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MA' and the "GENERAL PIKE" PITCHER

BY GRACE MARGARET GALLAHER



"MOTHER," the rocking chair by the gate sounded slightly displeased with things, "do you feel promptings to the strenuous life?"

"In what form?" The steamer chair on the piazza was evidently inviting a nap.

"Um—er—say golf; I haven't played for days."

"Golf! A mile across lots to the links and three miles around them! Ask Lois."

"Lois is in one of her now-you-see-me-and-now-you-don't moods. I can't find—"

The stones on the wall rattled, and through the swaying rows of sweet peas came a breathless voice.

"The most wonderful find—right here—Joe says we can drive easily—now, to-day—for fear some one breaks it—"

"A 1697 carved chest or a hood-top highboy?" The tone would have dampened any but a true enthusiast.

"It's a 'General Pike' pitcher!" There was a pause for every one to take in the great news.

"And we yearn for a General Pike pitcher above all earthly joys?"

"Alas, the ignorance of one's own kin!" said Lois, coming out of the sweet peas. "Listen, Bess. It's one of the oldest and rarest pieces of native china. I've never even seen one, and father has hunted years for one. Think of its being up in this little Vermont village!"

"Who told you?" queried Bess.

"The postmistress. I asked her about old furniture and china the first day I came. I've just been down to the village. She was visiting up on 'Pond Meadow Hill' last week and saw an old pitcher in one of the houses; she can't remember whose, but she wrote down the name of the pitcher. Joe is willing to take us right up there now in the jolly-boat."

Driven by Lois's impetuosity, the aunt and the cousin packed themselves and their remonstrances into the jolly-boat, a wagon of mixed architecture, but unlimited capacity, and counseled Joe, owner of the vehicle, to drive to Pond Meadow Hill.

The sun still stood over Haystack Mountain, but "the sleep that lies among the lonely hills" was already creeping down its slope. Mrs. Gerard and Bess enjoyed the September beauty in silence. Lois brooded lovingly over the prize yet to be captured.

Lois's father possessed all the requisites for happiness but health. Shut out from the things of action, he gave his life to the things of the mind. A boyhood passed in an English village had given him a love for all the links that hold us to the past.

He had delved in old records and gathered about him the antiquities of

forced to be its own reward. The 1697 chest was genuine indeed, it crumbled feebly away under the ministrations of the freight handlers. The hooded highboy proved to be wearing a head-gear not its own, and its legs at least one hundred years too juvenile for it. The "Pittsfield Elm" plate revealed to the unfriendly daylight cracks seaming it from side to side.

Other calamitous disabilities appeared mysteriously in all Lois's treasures. But she was of the stuff of which martyrs and collectors are made. Each new expedition was "a triumph of hope over experience."

Mixed with the pure gold of her antiquarian passion was, it must be told, the dross of wounded pride. It was hard to be met always at the end of each hunt by the wise smiles of her father and his friends, and their "You see, my dear, a genuine platter would have—" or "You never find a really old chair with those marks on—"

"I do hope it hasn't got a great bite out of it like the George Third tureen!" said Lois to herself.

"Here's Pond Meadow," announced Joe, pointing to open fields which stretched away from a mountain lake. A few houses stood along the grassy road.

"Let's begin here!" cried Lois, nodding at a rambling old farmhouse, shining white and clean in the afternoon sun. "There's an old man on the porch."

asters, nasturtiums, hollyhocks and zinnias.

"You dear!" whispered Lois. "How nice to get it from such a place!"

The kitchen gate and door stood cordially open. The three peeped in as Lois knocked.

There must have been all over New England hundreds of such kitchens in the days of Adams and Jefferson. Absolutely clean, bare of all but necessities, and those of the clumsiest fashion, it spoke of toil and poverty.

But the little woman who entered from another door was eloquent of greater things. Her white hair and heavy wrinkles were defied by her straight shoulders and her eyes, in which burned immortal youth.

"Good afternoon!" She answered their greetings in a bright little voice. "Won't you walk into the fore-room?"

A touch of pride in her voice made them look eagerly about; here might be treasures. It was only the humblest of sitting rooms, with no carpets on the unpainted boards. Yet it represented Miss Polly's best; therefore her pride in it.

"A real pleasant day for a ride," she began.

"Yes," answered Lois's aunt. "We are having beautiful weather."

Lois, with the tact that was the wonder of the girls, divined the desire for information that would not satisfy itself by questions.

"We are spending the summer down in Searsboro," she said. "We drove up from there. We heard you had some old furniture we could look at."

Miss Polly sat straighter. "Just look around you. Everything's old. I'm most as old as the rest."

"We heard about a General Pike pitcher; perhaps you know about it," said Mrs. Gerard, who saw no reason for wasting time in overtures.

