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By LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM

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The Use of Her Legs

L. M. Montgomery

Illustrations by James and Charlotte Billmyer omitted due to lack of biographical information.

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Tillie John—known to the postmaster of Upper Bartibog but to nobody else as Mrs. John Page—set a freshly baked batch of pies on her shelf, looked at her work and saw that it was good. There was no one in Upper Bartibog who could match her for pies, she complacently reflected. Other things contributed to her complacency. It was a lovely day after the April rainstorm the day before—a bit cool but clear and sunny. She was going to town to spend the day with her sister Annie and help her plan her daughter’s wedding. The only thing that marred her enjoyment was leaving Amanda alone. They seldom left her alone but it couldn’t be helped today, for John had to go to town on business that couldn’t be postponed, and Mrs. Harrow, the only near neighbor who could be asked to come and stay with her, was also away. Really, there was no danger. Tramps never came to Bartibog—it was too much out of the world—and Amanda was perfectly healthy, except that she hadn’t the use of her legs, poor thing. Tillie John sighed again. She was glad that so far John had resisted all the solicitations of persistent agents to sell him a car. She had never felt safe in one since Amanda’s accident ten years before. Amanda had gone out in a friend’s car—there had been a collision—and Amanda had never walked again.

Amanda Page was sitting in her wheel chair by the kitchen window, looking like a mediaeval saint and probably quite aware of the fact, at least if you left the mediaeval out. Mediaeval saints may never have worn dresses of blue print, with an elaborate Irish crochet collar around the neck, but they sometimes had smooth braids of rippling auburn hair wound around their heads, placid creamy faces and large, brilliant, gray-blue eyes, set at a slant calculated to give the face a peculiarly appealing sadness. At any rate, Amanda Page had them and the lashes of a Hollywood star into the bargain. She was thirty-five but you would never have guessed it to look at her. Tillie John sometimes scowled at her own wrinkles and warped hands and resented Amanda’s timeless beauty a little. No wonder Amanda looked pretty and young! She spent her time between her bed and her wheel chair and was waited on hand and foot. Then Tillie John would reproach herself. After all, when you hadn’t the use of your legs—

“That north blind is an inch lower than the other. Would you mind making them even,” said Amanda in the soft pathetic voice she had always affected since her accident.

Tillie John gave the north blind a jerk that sent it whizzing to the top. Then repented her impatience and adjusted it carefully. After all, the Pages were like that. John himself was as fussy as an old maid about trifles.

Amanda surveyed the blind with an air of plaintive triumph. Then she looked at the lunch Tillie John had set out for her on one end of the long kitchen table, on a trim little red-and-white checked cloth.

“Is there anything else you’d like, dear?” Tillie John asked solicitously, to atone for her momentary petulance about the blind.

“You could set that chocolate peppermint cake out,” said Amanda gently. “I might fancy a crust of it, though I haven’t any appetite. But then you know I never have. I wonder what it would be like to feel hungry again. Ah, you people who can take exercise—do you ever stop to think how fortunate you are? Thank you, dear. I’m sure I’ll get on very nicely. Have a good time at Annie’s and don’t worry about me.”

“I will worry, though,” said Tillie John. “It doesn’t seem right to leave you alone—dear knows what might happen.”

“What *could* happen? No tramps ever come here—”

“Suppose the house took fire.”

“I could get out in my wheel chair somehow if it did. Besides, it won’t. You’re always worried too much, Tillie. You’re as bad as old Daniel Random—you really are.”

“Speaking of old Daniel, he’s gone off again,” said Tillie.

“Has he ever been on?” inquired Amanda. “As long as I can remember Daniel Random has had rats in his garret, especially when it came to religion.”

“Well, you know he’s worse at some times than others. And they’ve been holding revival meetings up at Prospect Head, with them go-preachers, and Daniel never missed one.”

“No doubt he’s had a glorious time, too.”

“Well, his wife hasn’t. She’s worried to death about him. He thinks the end of the world is coming. And I hear he got up in Prospect church last Sunday and asked the minister questions.”

