

THE Country Home

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A GREAT SCIENTIST LOOKS AT FARMING DR. KARL T. COMPTON

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Brother Beware

L. M. Montgomery

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There had been no change in the Randebush household at Upper Bartibog for fifteen years, ever since Nancy, beloved wife of Amos Randebush, had died. Amos, his brother Timothy, and Matilda Jollie just jogged along peacefully and contentedly. At least, Amos and Timothy were contented. If Matilda Jollie—who belied her name if ever a woman did—was not contented that was her own fault. She had a good place as housekeeper. Amos paid her fair wages and never growled when the biscuits were soggy or the roast was underdone. Sometimes when he looked at her, sitting at the head of his table, and contrasted her stringy, mouse-colored hair and pessimistic countenance with Nancy’s glossy tresses and rosy face, he sighed. But he never said anything.

Timothy was more philosophic. Matilda suited him very well. Nancy had been good-looking and a good housekeeper, but, blue cats, how she made you toe the mark in everything! You had to wear the soles off your boots scraping them before you came in. Even Amos had at times rebelled under her rule, though he remembered only her good qualities now. That was what women did to you, even after they were dead. Timothy thanked his stars that none of them had ever succeeded in bamboozling him. No, thank you! He had always hated them all in general and now he hated the Winkworth woman in particular. Dimples, by gad! Airs and graces, by jiminy! Taffy-colored hair and come-hither eyes! Blue cats! Could anyone have supposed Amos would be such a fool? Wasn’t one lesson enough? Evidently not, when you had a spineless creature like Amos and a plotting, wheedling, designing, desperate hussy like the Winkworth woman to deal with. Hold your horses! Amos might be quite helpless before her fascinations but he had a brother to save him in spite of himself.

Miss Alma Winkworth was boarding with the Knapps at Lower Bartibog. It was reported through the Knapps that she worked in Hillier’s Beauty Shoppe in Boston, that she had had an operation and had to have a longer vacation than her usual two weeks before going back to work. Timothy hadn’t a speck of faith in that operation. She wouldn’t look so blooming if she had had an operation. It was merely a play for sympathy. She had just come to Bartibog to see if she couldn’t get a man, and by golly, she was on the point of succeeding. Would succeed if he, Timothy, didn’t put a spoke in her wheel. And do it quick.

They had seen her first in church, sitting in the Knapp pew in front of them, a smiling creature, looking, as far as hair and complexion went, like a remarkably good advertisement for the beauty shop. Amos had never been the same man since. The next evening he went down to the Knapps’ on some trumped-up excuse and

that was the creature's opportunity. Look what she had done to him already. For all it was harvest time, when men had to work and sleep, Amos mooned through the day and when night came shaved and dressed, touched up his mustache, got out his car and went to Lower Bartibog.

Another bad sign was that Amos had suddenly become sensitive about his age. When, on his fiftieth birthday, Timothy congratulated him on attaining the half-century mark, Amos had peevishly remarked that he didn't feel a day over forty. The Winkworth woman had told the Knapps *she* was forty, no doubt to encourage Amos, for would any single woman admit to being forty if she had no nefarious purpose in it?

It seemed to Timothy that nothing less than a miracle could prevent Amos from asking the Winkworth woman to marry him. He had not done it yet—Timothy was sure of that from Amos' continual air of nervousness and uncertainty. But very soon he would screw up his courage to the sticking point. He would have to do it before another ten days elapsed for then he had to leave for the National Exhibition in Toronto, in charge of the consignment of silver foxes the Fox Breeders' Association was sending there. He would be absent for two weeks and the Winkworth woman's vacation would be over before he returned. So Timothy felt quite sure Amos would propose to her before he went.

No, by gad, he wouldn't! A lifelong, harmonious brotherhood was not going to be destroyed like this. Timothy had an inspiration from heaven. Jones Island! There was your answer to prayer!

