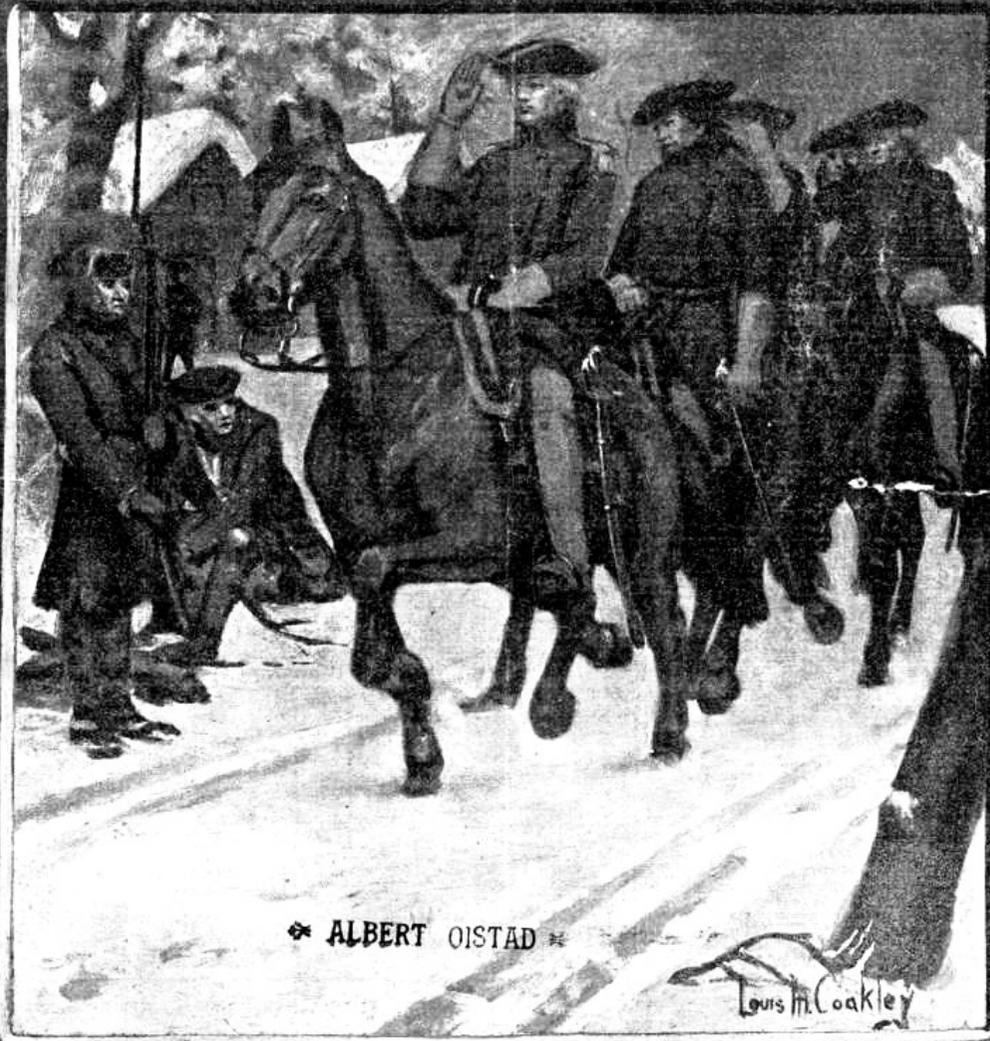


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✻ ALBERT OISTAD ✻

Louis M. Coakley

WASHINGTON VALLEY FORT

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Cyriac's Pony: A Story of School Days

L. M. Montgomery

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CYRIAC'S PONY

A STORY OF SCHOOL DAYS

By L. M. Montgomery



Lockeport, Nov. 2, 18——



My Dear Jack:

Your letter has gone unanswered for a long time but, to tell the truth, I haven't felt like writing letters lately. I've been all mixed up.