“He’d get a real kick out of that,” said Amanda, “and so would everybody else who was there. Daniel has always been very peculiar. If I could have laughed over anything I’d have laughed at the look on his face that Sunday last fall when him and Captain Jonas were here and Daniel was shooting off some of his fine talk. ‘All humanity are my brothers,’ he boomed, big-like. And Jonas said, winking at me, ‘That’s too much of a family for the average man to carry, Daniel.’ Daniel went off mad and has never been back since.”

“Which is a mercy,” said Tillie John devoutly. “I never did feel easy when he was about. He gives me the creeps. One of his crotchets just now, they tell me, is that it

isn't right to cut your hair or beard. He's letting his grow. They're both to his waist already. Won't he be a sight? He's been seeing a great army in the sky and painting texts everywhere about his place. Mrs. Peter Cary told me it got on her nerves just to walk through his yard with all the awful warnings staring her in the face from the barn walls. His wife says he's used up five dollars worth of paint already and them mortgaged to the ears. And he kneels down and prays whenever the notion takes him—when he's ploughing or watering the horses—or feeding the pigs. He prayed for half an hour in Henry Beckett's store at Prospect Centre last Tuesday and got fearful mad when the boys laughed at him. Of course they shouldn't of laughed at an afflicted man—but you can imagine. He ought to be shut up 'til the spell passes. Well, I think I've arranged everything for you as well as I can. I hope you won't be lonesome. Likely—” slyly “—Captain Jonas will be up sometime through the day.”

Amanda smiled mysteriously. “Oh, no, he won't, Tillie. Jonas won't be coming back any more—except to my funeral. He said so yesterday.”

Tillie John knew something had happened the previous afternoon. She had met Captain Jonas starting out, when she came up from her trip to the harbor for fresh fish, looking as indignant as a cat you had just put off your knee. She supposed he had lost patience with Amanda at last. Well, it wasn't any wonder. Any man got tired of being a doormat in time. She could never understand his infatuation for Amanda, when he could have got plenty of reasonable women, with full use of their legs, for the asking. However, since nobody but Amanda would suit him, it was a pity Amanda was so stubborn.

“I can't see why you won't marry Captain Jonas, Amanda,” she said a bit crossly.

“And me with no use of my legs!” Amanda eyed her reproachfully. “I may be selfish, Tillie—no doubt I am—but I'm not so selfish as that.”

“If he doesn't mind your legs I don't see why that should hinder you. He can afford to hire Matilda Wiggins to do the work and wait on you. He never goes on long voyages now and that new house of his at Lower Bartibog is fitted up with everything. You could do all the sewing and nothing else to do but just look pretty. And he's real good looking—with such a nice flat stomach.”

Tillie John, recalling John's paunch, sighed.

“I know I'm a terrible burden to you.” Amanda looked like a wounded gazelle—at least like the picture of a wounded gazelle in the African explorer's book on the clock-shelf, which John read on rainy Sundays. “I know—I feel—you'd like to be rid of me and I don't blame you, Tillie—not a speck do I blame you. I often wish I could die and be no more trouble to you.”

"I *don't* want to get rid of you," protested Tillie in exasperation. "It's just that I think you'd be happier if you married Jonas, that's all."

"I'd marry him if I had the use of my legs," said Amanda, "but since I haven't I'll never, never burden him with my affliction. I made him understand that finally yesterday, Tillie. That was when he got mad and said he wouldn't come here again 'til he came to my funeral. It may not be so long at that."

"Captain Jonas will die before you do," snapped Tillie. Tillie was always snapping—and then instantly repenting. "Everybody says he's fretting himself to death because he can't get you."

"No one in the Haye family has ever died of love," smiled Amanda. "Of course I'll miss him coming here—I've always enjoyed his company—but you know it keeps people gossiping and wondering, so it's better as it is. Now, Tillie dear, don't worry about Jonas and me any longer. Just go off and enjoy yourself. You might bring me my red bedroom slippers with the fur 'round the tops. My shoes are hurting my feet a bit. And you might hand me my pale blue chiffon scarf, in case anyone should come in. It's in the third box from the top in my middle bureau drawer. I'll finish embroidering that gingham cushion today. Thank goodness I have the use of my hands at least. I'm not absolutely good for nothing."