The details caused Timothy considerable anxiety. Time pressed and, rack his brains as he might, he could think of no way to lure the Winkworth woman to Jones Island unbeknownst to anyone. But Providence opened a way. Mrs. Knapp came up to the Upper Bartibog store and dropped in to have a visit with Matilda Jollie. They sat on the back porch and rocked and gossiped until Timothy, lying on the kitchen sofa just inside the window, heard something that brought him to his feet in another flash of inspiration. Miss Winkworth, so Mrs. Knapp said, was going to Charlottetown to spend a day or two with a friend who lived there. She was going on the boat train.

So this, Timothy reflected scornfully, was why Amos had seemed so dull and depressed all day. Blue cats! He must have it bad if the prospect of being parted from his ladylove for a couple of days had such an effect on him. Well, the hotter the fire the quicker it burned out. Amos would soon get over his infatuation and be thankful for his escape.

Timothy lost no time. He felt sure Amos was going to take her to the train, but Amos' car was still visible down in the store yard. Timothy strode out to the barn and got out his own car.

"Now, where's *he* going?" said Mrs. Knapp, as Timothy's car swung out of the yard.

"Must be to the harbor after fish," said Matilda. "He'd have shaved and dressed if he was going visiting. Forty-five if he's a day, but vain as a peacock."

"Well, he's a real good-looking man," said Mrs. Knapp. "Way ahead of Amos, if you ask me. Amos is what you might call insignificant."

"D'ye think Amos and your boarder are going to make a match of it?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Mrs. Knapp cautiously. "He's certainly been very attentive. And I think she's pretty tired of struggling along by herself. But I can't be sure—she's one to keep her own counsel."

The Winkworth woman was sitting on the Knapp veranda when Timothy drove up. She was dressed for traveling in a very natty suit and a smart, little hat with a green bow and she had her packaway at her feet.

"Evening, Miss Winkworth," said Timothy briskly. "Sorry my brother couldn't come—he's detained at the store by business—I've come to take you to the train."

"That is lovely of you, Mr. Randebush."

She certainly had a pleasant voice. And a very elegant figure. And a way of looking at you. All at once Timothy remembered that he hadn't shaved for three days and that bits of chaff were sticking to his sweater.

"I guess we'd better hurry," he said grimly. "It's near train time."

The Winkworth woman stepped into the car unsuspectingly. Timothy glowed. This was far easier than he had expected. But the crux would come when he turned off the Upper Bartibog road down the deep-rutted, grass-grown track that led to the bay shore. She would smell a rat there. She did.

"This—this isn't the road to the station, is it?" she said, with a little note of wonder in her voice.

"No, it isn't," said Timothy, more grimly than ever. "We aren't going to the station."

"Mr. Randebush . . ."

The Winkworth woman found herself staring into very stern eyes.

"You're not going to be hurt, miss. No harm of any kind is intended if you do just as you're told and keep quiet."

The Winkworth woman, after one gasp, kept quiet. Probably she thought you

had to humor madmen.

“Get out,” said Timothy when they reached the end of the road. “Then go right down the wharf and get into the boat that’s tied there.”

There was nobody in sight. The Winkworth woman walked down the wharf, Timothy following close behind, feeling splendidly bold and buccaneery. Blue cats! This was the way to manage them.

When they were off and skimming merrily over the bay, she said gently, with a disarming little tremor in her voice, “Where—where are you taking me, Mr. Randebush?”

No harm in telling her.

“I’m taking you to Jones Island, miss. It’s four miles across the bay. I’m going to leave you there for a few days and my reason is my own business. As I’ve said, you won’t be hurt and you’ll be quite comfortable. Mr. Wilson’s summer house is on the island and I’m caretaker for him. The Wilsons went to Europe this summer instead of coming to Bartibog. There’s plenty of canned stuff in the house and a good stove, and I reckon you can cook.”

She took it admirably—you had to hand it to her. Some women would have been in hysterics. She did not even ask him what his reason was. Likely she guessed, darn her. Sitting there as cool and composed as if being kidnaped was all in the day’s work for her.

“Don’t you think somebody will raise a hue and cry when I’m found missing?” she asked after an interval.

“Who’s to miss you?” he said. “Amos will think you got afraid of losing the train and took another chance.”

