

MISS MARIETTA'S JERSEY.

By L. M. Montgomery.

IT was ten o'clock on a hot July morning, and Miss Marietta was helping Cordely shell the peas for dinner on the back veranda, which was always cool and pleasant, shaded as it was by Virginia creepers and sibilant poplars.

Miss Marietta, whose morning work was not done, was not dressed for the day. She had on her lilac wrapper, and her front hair was in curl papers. An ample white apron was tied around her trim waist and floated off in long, crisp streamers behind.

She was fair and forty, and could afford to admit it since she looked all of five years younger. Her round, plump face was flushed pinkly with the heat; she swayed easily back and forth in her rocker, holding the pan of peas in her lap, and running her fat, white fingers deftly up the green pods as she talked to Cordely.

Cordely was Miss Marietta's cousin and "stayed" with her. She was paid wages for so doing, but nobody ever thought of her as "hired help." She was much higher up in the social scale than that.

She was a thin, snapping, black-eyed woman, with angular elbows and nerves, and she shelled four peas to Miss Marietta's deliberate one. But then Miss Marietta took things easy, and Cordely never did. It wasn't her way.

"My, it's dreadfully warm, isn't it?" said Miss Marietta, making an ineffectual attempt to fan herself with a peapod. "I'm glad Hiram has decided not to begin haymaking until next week. I'm sure I shouldn't feel like cooking for a lot of men in such weather.

"And I do hope Mr. Randall will come this afternoon and see about buying that Jersey cow. I shall never feel easy in my mind until she's safely off the place," she concluded.

"I guess Nathaniel Griffith won't either," said Cordely, giving her chair a vicious hitch around. "I wonder if he's got over that last tantrum by now.

"My, but wasn't he mad! He knows your cow is ever so much better than his, for all they look so exactly alike, and that helps to rile him up."

"Well, it was very aggravating to find her in his best clover hay, I've no doubt," said Miss Marietta, soothingly. "I'm sure I shouldn't like to find his Jersey in my hay. But I must say I wouldn't get into such a ridiculous fluster as he did for all. And—oh, goodness me, Cordely! Look there!"

Miss Marietta pointed with a gasp across the yard. Cordely looked and saw. She sprang up, scattering peas and pods wildly over the clean veranda floor in her flight.

"Goodness gracious, Marietta! That cow has been in again. However could she have jumped out? And he's mad clear through."

Scuttling through the yard gate at a lively rate was a demure little Jersey cow, and behind her came Miss Marietta's next-door neighbor, Mr. Nathaniel Griffith, very red and puffing and angry as he bounced up the veranda steps and faced the two women.

"Now, see here, Miss Hunter," he spluttered, "this isn't going to do—I don't intend to put up with it. This is the third time, ma'am, I've found that Jersey cow of yours in my clover hay. Think of that! I warned you last time. Now, ma'am, what do you mean by letting her in again?"

Mr. Griffith stopped, perforce, for want of breath. Miss Marietta rose in distress.

"Dear me, Mr. Griffith! I'd no idea that cow was in again. I don't know how she got out, I'm sure. I'm very sorry—"

"Sorry, ma'am! Sorry isn't going to help matters any. You'd better go and look at the havoc that animal has made in my hay—trampled it from center to circumference. It isn't to be endured—I won't endure it!"

"Oh, you needn't scowl at me back there, Miss Cordely Hunter. I'm talking to Miss Marietta. I'm a patient man, Miss Hunter."

"Very!" Cordely could not have helped saying it to save her life, any more than she could have kept the sarcastic inflection out of it when she did say it. "Only your patience will be the cause of your bursting a blood-vessel yet, if you go on in such a fashion a hot day like this. If I was a man, Nathaniel Griffith, I would try to have a little common sense."

"Hush, Cordely," said Miss Marietta, with dignity.

"Mr. Griffith, I regret very much that my cow has been so much trouble to you. Perhaps if you had kept your fences in better order she might not have been. They are not very good, I notice."

"My fences are all right," snapped Mr. Griffith. "There weren't ever the fences built that would keep a demon of a cow like that out. Much a pair of old maids know about fences, or farming either."

Miss Marietta carefully set her pan of peas on a bench and stood up, the better to overwhelm Mr. Griffith. Her mild blue eyes were sparkling dangerously, and her cheeks were very red.

"I may be an old maid, Mr. Griffith," she said, with calm distinctness, "I've no doubt that I am; but it isn't because I've never had the chance to be anything else, and there are people not one hundred miles from here who know it, too."

Mr. Griffith grew pink all over his shiny little face to the very top of his bald head. He stepped backward awkwardly and fanned himself with his hat.

