

# GOLDEN DAYS

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS.

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### How the Colonel's Son Was Captured.

BY LIEUT. J. A. W. BROOKS, U. S. A.

"There is a big Indian outbreak, and we are all ordered to take the field at once," announced a young cavalryman, bursting into his barracks-room at Fort Modoc one bright summer morning, just after guard mounting.

In a moment he was the centre of an excited group of soldiers, to whom he eagerly told all that he had heard.

It was only a rumor, however, and, like most rumors, when first spread around an army post, it had grown greatly to every repetition. Most rumors have some truth for a foundation, and this rumor originated in the following way:

While the officers and ladies were watching guard mounting, Colonel Larson came down his front steps, holding in his hand some letters which had come in the morning's mail. After greeting every one in the cordial way which made him a general favorite, he held up a long official envelope, and said:

"I have some news which is of interest to most every one here."

A chorus of "What is it?" arose from the ladies, while the officers looked as if they would like to ask the same question, did they not consider it unsoldierly to be so inquisitive.

"Well," said the colonel, smiling, "troops C, D and H are to go on a scouting expedition, effecting a junction with several troops from Fort Rocky, at Piney Run, on the third day's march."

Just as guard mounting was over, Nick Larson, the colonel's son, galloped into the post on a handsome Kentucky thoroughbred.

It was Nick's fifteenth birthday, and a happier boy could not have been found in the whole State of Arizona. When Nick came down to breakfast that morning he heard a whinny at the hitting-post in the side yard, and stepping to the window, he saw a bay horse, with the fine head, arched neck and long, slender legs peculiar to the Kentucky hunter. The splendid animal, saddled and bridled with the new trappings of the army cavalry pattern, even including the boot into which was thrust a Winchester repeating rifle, stood impatiently waiting for the groom.

Nick gazed in admiration at the horse, for, besides being an excellent rider, he was a good judge of horses.

He was still standing at the window when his father, the colonel of the 4th regiment of United States Cavalry, entered the room.

"Well, my boy," he said, as he joined his son at the window, and patted him affectionately on the shoulder, "I wish you many happy returns of the day, and hope you will like your new horse."

"My horse!" exclaimed Nick, wheeling in astonishment. "Mine!" he repeated, as though not believing his ears.

The colonel nodded, smiling at the boy's amazed yet happy expression.

"Oh, father!" was all that Nick could say, and giving the colonel a hearty hug, with a bound he sprang through the open window and threw his arms around his horse's neck.

After allowing Nick a few minutes to examine and pet his grand birthday gift, the colonel said:

"Come, Nick, eat a good breakfast, and then you can try your new mount."

As Nick, on his return from his ride, joined the group which had been watching guard mounting, the sight of the handsome horse diverted, for a moment, the conversation from the subject of the scouting expedition, but after every one had admired the animal, one of the officers remarked:

"Nick, you are now the best mounted and best armed fellow at the post; you ought to go on the scout."

"What scout?" asked Nick, for the mail had arrived during his absence, and he had not heard the news.

He rambled into his father's office as soon as he could get there after hearing what was on foot, and breathlessly cried:

"Oh, father, I thought that you had given me everything that I wanted, but I do want one thing more."

"What is it?" said the colonel, looking up into his son's eager face with a smile which seemed to say that he had more than half-guessed what new request was about to be made.

"Let me go on the scout with the troops. I will obey the commanding officer like one of the men."

This was said in such a beseeching tone

that a refusal would have been very hard to make.

"Do you think that you could stand the fatigue?" asked the colonel.

"Of course I could," replied Nick, with offended dignity.

"Well, run and ask your mother," laughed the colonel. "I want an outing officer, so I will be your commanding officer who is to be obeyed."

Four days later the garrison, who were to be left behind at Fort Modoc, gathered at the entrance of the post to wave farewell to the departing troops.