You said in your letter that Bert Sawyer had written you that there had been a bit of a rumpus in school and that Bob Morrison and I had been mixed up in it and you wanted to know all about it.

Well, I'll try to tell you although I won't enjoy the telling very much. However, somebody else will be sure to tell you if I don't, and maybe get things crooked. So here goes to tell you just what happened.

To begin with, when school reopened in September Cyriac Buote came to school. You don't know Cyriac, of course. He is a French Canadian boy and belongs to that wretched little settlement called St. Anne, about six miles back in the country. You remember we went through it on our wheels last summer and you said you thought it the most poverty stricken place you'd ever seen. It's just as poor as it looks and so are the people in it. Cyriac's family is about the poorest of them all; but it seems that Cyriac is ambitious in spite of his poverty.

He had gone to the little third-rate school at St. Anne until he had learned all the teachers there could teach him and then he determined to attend Lockeport school for a year before trying the entrance examination for the Dayton High School.

How we Sixth Grade boys howled when we found that Cyriac meant to try for the scholarship for which we all meant to compete ourselves! He didn't look as if he could spell c-a-t, cat, so Bob Morrison said, and so we all thought. But it was a big mistake to judge Cyriac by his looks as we soon found out.

But there is no use talking, Jack, he did look funny. He was a tall, lanky fellow and looked all wrists and ankles for his trousers and coat sleeves were four inches too short for him. And such patches! Patches everywhere and of every color and size. And never a vestige of tie or collar of course. He had a great shock of whitish-colored hair, a long, brown, stolid sort of face and big, inky-black eyes. "Sleepy-looking chap," I thought. But I tell you a fellow would have to get up early to get

ahead of that same Cyriac.

His brains were all right, there wasn't a doubt of that. To be sure he talked English with a fearful accent and when he tried to read Latin he convulsed the class and even Mr. Unsworth had to look the other way.

But just give Cyriac pen and ink and a clean sheet of foolscap and accent didn't count there. In the monthly examinations at the end of September Cyriac came out ten per cent ahead of everyone, even of Bob Morrison and your humble servant, who used to think themselves the flowers of the flock.

It was a pretty stiff dose for us all and especially for Bob and me. Here was this backwoods fellow, whom we had despised and made fun of, with his patched clothes and Frenchy accent and his big, brown work-hardened paws walking off with all our class honors as easy as rolling off a log. We were surprised and mad at the same time.

Indeed, all the Sixth Grade boys felt cut up except the stupid ones who hadn't expected to mark high anyhow and were just as glad to see Cyriac take us top chaps down a peg or two as not.

But mad or not, there was no changing the fact that there at the head of Mr. Unsworth's report was the name of Cyriac Buote with 98 per cent to his credit.

It rankled in our minds a bit—Bob's and mine—and we were just asking for a chance to pay Cyriac back in some way. Mean? Yes, of course it was mean—dirt mean! I see that now and you'd better believe me I feel ashamed of myself. But I was so sore just then after getting beaten in examinations that I was a regular cad.

We didn't have to look long for a chance to play a trick on Cyriac. There was one ready to hand. Cyriac, of course, couldn't walk six miles to school every morning and then home again at night. So he rode on a pony that looked as if it might have come out of the ark as far as age went. We found out that he had worked all haying and harvest with a man over at Swampscott in payment for the nag. It was so old that it was gray in spots and it was blind in one eye and lame in one leg and so thin you could count its ribs. Altogether I'll bet a hat, Jack, you never saw such a specimen in your life and we boys tormented the life out of Cyriac about his sorry steed.

Cyriac always took our personal slurs and jokes with perfect good humor but it made him mad when we sneered at "Napoleon Bonaparte." That was the pony's name. He was as fond of "Nap" as if he had been a beauty and took just as much care of him. When he came to school in the morning Nap was carefully tethered where he could get grass and water and shade. At recesses Cyriac would go and talk to him and at night he mounted him and ambled off up the road as proud as a

king.