Miss Marietta was mistress of the situation after that last effective shot, and she knew it. Cordely could not repress a little chuckle of triumph as she watched him down the steps and across the yard.

When he passed out of sight up the lane, Miss Marietta sat down again with a sigh.

"Dear me, Cordely, how very unpleasant! And me to be caught in my wrapper and curl papers, too! We must certainly do something with that cow. It is quite unbearable. What a dreadful temper Mr. Griffith was in! and he has tramped those peas you spilled right into the floor."

"The old monster! I'd have liked to pitch the whole panful at his head," returned Cordely, vindictively. "Why didn't you fly at him? I'd have done it if I'd been in your place."

"Dear me, Cordely, what good would that have done? I've no doubt it was very trying to find that cow in his hay again. Of course, he need not have been quite so ridiculous."

"He can't and won't ever forgive you for refusing to marry him," said Cordely. "That's what's rankling in his mind—not Jersey cows or hay either. Didn't he get red, though? How many times did you refuse him, Marietta?"

"Twice," said Miss Marietta, with apparent satisfaction, "and the last time pretty decided, too. It doesn't become him to be casting up to me that I'm an old maid. He is an old bachelor because nobody would have him."

"I suppose it's no wonder the poor man flies into tempers. I should think it would spoil any one's temper to have to put up with a housekeeper like Mercy Fisher. I don't suppose the poor soul has a decent meal from one end of the year to the other."

"If you'd fly into a temper, too," said Cordely, who could not forgive Miss Marietta's easy-going ways, "when he comes here bickering about his hay, it would settle him."

"Law, I feel better now than if I had," laughed Miss Marietta. "You're too peppery, Cordely. Mr. Griffith does not mean half he says. You may be sure he's sorry for it already. He's always been so from a boy. But I shall certainly sell that cow. She's no milker and I don't like fracasas like this. Dear me, I feel quite upset, and what a dreadful state this veranda floor is in."

The thunderstorm that came up at noon and drenched everything well did not last long, and at two o'clock Miss Marietta and her handmaid were dressed for driving, and the carriage was at the door.

Miss Marietta had harnessed the horse, her hired man being away; and, moreover, she had shut the recalcitrant Jersey up in the milking pen.

"She can't possibly get out of that unless she tears the fence down," she reflected, complacently, as she tied up the gate. "She looks pretty quiet now. I dare say she's sickened herself on that clover hay. I'm sure I wish I'd never been persuaded into buying her."

"A woman is apt to make mistakes in judgment when it comes to farming, after all, though I'd never admit it to Nathaniel Griffith."

And Miss Marietta sighed as she looked over the trim, well-ordered fields of her neighbor to the right; perhaps it was on account of the shortcomings of Jersey cows with jumping proclivities; or it may have been because she discovered that she had slightly dragged the skirt of her new chocolate print in crossing the yard; or it might have been for neither of these reasons.

"I do hope that cow will behave herself while we're away," said Miss Marietta, as they drove out of the gate.

It was four o'clock when they got back with a wagon full of parcels. As they drove up the lane, Cordely uttered a shrill exclamation. Miss Marietta, absorbed in a mental calculation regarding the day's expenditure, looked dreamily in the direction of Cordely's extended finger.

Before them on the right extended Mr. Griffith's broad field of clover hay, wet and odorous and luxuriant; and there, standing squarely in the middle of it, up to her broad sides in sweetness, and blinking calmly at them over the intervening blossoms, stood the jersey cow.

Miss Marietta dropped the reins and stood up with a curious tightening of the lips. She climbed nimbly down over the wheels, whisked across the road, and over the fence before Cordely could recover her powers of speech.

"Goodness gracious, Marietta, come back," screamed the latter. "You'll ruin your dress in that wet hay—ruin it, do you hear? She doesn't hear me. The woman's gone crazy. I do believe. She'll never get that cow out by herself. I must go and help her, of course."

Miss Marietta was charging through the thick hay like a mad thing. Cordely hopped briskly down, tied the horse securely to a post, turned her neat plaid dress over her shoulders, mounted the fence, and started in pursuit.

Cordely could run faster than plump Miss Marietta, and consequently overtook her before the latter had made much headway. Behind them they left a trail that would break Mr. Griffith's heart when he should see it.

"Law's sake, Marietta, hold on!" panted poor Cordely. "I'm clean out of breath and wet to the skin."

"We—must—get—that—cow—out—before—Mr. Griffith—sees her," gasped Miss Marietta. "I don't care—if I'm—drowned—if we—can—only—do that."