At the head of the column rode the colonel, and by his side, on his thoroughbred, was Nick, attired like the troops, in a slouch felt campaign hat and blue flannel shirt, a revolver at his side, and his Winchester in its place. His coat was strapped to the pommel of the McClellan army saddle, and his rubber poncho, in which were rolled some necessary toilet articles and a change of clothes, was attached to the cantle.

Behind the colonel and Nick came the three troops, all mounted on handsome bay horses, then the ambulance, with the doctor and hospital attendants, while the rear was closed by the guard and escort wagon, drawn by six army mules and filled with the tents, field cooking outfit and provisions.

The troopers, who wore very military and dashing in appearance, and at the same time

looked as if they were ready for rough field service, were heartily cheered as they passed out of the post, while the band played "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

Nick was in high spirits. His horse, whom he had named "Ben Hur," was all that could be desired, combining speed, spirit and endurance with gentleness. Ben was an unusually intelligent animal, and already knew his young master.

During most of the day Nick rode with his father at the head of the column, though occasionally he would drop behind to chat with some of the other officers or men, with whom he was a great favorite.

A short march was made the first day, for the camp had to be located near running water, and a pretty brook twenty-five miles from Fort Modoc afforded an ideal site.

The five large Sibley tents and the officers' wall tents were quickly pitched, and soon camp-fires were blazing, whose glimmering light in the gathering darkness made the conical-shaped Sibley tents look like Indian tepees. From the cooks' fires rose odors of boiling coffee and of meat roasting in the queer "Dutch ovens," as they are called, though they are simply iron pots with tightly fitting covers, which are placed on the blazing logs, and while protecting the meat from smoke, at the same time retain its flavor.

On the second day's march the country became hilly. Nick frequently left the



"WHILE STOOPING OVER, SUDDENLY, TO HIS HORROR, HE SAW REFLECTED IN THE WATER THE PAINTED FACE OF AN INDIAN."

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# Our Practical Joke

L. M. Montgomery

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Ever since we could remember anything, Win Halstead and I had spent our vacations at Grandpa Richardson's farm. We were cousins, but as he lived in Maine and I lived in New Brunswick, we were together only when we went to the old farm in summer. We looked forward to it all winter.

Just as soon as school closed and we had stacked our dog-eared text-books in the darkest corner of the attic we went to grandpa's. It was a jolly place for boys—big woods quite handy and a capital trout-pond, and a shore where they fished for mackerel. Win and I used to put in two months of solid fun before we went back to foot-ball and Latin verbs.

There was nobody at the farm but grandpa and grandma and the hired man, but it wasn't the sort of place you'd get lonesome in. There was always something to do. If there wasn't, we did it anyway.

Grandpa kept us straight in essentials, and was pretty indulgent, though he detested my slang and what he called Win's "Yankee twang."

Grandpa was a rabid old Scotchman, one of the regular "Scots wha ha," and he hated anything that didn't smack of the heather.

We went down this summer expecting to find things as usual, and they were at first. Win and I were both fifteen and no smarter than we fancied ourselves. We had a fairly good opinion of our own acquirements—I don't know that other people shared it—and above all, we didn't want to have any one else bothering around.

So that, when grandpa told us that another cousin of ours was coming to spend his vacation at the farm, Win and I kicked each other under the table; and when grandma said he was sickly and was coming down to see if the sea air would do him any good, we nudged with our elbows. His name was Reggie Talbot, and he was only twelve.

After dinner Win and I went out to a bench under the apple trees and talked it over. We were pretty mad. Here we'd planned so much fun for the summer and now this child was coming to spoil everything, for, of course, he'd want to be at our heels all the time and tagging around wherever we went. And, most likely, he'd be one of the whining, petted kind, and want as much looking after and humoring as a baby.

The more we talked it over, the worse we made him out, and at last we got worked up into a white indignation and felt as if we were very much-abused boys, who ought to have lived when martyrs were appreciated.

We grumbled about it all the afternoon, but by bedtime we had reached the stage of resignation. We said if our vacation was spoiled, it *was* spoiled, and the statement was wonderfully consoling.