Miss Polly vanished to the kitchen. When she appeared she bore a squat, brownish and—to the unenlightened mind—ugly pitcher.

ment should not be allowed to interfere with her own good.

"Yes, I do want it very much," again urged Lois. Could it be possible she was to be balked of this find? "I have hunted everywhere for one, and so have others. If you do not think the price enough, I will give you more."

"That is a large sum," said Mrs. Gerard.

"I guess I know it. I guess I'd like to have it, too," said Miss Polly. "There's just one thing I've said I'd do these last twenty year if ever I found the money. I've vowed and declared I'd get a carpet for this fore-room floor. Ma and me, we made a rag one long about twelve—no, near twenty year ago; but it got wore out an' I took it up, for give me anythin', says I but holes. I do want that carpet the worst way. It's a trial when folks come to see me from Searsboro or Pleasant Valley to have to take 'em right in onto bare boards."

Lois looked steadily at the worn old face. She divined something behind the hesitation to sell, and she wanted to find out what it was.

"You feel differently about this pitcher than about anything else that was your mother's?" she asked gently.

"That's it. Everything here was ma's, but—" She looked at Lois, and then, as if to her alone, went on in a soft, shy voice, that gradually lost all shyness in depth of feeling.

"Ma an' me was about everything to one another. I was the oldest—there was six of us—and I planned with her comeways about raising 'em, pa being busy a good deal. Then by and by pa he went, and my sister Cynthy—the other girl—both in one year. The boys they died, too, terrible quick after that—we ain't long-lived, only just ma and me."

"Ma and me, we just had to be all in all to each other, it was so lonesome. I went out sewing by the day, 'way over to Pleasant Valley sometimes. But there wasn't any weather or any distance could keep me away a night from ma. By and by she took sick, and I stayed here all the time."

"Ma an' me took sights of comfort together, even if we were lonesome. What we liked best was to talk about old times, when it seemed as if this house was just full of children, and noise and goin's on. Pa was a great hand for a joke, and so was ma, and good-dispositioned! I don't know as I ever heard a sour word from her, for all she was so tried. And it wasn't such work living then, neither. Pa, he was pretty prosperous with his farm, and the boys, they was likely fellows. I guess there wa'n't a happier family in this country than we was. 'I'm comin' to the pitcher. The thing that seemed to bring it all back clearest was that pitcher. Ma, she didn't believe in tea or coffee for young ones, so we had milk breakfast, dinner an' supper. I can see ma just as plain, waiting for pa to get through the blessin' so she could begin pourin' out our mugs of milk."

"She always used that pitcher. It stood right in the north buttry window, where it's always cool, and she kept it full of milk. If any of us children come in hot and thirsty, ma'd get right up and pour us out a mug to cool us off. Somehow that pitcher just seemed to mean ma, so full of something good, and ready to give to us."

"Ma suffered terrible the last year. I can't tell you about that, even now. For days after she was gone, I couldn't look at anythin' she'd used; it brought her back to me, all worn an' thin an' sufferin'."

"One day, a week from the burial, I went into the buttry for the first time—Cousin Ezra Drew's folks had been stayin' here doin' for me—and I saw that pitcher on the shelf. And maybe you won't believe it, I seemed to see ma standin' by it. Not poor and sick, but rosy and smilin', like long ago. Nothin' would do me but I must have that pitcher on the table that night at ma's old place. There she was, like she always was, happy and ready to begin to help us."

"I don't believe in any spirits or manifestations from the other world, don't you think that; but as I'm a professin' Christian, whenever I put that pitcher in the buttry or on the table, and sit and think about them that's gone, I can bring ma back as she was when pa and the children was here. An' I don't feel so lonesome or lost, because I know I can have ma again any minute 'most the same as always."

Tears rolled down the little woman's face, but her voice was glad. The others were perfectly still. In Lois's mind

quick thoughts were leaping. She remembered stories like this where the heart had taken for itself some one symbol of those "loved long since, and lost a while."

The homely little vision had nothing grotesque for the girl, but was irradiated with the love that made it possible. What was the small sense of prosperity and elegance that would come to this lonely old woman from "a fore-room carpet" compared with the abiding happiness that was hers now in the nearness of her mother? How very slight a thing it seemed now, too, that the girl's father's vast collection should lack this particular curiosity!

As for her own hurt pride, now so near receiving balm, Lois's breath did go hard for an instant. It was such a prize she had found; and even the most learned of her father's collector friends had never yet achieved it!

She put the pitcher back into its owner's hands. "Do not sell it to me, Miss Polly," she said, very softly, "or to any one. None of your friends care about the carpet at all; they like you just as well without it. But to have a sense of your mother's presence is the most beautiful possession on earth."

"Lois," said her aunt, as they drove away, "I think it was really wrong in you to encourage that poor old creature in her delusions against her own interests."