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But the Jersey cow appeared to see no good reason for being hustled out of her luscious browsing ground. No sooner had the two breathless women got near her than she turned and bolted squarely for the opposite corner of the field. "Head her off," screamed Miss Marietta. "Run, Cordely, run."

And Cordely ran. Miss Marietta tried to, and the wicked Jersey went around the field as if she were possessed. Privately, Cordely thought she was. It was fully ten minutes before they got the cow headed off in a corner, and drove her out of a gap and down the lane into their own yard just as a buggy turned in that direction.

Miss Marietta did not often lose her temper, but at this critical moment she felt decidedly cross. Her dress was ruined, and she was in a terrible heat. Cordely, being thinner, had suffered less, but she slammed the gate behind her with a vicious emphasis. "There's Randall and his boy now," she said. "He's heaven-sent if ever a man was. If you don't sell him that cow straight off, Marietta, I'll give warning here and now. Land sakes! I won't get over this picnic all summer."

Miss Marietta needed no urging. Her gentle nature was grievously disturbed.

"Mr. Randall," she said, "if you've come for my cow you can have her at your own price. I'll give her away before I'll keep her another hour."

In exactly twenty minutes Mr. Randall drove away, and following him went his son driving the Jersey cow. Miss Marietta counted the roll of bills in her hand complacently, and Cordely looked after the disappearing bossy with malevolent satisfaction.

"I do hope we will have some peace of our lives now," she said.

It was sunset before Miss Marietta recovered her equanimity.

"I guess I'll go out and begin milking," she said to Cordely, who was folding up the next day's ironing at the table.

"You needn't come until you've finished with the clothes. I feel flustered yet, I declare I do, but it's such a comfort to think that cow is out of the way."

Five minutes later Cordely wheeled about at sound of her own name to see Miss Marietta standing white and shaken in the doorway. She whirled across the room, and caught the latter's lilac arm.

"Marietta Hunter, what's the matter! Are you going to take a turn? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"So I have—or something worse," said Miss Marietta, with a hysterical little giggle, as she dropped into a chair.

"Cordely Hunter, it was Nathaniel Griffith's cow that I sold to Robert Randall this afternoon. My own is out there in the milking pen yet."

A lesser shock would have rattled Cordely's nerves completely, but this was so great that it left her perfectly calm.

"Marietta Hunter! Are you dreaming?"

"Go and look for yourself, if you don't believe me," said Miss Marietta, tragically.

Cordely needed no second bidding. She shot out over the veranda, and flew across the yard to the gate of the milking pen. There looking calmly out over the bars, and chewing the cud of placid reflection, stood Miss Marietta's Jersey cow, as she had stood, probably, ever since her incarceration therein.

"I never did in all my life," gasped Cordely, stooping for the milking-pails that Miss Marietta had dropped. When she got back to the house she found the kitchen deserted, and charged into Miss Marietta's bedroom where she found the latter putting on her best dress with nervous haste.

"Land sakes, Marietta, this is a nice scrape to be in! What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Go up to Mr. Griffith's and explain, of course; that is, unless you'd like to go in my place, Cordely."

"Heaven forbid!" said Cordely, devoutly, as she dropped limply into a chair. "I'd

rather face a lion. I never did hear of such a piece of work. Mad isn't any word for what Nathaniel Griffith will be. I wonder you ain't scared to death, Marietta."

"Well, I almost am," returned Miss Marietta, tremulously, "but then you see, Cordely, it has to be done, if it's ever so humiliating. I suppose he'll say again that it's just what one would expect an old maid to do."

"There's no getting his cow back, for Randall said he meant to take her right down to Larksville and ship her on the 5:30 train. I shall offer him the money or my cow in her place, whichever he likes—and my cow is better than his, if she does jump. Oh, dear, my crimps all came out in that hurry-scurry this afternoon, and I look like a fright."

Miss Marietta started off bravely enough. Cordely watched her out of sight, and then picked up the milking pails again. "Laws me, won't there be a scene," she smiled.

Mr. Nathaniel Griffith was smoking a pipe on his front verandah and enjoying the view, while his housekeeper was milking. Mr. Griffith never dared to smoke a pipe inside his own house.

A henpecked husband is to be pitied, but a henpecked bachelor is the most forlorn creature on earth.

"Goodness me!" said Mr. Griffith, removing his pipe and jumping to his feet as he caught sight of Miss Marietta skimming up the lane. "If there ain't Marietta Hunter coming here as sure as a gun. She must want to see Mercy for something. I'm blessed if I want to face her after the fool I made of myself down there about that cow, darn her; but it won't never do to run, with Mercy 'way down in the yard, and she's seen me, anyhow."

Mr. Griffith did not run, but manfully stood his ground, though he got pinker and pinker until, when Miss Marietta sailed up the steps, he was crimson from chin to crown.