"You're the most wonderful sewer I ever saw," said Tillie John. "I don't know what we'd do without you if it comes to that." She knew it was of no use whatever to plead the cause of the faithful Captain Jonas any further. Amanda was inflexible. She had always been like that, Tillie John reflected—always sweet but always going her own way.

"It's little enough for all your kindness and care," said Amanda, with a break in her voice. "Sometimes—Tillie, I've never spoken of this but oh, I've thought of it—sometimes I wonder if you believe what that English doctor from the convention said when he was at the Bartibog Hotel. You remember? He said there was nothing to prevent me walking now if I wanted to—*wanted to*. As if there is anything on earth I want more! You don't believe him, do you, Tillie?"

"Of course I don't. Amanda, you haven't been brooding over that?"

"Sometimes—in the night—when I can't sleep—I wonder if you and John think I'm a fraud."

"Amanda Page, stop talking like that! As for that doctor, he didn't know what he was talking about. Anyhow, we never heard the rights of what he did say. Something about the trouble being in your sub—sub—something mind."

"I've only got one mind! I wish *he* had to sit here year in and year out, a helpless burden on his friends. He'd know then whether I wanted to walk or not. Perhaps

Jonas thinks it too, since he's always worrying me to marry him. Well, I'll try not to think of it. There's John with the buggy. You might sprinkle a whiff of violet on me before you go. There's a little left in the atomizer. I'm fond of violet perfume. It reminds me of happier days."

"I'll bring you home a new bottle," promised Tillie. The violet perfume cost a dollar, and dollars were hard to come by. But she could take one of the three she had saved for a new hat. The hat could wait.

Amanda heard the buggy drive away down the lane with a secret smile of satisfaction. It was really nice to be alone once in a while. Tillie was a dear but there were times when she got on your nerves. She really was rather stupid. And she was always trying to cheer you up and entertain you and amuse you when you didn't want to be cheered up or entertained or amused. Amanda generally found quite a bit of entertainment and amusement in her day-dreams—gorgeous fantasies of luring princes and ruling empires—she, Amanda Page of Upper Bartibog. If she had the use of her legs she would have been quite content to lure and rule Captain Jonas, but since she hadn't it was fun to fly a bit higher in imagination.

She gazed complacently in the mirror on the wall opposite her chair. She really looked quite nice. Her hair gleamed like polished mahogany in the sunlight. Amanda had always been very proud of her beautiful hair, and her complexion was above the average. The Pages had all been born with good skins. There were not many women in Bartibog with as few wrinkles. That scarf around her full white throat was certainly becoming. It was rather a pity there was no likelihood of anyone—well, of Jonas—seeing it. Jonas noticed things like that, more than most men. She would certainly miss Jonas' visits, and his lean, lined, kindly face smiling at her. Jonas *had* a nice smile. But it wasn't fair to keep him dangling around when she could never marry him. She had made that very clear to him yesterday. It had all been rather dramatic and exciting. Amanda laid down her gingham cushion, leaned back in her chair, and savored her recollection of it. Captain Jonas had come in with an armful of pussywillows for her and had arranged them in her favorite vase. He was given to delicate little attentions like that. They had had their usual pleasant chat but at the end Captain Jonas had spoiled it all by again pleading with her to marry him.

"You know I can't marry you—or anyone—when I haven't the use of my legs," Amanda had told him sadly for the umpteenth time. Her eyes had filled with tears. She could cry whenever she wanted to, which was a great asset because she could cry and be beautiful. She never made noises or grimaces. The tears just brimmed over and got tangled in her long fringing black lashes. It was them eyelashes did the

trick, Captain Jonas told himself. No man could resist them.

“I don’t care a hoot whether you’ve got the use of your legs or not,” said Captain Jonas bitterly. She ought to know that by this time. It wasn’t her legs he wanted her for—though they were shapely enough, at least, what he could see of them below the blue dress. Amanda did not hold with too brief dresses. At any rate he had a fine view of her ankles and he reflected that he had never seen finer ankles in his life, and he had been around a bit in his time.