After we went to bed we compared our mental photographs of Reggie. Win

thought he had red hair, eyes between gray and fishy-blue, and a squint. I leaned to the opinion that he was dark, and that he stuttered. After much discussion we decided we would see him when he came.

By next day Win got so far as to say that, since Reggie was coming, he wished he was there and had it over. When grandpa went to the station for him after dinner, we put off our fishing excursion on the carefully-explained grounds that it looked like a thunder shower, and stayed around home.

We were at the door when grandpa and Reggie drove up. Win said he looked exactly as he expected him to. I couldn't understand that, since Reggie was pale and freckled, with mouse-gray hair and shy, brown eyes.

He was the thinnest boy I ever saw, and his legs were no bigger than broomsticks. His appearance wasn't exactly taking, but you never can judge of a person by their looks.

Before a week was out, Win and I began to think we had been rather previous in counting our vacation spoiled. In fact, after we got used to Reggie we admitted he was a valuable addition.

He wasn't a bit troublesome or in the way, and such an obliging little chap—really quite useful. Win and I found it very convenient to have some one to run our errands and do lots of things we used to have to do ourselves.

He was the most innocent youngster! Everything Win or I said he believed as gospel, and when we discovered this we got some fun out of it. We would spin the most amazing yarns about our school and home life, piling up statements regardless—positively awful stretchers—and Reggie would stand before us, looking gravely up, and taking it all in, unsuspectingly and admiringly. I suppose it was dreadful. Neither Win nor I would have told a lie in earnest for the world, but we never thought how really wrong it was to impose so on Reggie's innocence.

We thought we saved our consciences when we winked at each other over his head. Not that we were bad to Reggie, you know. We were real kind to him, but we did tease him a good deal.

There was another thing for which we poked fun at him. He was dreadfully afraid of the dark, and he believed in ghosts, pure and simple. You couldn't coax Reggie to go anywhere alone after dark—no, not for anything—and grandma always had to leave a lamp burning in his room till he went to sleep. And, mind you, he was no coward, either. By daylight he was the spunkiest boy I ever saw.

There was as much spirit in his thin little body as Win and I had put together, and he would go right through with things that even we would stop to think over. Win and I said it was a pity such a spunky boy should be spoiled by one fault, and we fixed

up a plan to cure him, as we thought.

It was agreed that I should decoy Reggie to the shore after tea and keep him there till dark. Then, coming home, we were to pass the sheep-house—it was in a dismal spruce grove back of the barn—and Win was to appear in the door dressed as a ghost. Then I was to yell and run, as if I were frightened to death. We expected Reggie would beat his record for speed, and then we'd have a laugh at him and shame him out of his nonsense about ghosts.

We devised a costume for Win, and everything worked beautifully. After tea, I proposed to Reggie that we go to the shore for a swim, and he agreed, as unsuspecting as a lamb.

We had a pretty good time at the shore, watching the fishing boats through a spyglass and diving off the rocks. Reggie did some perfectly reckless things in this line. I just have to own up I wouldn't dare attempt them.

He was all right till sunset, and then he got anxious to go home. I put him off by saying I wanted to wait till the mackerel boats came in, and kept him there, on one pretext or another, till I thought it was dark enough. Then we started.

When we got up on the capes, Reggie was terrified to find how dark it really was—there was always a sort of lemon after-light reflected from the water that kept the shore quite light long after it was dark above.

He clung tight to my hand, shrinking closer and closer; and I knew that every tree and fence-corner we passed was just bristling with ghosts for him, and once, when a harmless old white cow got up suddenly from where she had been lying by the fence, I felt him trembling like a leaf. I began to feel real guilty and uncomfortable, with Reggie's cold, clammy little fingers clinging to mine, and I would really have backed out, only for the thought of Win.