Well, Bob and I thought it would be a good joke on Cyriac to take old Nap away and tether him some place where he couldn't find him when school came out. Cyriac would have to trudge home for once and it would give him a jolly good scare if he thought his precious horse was lost.

So one day when school went in after the last recess Bob and I hung back a bit and as soon as everybody had disappeared we rushed to where Nap was tied. Bob untied his rope and led him up a lane in the woods for about a quarter of a mile, coming out where that little bridge crosses the Lockeport mill brook on Simon Crossway's land. You've been there, Jack, on trouting expeditions and you know how deep and steep the banks are and that there isn't any railing on the bridge.

Bob tied old Nap good and solid to a birch tree and we left him there, nibbling peacefully at the grass. Nap was always eating but it never seemed to fatten him any, poor old fellow.

We hurried back to school then and slipped in unnoticed while Mr Unsworth was hearing the Junior botany. When school came out Cyriac shambled off to Nap's usual haunt, but of course no Nap was to be found.

Wasn't Cyriac in a stew! Not that he made a fuss, you know—that wasn't Cyriac's way. But anyone could see that he felt worried. He hunted around everywhere near but he didn't find Nap and finally he started to walk home. Some of the boys told him that Nap must have got loose and gone home and Cyriac looked as if he were trying to believe it but couldn't. I suppose he knew as well as the rest of us, that poor old Nap hadn't enterprise enough to start off anywhere alone.

Bob and I hung around until all the other chaps had gone home. Then we started intending to bring Nap back and tie him up in the old spot. Wouldn't Cyriac look bewildered when he came and saw him in the morning?

"He will worry all night about him when he finds he isn't home," said Bob.

Then we chuckled as if Bob had said something witty. But when we got to Crossway's bridge we didn't chuckle. No, Jack, my boy, we didn't feel a bit like it!

Poor old Nap had strayed over to the bridge, giving his rope a twist around another tree at the edge as he did so, and then, owing, I suppose, to his blind eye, he had fallen over the bridge and there he hung—dead as a door-nail.

Well, Jack, I simply can't describe how Bob and I felt, so I won't try. And we were thoroughly scared, too, for we thought there'd be an awful fuss and likely as not the mischief to pay all round.

There was nothing we could do. Poor old Nap was dead, beyond doubt, and

we couldn't even haul him up.

"So the only thing is just to leave him here and cut for home," said Bob. "We can't bring Nap back to life now."

"I wish we'd never touched him," I said, disconsolately.

"Oh, so do I," growled Bob, "but what good is wishing going to do? He wasn't worth his pasture, anyhow."

So home we went, the cheapest-feeling boys in Lockeport. I tell you, Jack, I put in a miserable night. I was sure we were in for a scrape and I felt sorry for Cyriac, too. I hope, old fellow, that you'll never be in such a mixed-up state of conscience as I was that night.

Well, next morning Cyriac was at the school bright and early looking for Nap. He had walked all the way from home. He hunted all the morning and at last he found him. Nobody knows how he took it but when he reappeared at the school he looked awfully cut-up.

Bob wasn't in school at all. He had left Lockeport that morning for a week's visit with some cousins at Swampscott. He'd been invited there for some time but if it hadn't been for old Nap's hanging himself I'll bet Bob would never have gone holidaying in term time.

I must say I thought it shabby of Bob to leave me to face the music alone. But for a wonder there wasn't any fuss. It never seemed to enter into Cyriac's head to blame any of the schoolboys for kidnapping his pony. Instead he declared that it was Leon Poirier who had been hired at Crossway's all summer and who had an old grudge against Cyriac. Leon had left Lockeport that very day to hire with a man ten miles up country and Cyriac believed that he had revenged himself upon Nap before going.

Mr. Unworth did hold a bit of an investigation and asked us all in turn if we had tied Nap at the bridge. I said "No" with the rest. It was true enough, for Bob had done the tying. But there's no use in talking, Jack, I felt mean—mean—mean!