But the ankles were only incidental. He wanted Amanda to be waiting for him when he came home from a voyage—he wanted to sit beside her when rain drifted over the gray sea beyond the bar—when fogs crept up the harbor and made everything—even the ugly old houses at the fishing village—lovely and mysterious. He wanted to watch the evening star with her and the silvery moonlight paths over the water, the far dim shores jewelled with home lights. He wanted her to admire his delphiniums and his gorgeous splashes of nasturtiums than which there was nothing finer in either of the Bartibogs. It would be wonderful just to have her living in his house—his fine new white house with its red roof and its dormers at Lower Bartibog. He liked to think of her sitting there at his fireside, warm and cosy, while the winter winds ravened outside and the shadows of wild black clouds tore over the sands. He could never get things like this to her. Every word he uttered sounded clumsy when he talked to her. But he had made it clear to her for many years that he wanted her and only her for a wife, and never could want any other woman. And to have her turn around and say coolly that if he hunted about a bit he could find himself another girl was really too much to endure. For the first time in his life Captain Jonas felt that he was mad at Amanda.

“I never argue with a lady,” he said, “and I’m not looking for another girl. But I’m through with coming here and being advised to marry someone else. I’ll not come back again—unless it’s to your funeral, since you seem to think you’ve got one foot in the grave the way you talk. So put that in pickle.”

“Dear me, I hope you’ll be in a better humor when you come back,” sighed Amanda. One tear succeeded in making its escape from her lashes and rolled down the round enticing cheek . . . which Captain Jonas in wild moods pictured himself kissing. But, possessed by all the anger of a patient man, tears, even Amanda’s tears, had no influence on him now.

“I’m not coming back. When you want me you can come to me. You know where I live . . . Journey’s End, Lower Bartibog, at your service. And so good-day to you, Miss Amanda Page.”

Captain Jonas had marched off and Amanda permitted herself the luxury of a

few more tears while Tillie John was walking up the lane. What hurt her was Captain Jonas' speech about going to him if she wanted him. When he knew she hadn't the use of her legs! Or did he believe what the English doctor had said? Well, he was gone and for good. He would probably be sorry for what he had said when he cooled off, but the Hayes, like the Pages, never broke their word when it was once passed. And it was better so . . . far, far better so. Amanda was tranquil and composed by the time Tillie John reached the house and had assumed her Madonna look.

The day passed quite agreeably to Amanda. She embroidered her cushion diligently, she ate her dinner, contriving to dispose of a fair amount of food despite her lack of appetite; she wistfully decided that a third slice of peppermint chocolate cake might be better left uneaten; and she was quietly arranging herself for a nap in her chair when Daniel Random opened the door and stood for an impressive moment on the threshold, his flaming red beard sweeping across his breast. His grizzled hair reached to his shoulders and he was hatless. His six feet of bone and sinew was clothed in a faded red sweater and ragged, faded blue overalls. Altogether, he was a rather extraordinary looking creature with his red-hot brown eyes blazing in his very long, very narrow, deeply wrinkled face. There was undoubtedly something sinister about him but Amanda was not in the least alarmed. She had known old Daniel Random all her life and, years before, had laughed with the rest of the young fry over his religious spasms of prophetic fervor and strange frenzy. She had not seen him in any of them of late years and had heard they were growing worse but it would never have occurred to her to be afraid of poor crazy old Daniel Random. On the contrary she thought it would be rather amusing to hear what he had to say . . . a welcome break in the monotony of the day.

"Well, Daniel, and how are you?" she said cordially.

"I am *seeking*," he said mysteriously. "Seeking for my soul."

"Dear me, have you mislaid it?" queried Amanda with mild sarcasm. "You Randoms were always terrible careless creatures."

Daniel advanced a few steps into the room.

"I have been told by the Heavenly God what I must do if I am to find my soul," he said.

"And what is it? But won't you have a chair?"

Daniel ignored her invitation. His eyes blazed. Really, thought Amanda, the poor man was terribly strung up.

"Sacrifice!" he said hollowly. "Sacrifice! I have been told to offer a sacrifice and

I dare not disobey the Voice. Then I shall not only find my soul but the people of this community will be compelled to realize the danger of delaying any longer their acceptance of the truth that the end is near at hand. Oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up. But they shall be brought low . . . those children of wrath . . . those sons of Beelzebub. They have trusted in the blood of bulls and of goats but a nobler sacrifice is demanded. And I . . . I, Daniel Random . . . have been chosen by the Heavenly God for this high office.”

