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FARM MACHINERY SECTION, NEW JERSEY STATE FAIR

This photograph, taken by a representative of American Agriculturist, shows a corner in the agricultural implement section of the Interstate fair association at Trenton, N. J., in 1902. The exhibits were numerous and attractive. Farmers evidently appreciate the great educational value of such exhibits and are each year becoming more interested in the machinery display at state fairs. Manufacturers also recognize the value of these shows for exhibiting their very latest implements to the best advantage.

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# Uncle Dick's Little Girl

L. M. Montgomery

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Uncle Dick reached up to the apple tree above him, and pulled a long, sinuous bough, picked out with delicate, rose-hearted bloom, down to him, with a caressing motion. Through the little gap thus made in the big pyramid of blossom was seen a far-away glimpse of the harbor on the western side of the Four Winds peninsula. The sun had lately set, and the harbor was like a great ruby cup filled with fire and glamor. On the other side of the orchard long fields, fresh with the tinting of early spring, sloped down to the shore of the open Atlantic, long and white, where a calm ocean slept blue and sighed in its sleep with the murmur that rings forever in the ears of those whose good fortune it is to have been born within sound of it. Back landward were the wooded pine hills where the twilight was already hanging thickly and would presently overflow and trickle down on the lowland homesteads and orchards of Four Winds. But the harbor glow would linger long, and it was always a sight worth seeing when the great stars came out in the clear-swept arch of sky above it, like jewels in some huge, overturned crystal flagon of night.

“When these blossoms have given place to fruit, I’ll have my little girl with me again,” said Uncle Dick tenderly.

He looked through the boughs to the harbor, and his gentle brown eyes filled with a light that was not of the sunset or the lustrous water. The smile that came to the sensitive lips, veiled in the sweep of a silken, silver-sprinkled brown beard, told that Uncle Dick’s thought was a very pleasant one.

Two of his listeners smiled at each other—the tolerant, significant smile which expresses our slightly amused recognition of some harmless fallacy in our friends.

“Do you really expect that she’ll come back to Four Winds after all these years, Uncle Dick, and her such a great lady now?” said Martin Baker, perhaps thinking it wise to soften any blow the near future might have in store for this Uncle Dick, whom everybody in Four Winds loved, even those who, safe in their hard shell of protective common sense, laughed in a not unkindly fashion at his dreamy fancies and odd ways.

Uncle Dick released the apple bough and it swung back to its place with a gush of perfume that flooded the cool air like a wave.

“I know she will come,” he said calmly. “Bertha Lawrence never forgot or broke a promise in her life. The years will have made no difference in her in that, at least.”

“Even so,” said Christopher Merriam, “ain’t you afraid that she won’t be happy or contented here, Uncle Dick? Seven years makes a good deal of difference in folks—’specially seven such years as she has spent, living with rich people and traveling abroad and all that.”

Uncle Dick looked at the last speaker tolerantly. A humorous sparkle replaced

the musing light in his eyes and his smile was half quizzical.

“I don’t think you need be worrying over that, Christopher. I’m not. None of you really know my little girl, although she lived among you 14 years.”

He spoke in a tone of quiet confidence. Merriam and Martin, after a few more casual remarks, strolled away, and Uncle Dick was left with Philip Armory, the young minister of Four Winds church, whose manse was just across the road from Uncle Dick’s place, and who had fallen into the habit of straying over often to talk with this high-souled, simple-minded old man, with the eternal youth in his eyes and heart.

Mr Armory was sitting on the stone wall under the huge apple tree. When the other men had gone, his blue eyes met Uncle Dick’s brown ones with quiet comprehension.

“They’re laughing at me, those two,” said Uncle Dick with a smile. “They’re thinking now, and most likely saying, ‘What a fool that old Dick Romney is over his little girl! She’ll never come back.’ But I don’t blame them. They just don’t know her, that’s all, they just don’t know her.”

He came over and leaned against the mossy stones. The twilight was thick about them now, and the apple blossoms were dizzily sweet in the dew.

“I don’t know her, either,” said Philip Armory gently, “but I think she will come back to you.”

Uncle Dick nodded.

“Folks think I’m foolish because I talk so much about my little girl. I don’t talk half as much about her as I think. I’m thinking of her always—have been ever since she went away seven years ago. She’s been in my heart all the time, and I’ve been in hers! Don’t I know? What does it matter that she doesn’t write very often, or speak of coming back when she does write? I know she’ll come. She’ll keep her promise, and keep it gladly, too. If I didn’t know that I wouldn’t want her to keep it at all.”

“How was it she came to leave you?” asked Armory. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard the rights of the story.”

“I had a sister once,” said Uncle Dick gently. “She was beautiful and good. She married a fine fellow, too, but he took her away from us. He died soon after Bertha was born, and my sister came home here and died, also, of grief. She gave her baby to me with her latest breath. That can’t never be undone. Bertha was her mother’s gift to me—to me. There’s nobody has a right before that. But her father’s will had left her under the guardianship of his own people. They wanted to take her away at once, but I pleaded hard for her, and they agreed to leave her with me till she was 14. Then they took her away. It most broke her little heart. When she went away

she took my hand in both of hers in a way she had, and she looked up at me with her whole lovely, pure soul shining out of her great eyes, and she said: ‘Uncle Dick, as soon as I am 21 I’ll come back to you.’ I’ve never seen her since. They won’t even let her write me often. But I am content. Bertha will be 21 in September, and she will come to me then.”