Well, Cyriac had no pony to carry him to school now, but the third day after the "inquest," as the boys called it, he turned up again, looking tired to death, for he had walked the whole way and he wasn't at all strong. That night going home he got well drenched in a shower and there was no Cyriac at school next morning.

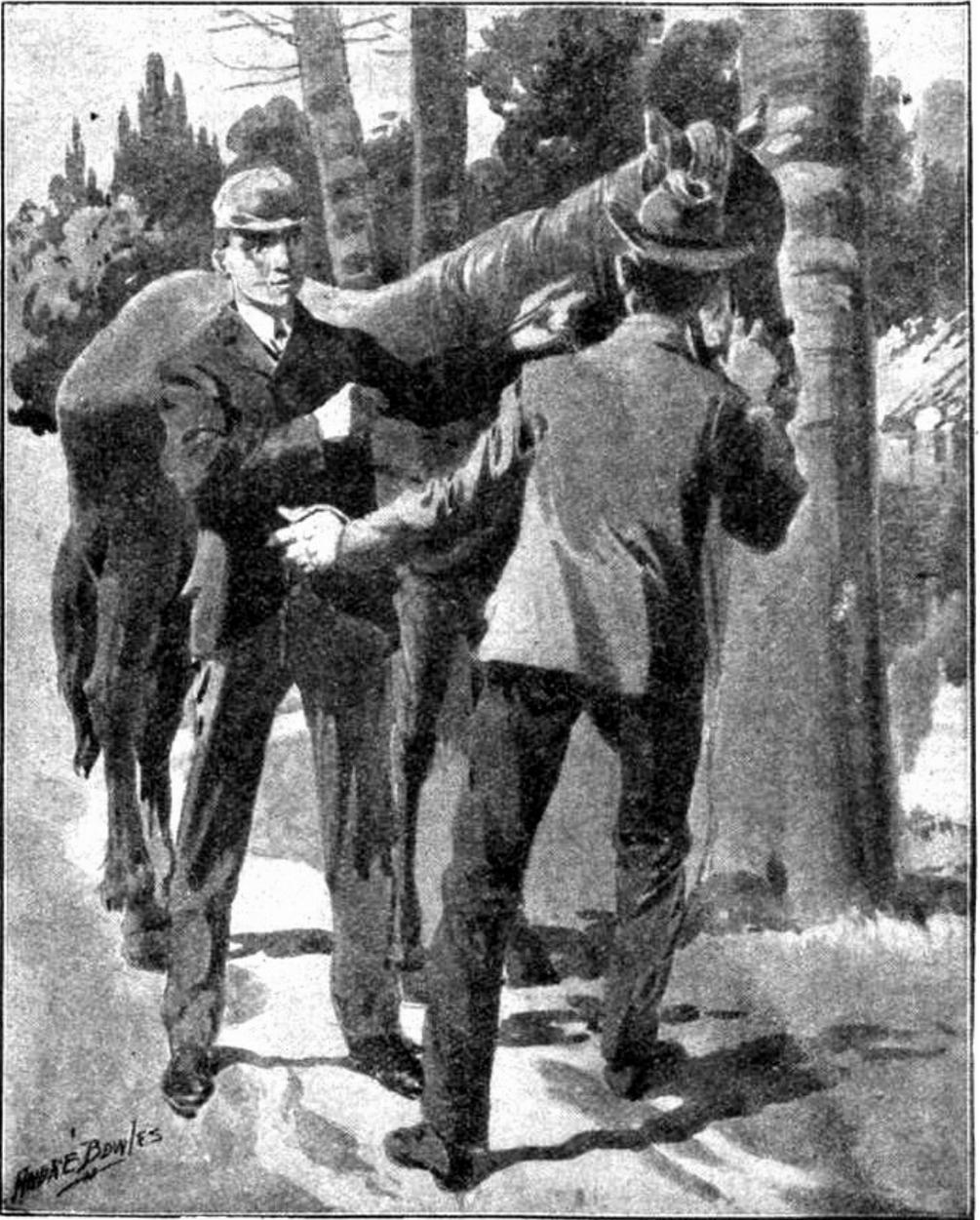
Three days later John Carslake's hired boy, Jerry, brought word from St. Anne that Cyriac Buote was down with pneumonia—"ammonia," Jerry called it—as a consequence of getting so wet that day and the doctor didn't think he would live.