“And what are you going to sacrifice, Daniel?” inquired Amanda, still easily, as she threaded her needle. You had to humor such people, she reflected. But he really ought to be shut up when these spells came on. There was no knowing what he might do. Kill somebody’s cow, as like as not.

“You . . . you, Amanda Page . . . are the appointed sacrifice,” said Daniel solemnly, taking a few steps nearer.

“Oh, me?” said Amanda, amused. “I wouldn’t do at all, Daniel. I haven’t the use of my legs. You mustn’t offer up an imperfect thing to the Heavenly God, you know. That’s in the Bible, isn’t it?”

“You are not deformed and you are very beautiful, Amanda Page. The Heavenly God took the use of your legs away from you because you danced. That was an offence to the Heavenly God.”

“You used to dance yourself, Daniel, if I remember aright,” retorted Amanda. His burning eyes were beginning to make her a little uncomfortable but she smiled over the recollection of Daniel Random leaping and shouting furiously as he danced an eight-hand reel at a party in Lower Bartibog years ago.

“I did . . . I did,” said Daniel wildly. “That was how I lost my soul . . . I danced it away . . . danced it to damnation. But it is not yet too late. I have got a word from the Heavenly God. Today he spoke to me and I have seen the light. I have been waiting for a sign and lo, it is here.”

He was quite close to her by this time and Amanda felt a sudden stab of fear. She had never heard of him being so bad as this.

“Don’t you touch me . . . don’t you dare touch me, Daniel Random,” she said sharply, trying to keep her voice steady. It did not do to let lunatics see that you were afraid of them. And this man was clearly mad! Not “off” or “cracked” or “goofy” but simply mad.

Daniel laid a bony hand, with long and very dirty nails, on her smooth, plump arm. There was a certain horrible gloating in his touch.

“I shall not speak smooth things to you, Amanda Page,” he said sternly. “High and lifted up you have always been, proud of your long hair and your eyes that

bewitch the hearts of men. But your hour is come. Prepare to meet the Heavenly God. I will wash my hands in your blood . . . it will be a glorious experience, oh, my sister. The parched ground shall become a pool and Daniel Random, priest of the Heavenly God, shall find his soul.”

“You’d better run away home, Daniel,” said Amanda faintly, when his ridiculous farrago of phrases and tags had ceased temporarily for want of breath. “I’m very tired . . . and I always take a nap in the afternoon.”

For all answer Daniel picked her up as if she were a child. Amanda tried desperately to free herself but he had her arms imprisoned between their bodies and she could not get them loose. Oh, if she could only kick him! Faugh, what a terrible breath he had! Was this a nightmare?

“Blue and purple and scarlet and fine-twined linen,” shouted Daniel, suddenly exultant, as her chiffon scarf blew across her face in a sudden gust of wind from the open door. “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh . . . ay, He shall laugh!”

Daniel laughed himself, horribly. He lifted Amanda high in the air for a moment, then laid her on the kitchen table, holding her down with one hand while he reached across the table with the other.

Amanda was momentarily paralyzed with horror. Her hands went clammy. This . . . this . . . was one of the things you read about in books and newspapers but which could never happen in real life.

Daniel had got what he reached for . . . Tillie John’s old long, wickedly thin and sharp carving knife. His burning eyes gazed into Amanda’s terrified orbs with all the irresponsible light of insanity as he raised the carving knife with both his hands gripping the handle.

Amanda knew all at once and indisputably that this madman meant to kill her. Something in her screamed although no sound passed her lips. She made one wild, convulsive spring from the table . . . she went out of the door and down the steps and down the lane, running as she had never run in all her life before. The use of her legs had returned with a vengeance.