Perhaps a shade of doubt showed itself on the younger man’s face. Uncle Dick detected it, and laughed in his low, gentle fashion.

“You don’t feel so sure? You’ve heard of her cleverness and her beauty, and what they call her social triumphs? Yes, yes, but you’ll see! They’ll all see.”

As Philip Armory walked home through the purple, softly-scented dusk he recalled all he had heard of Bertha Lawrence. The thought of her had been curiously interwoven with his life and dreams since he had come to Four Winds a year ago. He believed in her, but not quite with Uncle Dick’s entire faith. She would come back, but would she be soul-free? Would the life here satisfy her now? Between the child of 14, knowing no home save Uncle Dick’s gray old cottage, and the woman of 21, who had spent her seven formative years amid all that wealth and culture can give, what unbridgeable gulf might not yawn?

“I hope there is no disappointment in store for Uncle Dick,” thought Armory tenderly. “I have never met a purer, sweeter soul.”

As the summer waned Uncle Dick talked less about his little girl than was his wont. His Four Winds neighbors said that he was growing doubtful himself, but Philip Armory knew better. He knew how Uncle Dick was counting the slow-passing days, and his heart was troubled with the fear that there was some sorrow in store for the sweet old man.

“She will not come—or, coming, will be changed,” was his unuttered doubt.

But Uncle Dick remained untroubled. His eyes were always tranquil and happy when he spoke of her, as he often did to Philip.

“Merriam was here to-day, Mr Armory. He said he s’posed I’d soon be fixing up the house and getting ready for Bertha. I said no. She would find it as she left it, and it would satisfy her. The Four Winds folks laugh at me and I laugh at them. I know her; they don’t you see. That makes all the difference.”

A great, although quiet, change had come over Uncle Dick in those purple-hearted days of the late summer. He went about humming scraps of old-time songs, his step was lighter, his deep, kindly voice had a new and richer note of tenderness. He liked to linger in his orchard at twilight and dream of his little girl. Armory, who often walked there with him, forebore by word or motion to interrupt his charmed reveries. He walked beside him, suiting his younger, stronger step to the old man’s.

Sometimes Uncle Dick patted his friend's arm and laughed softly. "What a nuisance the old man is, isn't he?" he asked whimsically. "Old dreamer! But, ah, you don't know my little girl, Mr Armory."

"I hope you will know her," he said again; "not as her fashionable world knows her—nor yet as these well-meaning, stupid Four Winds folks know her, but as I know her, in all of her beautiful woman's soul and her noble, loyal little heart. She will be worth knowing. Her mother was a queen among women."

One evening Uncle Dick came to meet Armory with an almost boyish lightness of step; in his eyes was a glow and brightness. He held a letter in his hand.

"Writ on her 21st birthday," he exclaimed. "She will be here in a week's time. God bless her!"

On a September day, when Four Winds in its ripely tinted breadth and length lay basking in the mellow autumn sunshine that spilled over the brim of the valley, through the grim old pines, down to the harbor, cupped in its harvest-golden hills, Bertha Lawrence came home. All Four Winds knew it by night. Philip Armory did not make his customary evening call on Uncle Dick. For one thing, he feared to intrude on the sacredness of this reunion; for another, he was still troubled by the thought that he might see something besides gladness in his old friend's eyes—some perplexed shade of doubt or fear, some token that his dream lacked perfect fulfilment.

But when he went over the next evening he understood that his fear had been needless. Uncle Dick had been right—he, and only he, had thoroughly known his little girl.

They were in the orchard, those two, among the bronzing leaves and hanging boughs bent earthward by their mellow burden. They came to meet him slowly, through a long avenue of fruition with an arch of primrose sky at its seaward end.

Uncle Dick's face was an open book written over with unmarred triumph and happiness. Armory was quick to see that there was no shadow in the old man's eyes, and equally quick to realize that, as far as the girl at his side was concerned, there never would be. Bertha Lawrence had come to her own.

She was very lovely—lovelier than even rumor had painted her—this tall, graceful girl, with the dark, finely-poised head and the clear, untroubled gray eyes. Apart from her loveliness she had the distinctive charm, feminized and subtilized, that Armory had come to associate with Uncle Dick.

She held out her hand with a gesture of fine, frank friendship.

"This is my little girl," said Uncle Dick, proudly.

"You have justified his faith in you," said Armory to her with a smile.

“Anyone in whom Uncle Dick believed would do that,” she answered. “His faith is of that rare kind which carries its own fulfilment.”

She turned and held out her hands to Uncle Dick with a sudden, girlish delight that broke through her womanly calm like a gleam of sunlight rippling over a placid sea.

“Oh, how happy I am!” she said. “Everything here is so dear—and you, Uncle Dick, are the dearest of all.”

Uncle Dick took her hands softly in his own.

“My little girl!” he murmured tenderly.

Armory turned away his head, as if from some glimpse of soul communion too holy to be desecrated by stranger eyes. But on his face was the light of one who sees a great glory widening and deepening down the vista of his future.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Uncle Dick's Little Girl* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]