But Miss Marietta, in her own confusion, failed to notice this.

Oh, Mr. Griffith," she said, desperately, without wasting time on preliminaries. "I've—I've—something dreadful to tell you."

"Bless my soul, ma'am," exclaimed Mr. Griffith, "sit down, ma'am—do sit down. Has that cow of yours got into my hay again? But it's no difference—no difference, at all, ma'am—if she has. I was too hasty to-day, ma'am—far too hasty."

"Oh, it's worse than that," said poor Miss Marietta, taking no notice of the rustic seat Mr. Griffith pushed nervously towards her. "I—don't know how to tell you. I shut my cow up after you brought her home, and Cordely and I went over to Larksville after dinner, and when we came back we saw a Jersey cow in the hay again, and we chased her out, and Mr. Randall came along just then and I was so exasperated I sold her to him on the spot, and he took her away. And to-night when I went out to milk, there was my cow in the pen—and it was yours I had sold, Mr. Griffith."

And the revelation being over, Miss Marietta sat down on the rustic chair with a distinct sob.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Griffith. "What an extraordinary thing. Don't cry, ma'am, I beg of you. It's no difference at all—nothing to disturb yourself over, ma'am. There now, don't cry, my dear."

He stepped over and patted her shoulder nervously. Miss Marietta wiped her eyes.

"It's very good of you to say so, Mr. Griffith," she sobbed. "I do feel so dreadfully about it. Your cow is a hundred miles away by now, but I've brought the money over, or you can have my Jersey if you'd rather. She's a very good cow. I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am."

"No need to be sorry at all, ma'am," said Mr. Griffith, gently, still patting Miss Marietta's arm. "It was an accident, ma'am. One cow's the same to me as another. I'll take yours in her place, since you want to get rid of her. Now, don't think another thing about it. Bless me, I'd rather lose every cow I've got, than have your feelings harrowed up so, my dear."

Miss Marietta colored a little, and stood

up. "I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Griffith. Hiram will drive the cow over in the morning. I guess I must be going now, Cordely is milking all alone."

Mr. Griffith fidgeted down two steps, and up again.

"No hurry, ma'am. Mercy will be in in a minute or two. Sit down again, won't you, and have a neighborly chat. It's—it's lonesome here by spells."

Miss Marietta sat down again. It would be very uncivil to refuse under the circumstances. Mr. Griffith had been so nice about the cow; and it must be rather lonesome for a man to be there all the time with no company but a cross old housekeeper. He looked neglected. She felt sorry for him.

Cordely had almost made up her mind to start out and see if Mr. Griffith had murdered Marietta, when she saw two figures coming up the lane in the moonlight.

"There she is now," said Cordely, peering out of the kitchen window in relief. "What on earth kept her so long? And old Griffith's with her, or my name isn't Cordely Hunter! What can be going to happen?"

Miss Marietta and Mr. Griffith stood and talked at the gate for nearly half an hour, until Cordely thought they must both be demented. When Miss Marietta finally came in, with a very high color in her face, she found Cordely sitting blankly on a chair.

"Marietta Hunter," said Cordely, solemnly, "did I or did I not see Nathaniel Griffith kiss you out there at the gate?"

"I dare say you did," was the calm response, "especially if you happened to be peeking out of the window. We're—we're going to be—married."

"Well, I never did!" Cordely was overwhelmed. "Marietta Hunter, I've heard you say a dozen times, if you've said it once, that you wouldn't marry Nathaniel Griffith if he were the last man left alive on earth; and after your refusing him twice!"

"The third time's generally lucky, I've noticed," said Miss Marietta, loosening her bonnet strings, composedly. "Dear me, what a day this has been! If you could see the state that poor man's house is in, you'd think it time somebody took pity on him; and it's a woman's privilege to change her mind, you know. To be sure, I might never have changed mine if it hadn't been for that blessed Jersey. What could you do, Cordelia Hunter? You couldn't say 'no' to a man when he'd just forgiven you so beautifully for selling his prize cow. I couldn't anyway, and I don't know that I am sorry, either."—The Household.

—Singleton—What's the trouble, old man; you look all broke up.

Wederly—You would doubtless look broke up too if you had a mother-in-law like mine, and she—

Singleton—Ha! The old, old story; she's coming to spend a few weeks with you, I suppose.

Wederly (sadly)—No on the contrary, she has been with us for two months, and to-day she was compelled to return home. She nursed my wife through a bad case of fever, took care of the baby, attended to the household duties, mended my clothes and loaned me \$5 on three different occasions. Oh, I tell you that woman is an earthly angel if there ever was one.—News.

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