“Your brother wasn’t taking me. I was going up with the fishman from the harbor,” said the Winkworth woman gently. “But when I don’t come back day after tomorrow won’t Mrs. Knapp wonder?”

“No. She’ll think you’ve just been induced to stay longer in town. Besides, what if she does start wondering? She won’t have any idea where you are. She’ll think you’ve just gone back to Boston to get out of paying your board.”

The Winkworth woman said nothing in reply to this cruelty. She looked afar over the sunset harbor. She *had* a way of tilting her head. Little taffy-colored curls escaped from under the edges of the hat. Suddenly, she smiled. Timothy experienced a queer, tickly sensation in his spine.

“The wind is west tonight, isn’t it?” she said dreamily. “And, oh, look, Mr.

Randebush, there's the first star!"

As if nobody had ever seen a star before! Of course she knew she was showing that pretty throat of hers off when she lifted her face to the sky. This kidnaping of women was a darned dangerous business. He didn't like that sensation in his spine. Maybe she didn't think he meant it about leaving her on Jones Island. She'd likely be good and mad when she found he did. Well, there was plenty of room there to be mad in. Four miles from anybody. Nothing but fishing boats ever went near Jones Island and they never landed. No light would show through the solid shutters and if anybody saw smoke coming from the chimney, they'd think it was only he, Timothy, airing the house. By golly, but it was a masterly trick, this!

"Stars are quite common in Bartibog," he said shortly.

The Winkworth woman spoke not again. She sat and looked at that confounded star until they were close to the boat pier on Jones Island.

"Now, Miss," said Timothy briskly, "we're here."

"Oh, Mr. Randebush, do you really mean that you're going to maroon me on this lonely place? Is there nothing I can say will make you change your mind?"

"Miss," said Timothy sternly—all the more sternly because there was no doubt in the world that there was a fascination about her—"try molding granite if you want an easy job, but don't try to change a Randebush when he has once determined on a course of conduct."

She stepped meekly out on the pier. Meekly she walked before him up the path. A very beguiling fragrance seemed to exhale from her, another advertisement for the beauty shop, no doubt.

The Wilson house was built on the high, rocky point on the north of the little island. All the windows were shuttered with good, strong wooden shutters. Doors and shutters were securely locked and Timothy had all the keys. There was everything in the house one wanted for comfort—canned foods, coffee, tea, running water.

"You can be quite comfortable here, Miss. It's dark, of course, but there's plenty of lamps and coal oil. The bed in the north room upstairs is aired—I saw to that yesterday."

Without another word, he went out and locked the door. As he did so he suddenly felt a twinge of compunction. It was too much like locking the door of a jail.

"Don't get maudlin, Timothy Randebush," he told himself sternly. "Amos has got to be saved and this is the only way. You know she can't be let run loose. She'd

signal some fishing boat quicker'n a wink. The boats always run close off Jones Island when they're coming in."

Halfway across the bay he suddenly thought. . . . Blue cats! Were there any matches in the Wilson house? He had lighted a lamp when he went in, but when she had to refill it, it would go out and what then?

To his wrath and amazement Timothy found himself unable to sleep. Well, you didn't kidnap a woman every night. No doubt it did something to your nervous system. If he could only stop wondering if she had any matches! Blue cats! If she hadn't, she couldn't light a fire to cook with! She'd starve to death. No, she wouldn't. The meat in the cans was already cooked. Even if it was cold, it would sustain life. Turn over and go to sleep, Timothy Randebush.

Timothy turned over, but he did not go to sleep.

The worst of it was he could not take her matches in the morning. The wheat had to be got in, and for him to start off on a cruise to Jones Island, which would take the best part of the forenoon, would be to arouse Amos' suspicion—or so thought Timothy's guilty conscience. The day seemed endless. When the last load was in, Timothy shaved and dressed in a hurry, and, not waiting for supper on the pretense of having to see a man at the harbor on business, got out his car and started for the shore, stopping at the store to get matches.