Lois smiled. "I didn't want the pitcher, truly, auntie, not after—you see—well I think while she talked I saw 'ma' a little, too."—Youth's Companion.

She Got the Potatoes.

The man who forgets the obligations in the way of shopping imposed upon him by the women of his family when he leaves the house is not rare enough to excite curiosity, but the woman with sufficient wit and tact to checkmate this loss of memory is. One such lives in Pennsylvania. The Philadelphia Record says that she had labored for several days to impress upon her husband the necessity of sending home a bag of potatoes.

At last, when all her persuasions and injunctions had failed, she surprised him one morning by handing him a sealed letter, and asking him with great seriousness not to open it until he had reached his place of business. All the way down town he thought of the strange request, and he no sooner entered his office than he tore open the letter. This is what he read:

"Dear John: For some time past I have thought long and earnestly on what I have to say to you, and I have decided that this is the best method to communicate it. I have hesitated several times about writing to you in this way, but I find that I cannot conceal my thoughts longer. I must and will tell you all."

Here John's hair began to rise, but he heroically turned over the page and read on: "The potatoes have been out for a week. Please send home a bag. I thought by this method you would not be likely to forget."

The potatoes went up to the house that morning.

No Music in His Soul.

Mr. Finley, of South Carolina, makes no concealment of the fact that he has no ear for music, but he turned this lack of tuneful information into a joke a few days ago when a friend invited him to attend a concert. For the sake of old times Mr. Finley consented to sit through a varied program, which naturally afforded him little amusement.

"Don't you know that piece?" inquired his friend, when he seemed indifferent to inspiring strains.

"What is it?" replied the South Carolinian.

"Why, that's 'America.'"

"North or South?" he rejoined.—Washington Post.

An Old Custom in Damascus.

There is an ancient custom under which the olive groves around Damascus are guarded by official watchmen to prevent the trees being stripped by thieves. But on a certain date the governor, or some magistrate, issues a proclamation warning all owners of olive trees that they must pick their fruit, for after a certain date it becomes public property. If a farmer has his crop only half gathered when that date arrives the public will gather it for him.—Chicago Record-Herald.

Venice is increasing very rapidly in population. It had 17,000 more people last year than it had in 1891.



"MA'D GET RIGHT UP AND POUR 'S OUT A MUG TO COOL 'S OFF."

"I quake, Lois," whispered Bess. "He looks like Jupiter in the Flaxman Homer."

Evidently even the Olympians are as naught to your collector, for Lois was already saying in beguiling tones:

"Good afternoon, sir! We are very much interested in old-fashioned furniture, and we thought perhaps you had some we might look at."

"No, ma'am," replied the old man, with surprising quickness, "I ain't, but if I had you should have it so quick you wouldn't know who you be. Me an' my wife we perfectly hate it. Just look in thar, if you want to know what we favor for furniture."

He opened the door into a low, old room, with crooked windows and billowy floor.

"Oh!" cried the visitors in anguish. Red plush chairs and gilded tables crowded every space; huge chromos in gilded frames covered the walls.

"All our taste," rejoiced the owner. "No old traps for us. But some folks has other notions. Let 'em have 'em and welcome, I say. If you're that sort, you'd better go to Miss Polly Ann Pettis; her folks has been here longer'n any one. Right to the end of the road she lives."

The road soon grew to be no road at all, only a wide meadow running to the edge of the hill. Right at the end of things hung a little, low house, gray and moss-grown, its bit of a doorway a flame with autumn flowers,

"Oh!" cried Lois. Her eyes began to glitter with the collector's joy. She received it into her hands as if it were a sacred vessel. The most searching examination proved it flawless, without crack or nick.

The heart of the young collector fairly bounded. Here was a relic of bygone history for which her father had searched years; here was a trophy that would prove her something more than a silly girl, snatching up anything because she happened to see it in an old house.

Then she made Miss Polly a humble, gracious little speech, asking her to sell the treasure.

"Sell it!" cried Miss Polly. "No, indeed!"

"I will pay \$20 for it," urged Lois.

"Twenty dollars!" Miss Polly gasped a little. "Well, now, there's sights folks can do with a sum of money like that. But that there's 'Ma!'"

Her visitors stared. The little woman blushed red all over her white old face.

"Don't that sound foolish?" she cried. "I guess I ought to explain. I always call that pitcher Ma. You see, ma used it ever since I can remember. Ma's been dead ten year."

"But surely you have other relics of your mother. My niece is very anxious to own this special pitcher. It has historical value." Mrs. Gerard spoke decidedly, feeling that as this poor woman needed the money, senti-



SEE DORE A SQUAT, BROWNISH PITCHER

every country. He and his daughter had spent many days in little outworn villages picking up relics, curious or valuable.

At first Lois loved the old things because her father did, but gradually the collector's passion burned in her own breast.

Thus far perseverance had been