Win said afterwards that, while he was waiting, he felt real remorseful, too, but stuck to it on my account; so there it was. But I hardened my heart, and when we reached the barn-gate, I whistled to warn Win, and, sure enough, as we came around the shed-corner, there he stood, in all his ghostly glory! And you never in your life imagined a more unearthly sight than he presented!

If I hadn't known what it was, I believe I should have taken a fit. As it was, I was actually creepish. He had a long white sheet pinned around him, and a pillow-slip, stuffed stiff with shavings, on his head. This brought his face about in the middle of his body, seemingly, and he had rubbed matches over it till it shone and flared fearfully.

Win made a noise to attract Reggie's attention—a dreadful hollow sort of groan and howl combined—he'd been practicing it all the afternoon out behind the barn,

where nobody could hear him—and I shouted and ran. I went so fast, that I couldn't stop till I got nearly down to the house. I pulled up, puffing, and had just time to wonder why Reggie wasn't at my heels, when I heard Win calling, "Guy! Guy!" from the barn.

Something in his voice made me go back quicker than I had come, if that was possible. I never want to feel again as I felt when I got up there. I've heard people wondering how a murderer must feel; I know as near as I want to!

There lay Reggie, just where he had dropped, in a limp little heap, with Win on his knees, in that ridiculous rig, begging him to speak.

"He isn't—*dead!*" I gasped.

I just went cold all over. It seemed to me whole years and centuries before Win got up, shakily, and said:

"No, no! His heart's beating. Oh, Guy, here! Let's carry him in, quick!"

Win took his feet and I took his shoulders and we marched down to the house and into the kitchen, with Reggie's white face hanging over my arm.

Grandma was setting bread and grandpa was reading an amusing Scotch story out aloud to her. He sprang up as we stumbled in, breathless and trembling. Grandma screamed and said she'd always expected it.

"Boys, what is this?" asked grandpa, in the tone he reserved for state occasions.

We never heard it more than two or three times in our lives, but those two or three times were sufficient. We stammered a few words. Grandpa waved his hand to the door.

"Go out," he said.

We went, dumb and repentant, and sat on the door-step till they brought Reggie to. We gripped each other in joy and shame, when we heard the poor child give a gasp and say, in a shuddering wild voice:

"Oh, don't let it catch me—don't!"

"You poor dear!" grandma sobbed. "No, no! Those miserable boys!" and carried him up stairs.

Win and I were still skulking around when grandpa came out; and such a solemn talking-to as he gave us! He didn't say anything more than our own consciences had said, but it sounded worse, put into words in cold blood. He pointed out what a mean, cowardly thing it was to scare a little fellow like Reggie, who was delicate and timid, instead of protecting him all we could, and showing forbearance to his little weaknesses.

He said Reggie's mother was a widow, and Reggie was all she had to love; and now, perhaps, we'd made him sicker than ever, and given him a fright he'd never get

over.

Grandpa said he noticed before several times that our behavior to Reggie wasn't all he could wish, but he hoped it was more thoughtlessness than any real meanness, and that this would be a lesson to us. I tell you, when he went in we were pretty sober. Win said he felt like a downright sneak. I said I guessed there was a pair of us.

It seemed to us we could never wait till morning. As soon as we knew Reggie was awake, we slipped in. The poor little chap was lying in bed, as white as the pillow, but he sat up when he saw us. Win and I just dropped on the edge of the bed and each of us took one of his thin little hands.

"Oh, Reggie," stammered Win—my face was just as hot as fire. I couldn't have spoken to save my life. "We were regular sneaks! Can you ever forgive us?"

"Of course," said Reggie. "Why, I know you didn't mean it to be so bad, you fellows. Honest, I don't mind. I know I'm a goose."

And he smiled up at us. We just sat there in silence for awhile till grandma came in and sent us out, saying Reggie was to stay in bed all day, and she hoped we were ashamed of ourselves.

Win and I went out to the apple tree bench and made a solemn vow that our first practical joke should also be our last. We had had enough of ghosts in all conscience! and we both said Reggie was a brick.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Our Practical Joke* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]