The evening had turned cold and foggy and a raw wind was blowing over the bay. Timothy was chilled to the bone when he landed on Jones Island. But when he unlocked the kitchen door, after a preliminary knock for manners' sake, a most delightful sight greeted his eyes, and a most delightful smell, his nostrils. A cheery fire was burning in the range, and Alma Winkworth, in a trailing, lacy blue dress, protected by a rose-colored apron, was frying codfish cakes on it. The whole kitchen was filled with their appetizing odor, blent with the aroma of coffee. A plate of golden-brown muffins was atop of the warming oven.

She came forward to meet him eagerly, a warm, friendly smile on her face. Her cheeks were flushed from the heat of the stove, her rich hair curled in tendrils around her forehead, and her eyes shone. Timothy actually thought this and then was horribly ashamed of such a thought. Maudlin, that's what it was—worse than Amos. Blue cats, there was something the matter with the pit of his stomach! It had been the spine before, now it was the pit of his stomach. It must be the smell of that supper. He hadn't had a mouthful to eat since twelve o'clock.

"Oh, Mr. Randebush, I'm *so* glad to see you," she was saying.

"It occurred to me you mightn't have any matches, and I'd better bring you some," said Timothy gruffly.

"Oh, wasn't that clever of you," she said gratefully. Timothy didn't see where he was so clever, but she contrived to make him feel like a Wonder Man.

"And won't you sit down awhile, Mr. Randebush?"

"No, thanks," Timothy was gruffer than ever. "I've got to get back and get my supper."

"Oh, Mr. Randebush, won't you have a bite with me? There's plenty for two—and it's so lonely, eating alone."

Timothy told himself that it was the smell of the coffee that was weakening him. He loved coffee. And the dishwater Matilda Jollie called coffee! He found that his hat was taken and he was being gently pushed into a chair.

"Just sit there until I lift my codfish cakes. I know better than to try to talk to a hungry man."

Such codfish cakes—such muffins—such coffee! And such common sense! No bothering you with conversation. She just let you eat your fill in comfort. To be sure, that queer sensation still persisted, even though his stomach was no longer empty. But what matter? The less attention you paid to your stomach the better.

"It's really very nice to have a man in the house," said Alma Winkworth after Timothy's second cup of coffee.

"I s'pose you find it rather lonesome," said Timothy gruffly. Then reproached himself for his gruffness. It was necessary of course, to save Amos from her, but one didn't need to be a clown. The Randebushes always had prided themselves on their good manners. But she wasn't going to get around him with her blarney and her lonesomeness. *He* had cut his eye teeth.

"A little," she said wistfully. "You might sit awhile and talk to me, Mr. Randebush."

"Can't do it, Miss. Thank you for the supper. I must be getting along."

She was looking at him admiringly, with her hands clasped under her chin. It was years since a woman had looked admiringly at him.

"I suppose you haven't an aspirin about you?" she was asking wistfully. "I'm afraid I have a headache coming on. I take one occasionally."

Timothy had no aspirin. He thought about it all the way home and most of the night. Suppose she was there alone suffering? There was no help for it—he'd have to go next night again and take her some aspirin.

He took the aspirin. He also took a bulging brown paper parcel containing pork

chops and two pounds of butter wrapped in a rhubarb leaf. Matilda Jollie never knew what had become of it.

He found Alma Winkworth sitting by a rock maple fire in the living-room. She wore a cherry-red velvet dress with little red drops in her ears. Blue cats! What women could carry in packaways!

She ran to meet him with lovely dimpled hands outstretched.

“Oh, I’ve been waiting for you all the evening, Mr. Randebush, *hoping* you would come! And you’ve brought the aspirin! You are really so kind and thoughtful. You *must* sit down and talk to me a little while.”

Timothy, who had come to the conclusion that the feeling in the pit of his stomach was chronic, sat down slowly.

“Amos worked his first wife to death,” Timothy found himself saying, without the least idea why he said it. Then he was overcome with remorse. “No, he didn’t. She worked herself to death. But he didn’t prevent her.”

Again, remorse. Blue cats! What sort of a man was he, slandering his brother like this?

“I don’t suppose he could have prevented her.”

Alma Winkworth was laughing. Her laugh, like everything else about her, was pleasant.