Bob was back at school by this time and he just turned as white as a sheet when George Carslake told him the news. I guess I did, too. When Bob and I got together

we were as solemn as crows.

“If Cyriac dies,” said Bob, miserably, “it will be our fault—or mine, I should say, since I was most to blame.”

As for me I felt too wretched to say anything. I wouldn't live over those next four days for anything. But at last we heard that Cyriac was getting better.



"We rushed to where Nap was tied"

Talk about reprieves to condemned criminals! Bob and I know just how they feel. We got together that day at recess and had a consultation.

"Now, Will, what is to be done!" said Bob. "Cyriac's getting better, but he can't come back to school if he has to walk, that is plain."

“We’ve just got to get him another pony in place of Nap, that’s all,” I said. “I’ve been saving up to buy a bicycle and I’ve got fifteen dollars. I’ll give that. I’d rather have a clear conscience again than all the bicycles in the world.”

“So would I,” agreed Bob. “Well, I haven’t any money, but I think I know a way to get some.”

Next day Bob turned up with twenty dollars. He looked glum and triumphant by turns.

“How did you make it out, Bob?” I asked.

“Sold Rex,” answered Bob, briefly. He didn’t say another word, and I didn’t, either. I knew what a sacrifice Bob had made. Rex was the very apple of his eye. He was a beautiful Gordon Setter pup that Bob’s Uncle Henry had given him, and every boy in Lockeport had envied Bob that dog.

We had to hunt around for a couple of days before we found a pony for our price, but we finally bought one from Stephen Cooke, over at White Bay. He was a bit old and slow—the pony I mean, not Stephen—but he had two good eyes and was worth a dozen Naps.

Then Bob and I took him over to St. Anne and went to Jerome Buotes’. Cyriac’s mother met us at the door. She was a great big, fat, jolly-looking woman and she couldn’t speak a word of English. Bob and I had quite a time making her understand that we wanted to see Cyriac, but we succeeded at last and she towed us in to the little bedroom where he was lying, looking so thin and white, with his big, black, hollow eyes, that I felt choky.

You should have seen his face light up when we went in. How glad he was! And he began to ask questions about the school and Mr. Unsworth and the class work so fast that we couldn’t keep up with him or get a chance to tell him what we came for.

But at last his mother jabbered away in French a bit to him and I suppose she told him he mustn’t talk too much and hurt himself for he got quiet, and then Bob began.

He told the whole story, plump and plain, and I helped him out here and there when he got stuck. Cyriac listened, with his eyes getting bigger and bigger, and when Bob told him that we had brought another pony for him in Nap’s place and asked him to forgive us, he gave a great swallow.

“Dat’s all right, boys,” he said. And it was all he ever did say. He tried to get out something about thanking us, but we stopped him right up and told him that if he could forgive us for one mean trick and for having nearly killed him it would be for us to thank him.

But we went to see Cyriac often after that; and as soon as he was well enough

to come back to school we Sixth Grade fellows gave him a rousing reception.

Of course the story got out but nobody said much to Bob and me, not even Mr. Unsworth, although of course it made lots of talk in the school. Cyriac is head of the class again and of course he'll get the Dayton scholarship. Nobody will grudge it to him, for he is a regular brick and we all like him, and he can talk English and read Latin quite well now.

I shall tell you more general news in my next letter, when I won't have Cyriac and his pony so much on my brain. We all miss you in class this winter and wish you were back.

Yours fraternally,

Will.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

The town was variously spelt as Lockport or Lockeport. The spelling has been made consistent as Lockeport.

[The end of *Cyriac's Pony: A Story of School Days* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]