesting him.

When he died of old age, Hector mourned him sincerely, and he and Ted buried him under the old willow in Hector's yard. And as a proof of the changes Time can bring, a number of us Swamp Hollow boys went to the funeral.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Old Hector's Dog* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]