“You *have* such a knack of putting things, Mr. Randebush.”

The firelight sparkled and shimmered over her shining hair and her beautiful dress. Timothy could see her thus quite clearly all the way home. She had thanked him so appealingly for his visit and asked him if he couldn’t come again. Well, he might—after a night or two. Of course, it was mighty lonely for her there, with not even a dog to talk to. Suppose he took her a dog? No, that would never do. A dog might attract attention by barking. But a cat, now? The very thing. She had mentioned that she was fond of cats—also that she had heard a rat. He’d take her a cat; he’d better take it the next evening.

By four o’clock the next day Timothy was skimming across the bay. In the bow was a yowling, squirming, shapeless thing—Matilda Jollie’s cat tied up in a potato bag. Timothy suspected Matilda would raise Cain when she missed her pet, but after kidnaping women you grew callous in respect to cats.

Alma insisted that Timothy have supper with her and she was delighted with the cat. While they sat and talked after supper, she held the creature on her lap and caressed it. Timothy had a spasm of horror when he realized he was envying the cat.

The next day Amos suddenly announced that he was starting for Toronto on Monday instead of Wednesday. There was some fox business to be attended to before the Exhibition came on. Timothy was relieved. Amos had not been a very cheerful housemate of late—worried because Alma Winkworth was lingering so long in Charlottetown, likely.

Well, Amos would soon be gone, and he could let Alma out. The thought plunged him into gloom instead of exultation. It took him some little time to realize what had happened to him. He did not go near Jones Island that night or the next night—would not have gone for a million he told himself. But he had to go the third night for Amos was safely on his way to Toronto and there was no longer the slightest need for keeping Alma Winkworth mewed up.

“I thought you were never coming back. I’ve missed you so,” she said with tender reproach. With one look of those soft, pansy-blue eyes Alma could say more than most women would utter in a year. Their sorcery had undone Timothy and he knew it at last.

“I’m a wreck—shattered fore and aft,” he thought dismally. He had really felt it ever since the moment she had looked at the star. It was kind of a relief to admit it.

“Amos has gone to Toronto, and I’ve come to let you out,” he said desperately.

For a fleeting second it struck him that she didn’t look overjoyed. Then she said slowly:

“Would you mind telling me . . . now . . . why you brought me here in the first place?”

“To keep Amos from proposing to you,” Timothy blurted out. She might as well know the worst of him.

“Your brother asked me to marry him the night before you kidnaped me,” she was saying quietly. “I . . . I said ‘no.’ I felt I didn’t . . . couldn’t . . . care enough for him. I . . . I couldn’t marry anybody unless I loved him . . . I really couldn’t . . . much as I’d like to have a home of my own.”

She had said it—but it didn’t make sense. Timothy stared blankly at her. She smiled mischievously at him.

“Of course, it would have been very nice to have been related to you, dear Mr. Randebush.”

There was *something* . . . in the way she spoke . . . the way she looked. Blue cats! Did she . . . could she . . . suppose she . . . ?

Timothy cleared his throat.

“Miss Winkworth . . . Alma . . . I was never one to beat around the bush. Will

you marry *me*? I . . . I admire stars, too. I've got a good house on my farm . . . if it's fixed up a bit and a veranda built on. . . . I'd like to take care of you. . . .”

Alma Winkworth smiled again—with a little relief in the smile. No more insolent and absurd customers for renewed beauty—no more lean vacations in cheap boarding houses! *And* the handsome man she had admired so much the first time she saw him in Bartibog church.

She came close to him. Timothy Randebush, tingling with the first thrills of love, found himself clasping her in his arms.

An hour . . . or a century . . . later Timothy, carrying the cat and the packaway, turned down the hall to the side door.

“We’ll go out this way, darling. It’s easier walking for you down to the beach than from the other doors.”

He set down the packaway and the cat, selected a key and tried it. It would not turn. He tried the knob. The door opened easily.

“Blue cats! This door is unlocked,” he exclaimed.

“It has been unlocked ever since I came here,” said Alma Winkworth demurely.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Brother Beware* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]