Daniel was close behind her, still clutching the carving knife. In his momentary stupefaction at her unlooked-for escape he had allowed her to get the lead but he was rapidly overtaking her. Not a living soul was in sight. Amanda flew across the road, her chiffon scarf, held by the pin of her collar, streaming behind her, and down the old, disused wharf below the Page place. Eliza, escaping from pursuers and bloodhounds, had nothing on Amanda as she leaped over the gaping holes in the ragged structure to the very end where two rowboats were tied. With one final, frenzied jump Amanda landed in John’s boat. But the rope was tied in a firm knot

and Daniel was already in sight. Amanda snatched up a hatchet which John had providentially left there and severed it at a blow. She caught at the oars and pulled wildly. She had been a good rower ten years before and under the stress of terror and stark necessity all her old skill came back combined with the strength of desperation. For Daniel had climbed into the Harrow boat and was coming after her. It was not so very far to Lower Bartibog where the little river debouched into the harbor. And once around the point Captain Jonas' house was near. Could she hold out? She would . . . she must.

Captain Jonas, standing where his lane ran out from his garden, smoking a pipe and scowling viciously at things in general, saw something. He had been all over the world and had seen all kinds of incredible things but never anything quite so incredible as this. In fact, he didn't believe he saw it. It couldn't be . . . it simply wasn't happening. He was dreaming . . . or drunk . . . or crazy. Ay, that was it. Crazy, as a man might well be after such a night as he had spent. Hadn't there been a yarn that his father's cousin's great-aunt had been in the asylum. Those things ran in families . . . you couldn't deny it.

Captain Jonas saw, or thought he saw, Amanda Page, who hadn't put a foot under her for ten years, running madly up his lane with Daniel Random one jump behind her, flourishing an implement which everybody in both the Bartibogs would have recognized as Tillie John's favorite carving knife. Amanda was almost staggering and was uttering the most piteous little cries. Her hair had come loose and streamed madly in the wind, her cheeks were whipped to a brilliant scarlet, her blue dress was spattered from head to foot with mud and her red bedroom slippers would never be the same again.

"Jonas . . . save me . . . save me . . ." she gasped, as he ran to catch her.

Captain Jonas had already decided that he was not crazy . . . after all, that great aunt had been on the cousin's mother's side . . . but only dreaming. Still, you had to do something even in a dream. Captain Jonas dreamed that he put the shaking Amanda carefully down on a stone bench and packed Daniel Random a wicked wallop on the jaw. There was something so solid and satisfying in the impact that Captain Jonas felt a conviction that the scene was real.

Daniel sat down abruptly in the muddy lane and put a hand to his face. The carving knife had flown from his grasp over the hedge into the garden . . . where Captain Jonas found it next day and restored it to Tillie John who could never have cut another slice of bread in her life if she hadn't regained it.

"What does this mean, Daniel Random?" demanded Captain Jonas.

Daniel looked about him vacantly.

“The Heavenly God,” he began.

“We’ll leave God out of this,” said Captain Jonas. “There’s evidently been a miracle and it’s probably His doing but you’re not going to take His name in vain in your condition. I’m asking you what has happened.”

Daniel tried again.

“The Heavenly God . . .”

Captain Jonas lost all patience.

“Git up and git.”

Daniel Random got up and got. He was crying bitterly as he stumbled down the lane but his frenzy was over for the time being at least, as his harrowed wife thankfully realized when he arrived home in tears.

Captain Jonas turned to the dishevelled, mud-splashed Amanda and gathered her up in his arms. She sobbed out a disconnected account of what had happened.

“Oh, Jonas . . . it’s been like a terrible nightmare . . . but it’s over . . . and I can walk again. Oh, Jonas . . . that English doctor must have been right . . . but you don’t think I was deceiving you all these years, do you? Maybe I *have* got a sub . . . sub . . . whatever-it-was mind.”

“My loveliest girl!” Captain Jonas tightened his grip. “You ought to know me better than that. Now . . . now . . . darling, don’t be hot and bothered any longer . . . he’s gone and you’re safe. You’ll just come in and have a bit of supper first, before we do any more talking. Mrs. Wiggins is getting it ready . . . it’ll set you up.”

Amanda lifted her head from his shoulder and sniffed. A heavenly smell of fried codfish cakes and salt pork floated out on the crisp April air.

“I *could* do with a cup of tea,” she said. “Oh, Jonas . . . you said I’d have to come to you . . . and I came. It . . . it’s an act of God, Jonas.”

“Act of God . . . or act of Daniel Random . . . you’re going to marry me right straight off, Amanda Page.”

“Well,” sighed Amanda happily, “since I’ve got the use of my legs . . .”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Use of Her Legs* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]