

CHAPTER XXVII

A STUDENT'S ROMANCE

No, dearies, Grandfather is not going to write you about a college romance of his own. In the first place, if you have read the preceding pages, you will know that Grandfather was much too busy with more important matters to have a college romance and in the second place, even if Grandfather had had a college romance, it would be embarrassing in writing in collaboration with Grandmother for Grandfather to tell you about it.

No, it is the romance of Harding, who ate the fifteen pieces of pie as recorded in the preceding chapter, and if you bother to read the story, you will find it filled with rather unusual incidents. It started back in Brodhead one summer day when Harding and your grandfather went fishing. We had had good luck and, in accordance with a custom designed to keep the fish from spoiling, we had put one after another as we caught them, on a long string and kept them in the water one end of the string being fastened securely to the bank.

In the afternoon we noticed some girls fishing down the river. This was an unusual sight, for the boys considered the river their exclusive preserve. We decided to make a call and found some "little girls", i.e. probably a whole year younger than ourselves. They had had no luck and we offered to bait their hooks. But, alas, their angle worms were a mess. "What in the world is the matter with the angle worms?" we asked. "You see," explained one of the girls, "we could not bear to put

the squirming things on our hooks, so we killed them by pouring boiling water over them." With uproarious laughter we explained that fish did not like cooked food. This appeared to peeve the girls, so we returned to our fishing hole.

Later, however, they designed to return our call and in their turn appeared to have a good joke which we failed to understand. But after they had disappeared in the direction of home and we had caught another fish, alas, the line holding all our catch was broken and all the fish were gone. How in the world had that happened? Then it dawned on us - the rascally girls had cut the line and let the fish go.

Our indignation ran high, and there were no symptoms on that day that a romance had started. Some weeks later, however, when Grandfather was still nursing his peeve about the rascally girls and his fine string of fish, he was surprised to hear the rather unbelievable news that Harding was paying friendly calls on one of these same rascally girls. Harding acknowledged this was quite true - as a matter of fact, the girls was not quite so incorrigible as he had thought, and in fact, he rather enjoyed calling on her.

Now these calls by Harding adorned, as related in a previous chapter with Bolshevik whiskers, was not to the liking of the girl's father and he threatened that if Harding ever dared to call again he would kick Harding off the premises. Now if Mr. Gordon, for that was his name, had really wanted Harding for a son-in-law, he could not have thought of a better way to bring it about; for, you see, Harding would have to go again and again to see whether Mr. Gordon really meant to

stage a kicking championship. For in kicking Harding thought himself proficient.

You see, Harding had sold stereoscopes and stereoscope pictures to farm homes which in those days were protected by fierce dogs. Harding professed not to be afraid of any dog that walked. His philosophy was - "If a dog barks, forget him, he won't do anything worse than sneak around behind you and nip a piece out of your trousers. But if the dog growls and settles back on his haunches, wait until he springs for your throat and then give him a quick kick in the stomach and the dog will lie down and regret the encounter while you sell the Missus a stereoscope."

But the old man changed his tactics. Harding would soon be off to college and the high school romance would be forgotten. Perhaps Mr. Gordon would have been right except for another entertaining bet between Harding and Lucas. Harding got busy at college, as written above, sawing cord wood, making grimaces at sophomores and getting his lessons, while his roommate Lucas, with sufficient allowance from home to keep him from want, became something of a lion with the ladies.

As the Christmas holiday vacation came near, Lucas offered to bet Harding a Freshman came that he would take Harding's girl away from him during the holiday. Harding took Lucas up, the decisive event being the taking of Miss Gordon to church the first Sunday evening of vacation. Lucas started corresponding with Mattie Gordon, for such was her name, Harding continued his neglect. Arriving home, Lucas hustled around and fixed it up for Mattie to go with himself to a party, to which it had been planned that Harding should take her, and at this party got her

acceptance of his offer to take her to church on the specified Sunday, in all of which Harding evinced no interest.

But the Saturday evening preceding this appointed Sunday, Harding called on Mattie with his blandest smile and minus the Bolshevik whiskers, which he had discarded upon entering the University, and frankly telling her the story of the bet, suggested that she throw Lucas overboard and go with him, which she did.

Perhaps I ought to finish my story of the cane and the girl. First the cane - Lucas bought Harding a Freshman cane all right and Harding, proud of himself, swung down the street with his cane and a good swagger, past the rooming house where sat a Sophomore on his own Sophomore doorstep. This Sophomore, noticing this lordly swing unbecoming to one who was a mere Freshman, made a remark which Harding did not like and Harding, turning aside, smashed his new Freshman cane over the head of said Sophomore. Strangely enough - at least strangely enough if you had not taken a good look at Harding in his Freshman days - he completed his Freshman days without being hazed.

Now for the girl - the romance developed apace. Harding graduated from Wisconsin with an excellent record, took some graduate work abroad and came to be recognized as an expert in the bacteriology of milk. He came to look like an acceptable son-in-law to Papa Gordon and the wedding day was set and guests invited to a home wedding. Harding was to meet the out-of-town guests at the 10 a.m. train and the wedding was set for noon. But no one met the out-of-town guests. Mattie was quite disturbed. The home town guests arrived and noon came and passed

and still no word from Harding. Some of the guests volunteered to hunt for him - you will remember that there were no telephones in that day - and about 1 o'clock he was found in a cabbage field intently studying the life methods of the cabbage worm.

Waking him out of his reverie, the searcher shouted: Have you forgotten this is your wedding day?" "Oh, no," said Harding, quite unconcerned, "I do not have to meet the guests until 10 o'clock." "But it is now 1 o'clock." "Great Scott," says Harding, "I was to have been married at noon." Well the wedding though a bit delayed, was brightened by Harding's irrepressible optimism and Harry and Mattie lived happily ever after and some years later Grandfather understood that one of their children turned out to be "a chip off the old block."

Perhaps in explanation of the cabbage worm incident, it should be added that at just this time the entire cabbage industry, which was an important factor in Wisconsin's economic life, was threatened by the cabbage worm and scientists of the University of Wisconsin were making strenuous efforts to solve the problem. It would be a fitting close to the story to have Harding find the solution, but this story is fact, not fiction, and one must record that it was another scientist who one day observed one cabbage in a badly infested field had not been touched. This cabbage, as Grandfather understands it, is the ancestor of all present-day Wisconsin cabbages and they are unattractive, for some reason, to cabbage worms.