

LITTLE ZOURI'S VALENTINE.

A Child's Message of Love That Brought Abiding Peace.

By FRANK H. SWEET.

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It was the 15th of February, the day had come out and made things look very bright and happy, and in the southern country the light was so warm and pleasant that three little girls had come out among the grass and trees to write their valentines. These girls were Betty Gramberry, three little states, as they were called. The two Gramberry brothers, Seth and Louie, were farmers, and their large farms joined. The brothers were twins.

They were married on the same day. There had been a sort of agreement between them that whenever a baby girl came to the household of either she should be given the name of a state in the Union.

So it came about that when some years had gone by there were six little states. Three in each family. The boys did not count in this Union, for it would not do to call a boy Let's in Mississippi.

Then came the time when Seth and Louie ceased to be twins to sport. They had a serious quarrel about the planting of a division stake and the ownership of three or four feet of land. Seth in the end won, and Louie had planted the same stake on his own land and was angry with him.

From that day the brothers had not spoken to each other and the six little states, who passed to each other but were separated.

Set's Valentine's day was near and beautiful. Moon after moon, without a word to any one Zouri put up a mean deal, and, hanging her sunbonnet on her arm, started away on her mission. Seth had been watching her all day. He saw her start from home, but said nothing.

She reached the point where the road crossed the head of the old mill pond. She knew that Uncle Joe's was put far beyond, but Zouri had never been very brave about crossing the pond. There was only a narrow plank way across, and it seemed so near the water, and so many fishes and noisy frogs and other queer creatures lived right under this plank, and the water looked so quiet and dark.

When Zouri reached this point in her journey she stopped a moment, a little frightened, and was almost ready to turn back and go home. But she did not do this. She began to sing, and as she sang she ran lightly across the plank.

Zouri was on Uncle Joe's farm now and hoped to find him in some field, not far away. As she went along the road she was looking to the right and left for a sign of a man. He was standing to watch her at the stake and had a white shirt and a hat that she had seen at the mill.

"What if it was you, Zouri?" being a fact that she had proposed to this fact. But she did not shake her resolution.

She had written the valentine in the way she had meant from the beginning to write. She left Georgia and Louisiana now and ran, patting her bare feet over the grass, to the fence that separated the yard from the roadway.

"She's gone to the field where pa is," Georgia said as she watched Zouri disappear down the roadway.

"Yes, and what's more," Louisiana answered, "she'll make pa say she can't do anything she wants to."

They were right in guessing that Zouri had gone to find her father. She knew that he was somewhere in the fields, looking about his farm and planning the spring sowing.

Every few minutes her voice rang out in a loud call, "Poppy, where are you?"

At last from a distance she heard the answer, "Hello, Zouri! Is that you? I'm down in the potato field."

When she reached him he placed her on the highest rail of the fence, while he stood beside her and listened. There had always been a strong bond of sympathy between him and this little girl, perhaps because she was "a chip of the old block."

"What's the matter with poppy's little girl?" he asked.

"It's Louisiana and Georgia. They've been bothering me."

Zouri's cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright.

Seth looked at her for a moment.

Then he took her sunbonnet from her hand and passed it on her head.

"What have they been bothering you about, honey?"

Zouri quietly took the sunbonnet off as she answered, "The same I said I was going to do something you didn't want me to. But I just have to do it, poppy. It would make me feel so bad if I didn't."

Seth's face looked grave.

"Well, honey," he said soberly, "did you come away out here to get me to let you do a thing after I had told you you couldn't?"

"No, poppy," she said, "I just come to get you to make Georgia and Louis any let me alone and stop being mean to me."

"Zouri, is it anything had you want to do?"

"No, it ain't."

"What is it, honey?"

"I can't tell you, it's a secret."

"Will you tell poppy some time?"

"Yes, if you ain't mean to me like Louisiana and Georgia."

He was silent, she slipped from the fence and took his hand, and they started together across the heads to ward home.

"Zouri, put on your sunbonnet. You'll catch cold."

Zouri obeyed. Poppy, she said, "what did you and Uncle Joe get an' g'ry about? Did he treat you mean when you wanted to do anything?"

Seth started. Joe had been in his mind more than once that day, because it was the anniversary of the planting of the stake and Seth had stood for half an hour to the side of the stake, waiting for some one to come with him.

No Zouri. Joe would not let his name be used in the stake. It was not his name. When he saw her going to the mill with him, she answered and the sunbonnet came off again.

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Is that a fact, Zouri? Little Louie on a run-up, and he'll be late. What if it was you, Zouri?"

There was no answer, and they walked home the rest of the way in silence.

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Zouri's tender words. "Did she hear the wedding?" he murmured.

As he stood there he heard her calling from far down the road.

Uncle Joe, "Oh I know."

He turned and saw Zouri running toward him, some what pale and frightened. He stopped and held open his arms, and she rushed into them. Then he kissed her sweetly.

"I was afraid to cross the plank at the pond," she said.

"Never mind, Zouri," he said, "I'll take you over the pond."

He held her gently in his arms and carried her as easily as if she had been a baby.

"Did you get it, Carlo Joe?" she whispered.

"Yes, honey. It was the best little letter that ever I had. How'd you happen to send it, Zouri?"

"Cause I wanted to after you told me about Lenny, and I ain't angry with you any more. Uncle Joe. I told poppy so too."

The day was drawing to a beautiful close. All along the side of the water and in the woods and fields the sounds of night could be heard as the shadows of twilight grew longer and the last rays of light of the day melted into darkness.

Zouri slipped from Uncle Joe's arms to the ground after they had safely passed the pond but she held his hand.

"Is it too, Joe?"

hand, and he saw that he must take her home or at least within sight of the house.

"Zouri," he asked, "did your father know you were going to bring me that valentine?"

"No, I didn't tell him what it was. He knew I was going to do something but didn't want me to, but Georgia and Louis say now, and they told me I'd be whipped for it. But I won't."

They were drawing near home now. The lightest shades of dawn were about with a cheerful light in the darkness.

It was you at the big gate, Zouri. You won't be afraid then, I reckon.

Zouri did not answer, and Joe felt a pain at his heart as he thought came that after all the child did not care whether he went farther or not.

Here he was, she cried suddenly.

"How's your father, he's a fine fellow. Now he'll know you come to and sit on the other side of the chimney."

Yes, there was Seth coming along behind her, and she pressed Zouri's hand, and she was glad to see her.

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Glassware and Hardware.

On occasions of impending danger people sometimes do what seems to them most absurd at other moments. When the steamship America, which carried one of the Ziegler exploring expeditions to Franz Josef Land in 1903, was being crushed by ice the following winter it became necessary to abandon the ship in haste.

Orders were given to unload upon the ice everything that would be of use in the long winter yet before the men. The work must be done with dispatch.

While the crew was passing the bags over the side of the ship the cook, who was of an excitable nature, and a large bag, which he heaved over with all his strength. It struck the ice below with a resounding crash, causing one of the sailor's to exclaim:

"Hello, cook, what was that?"

"Oh, that is all right," he answered. "It was lamp chimneys and fatirons."

But it was hardly all right, for during the winter they were obliged to cut the bottoms out of pickle bottles and use them in place of chimneys that had been broken.

At this moment his eye fell on a small boy at the end of the class who was evidently paying very little attention to what was said.

"You know that story," he demanded.

Without a moment's thought the youngster electrified his teacher by replying:

"Pawn his tools!"

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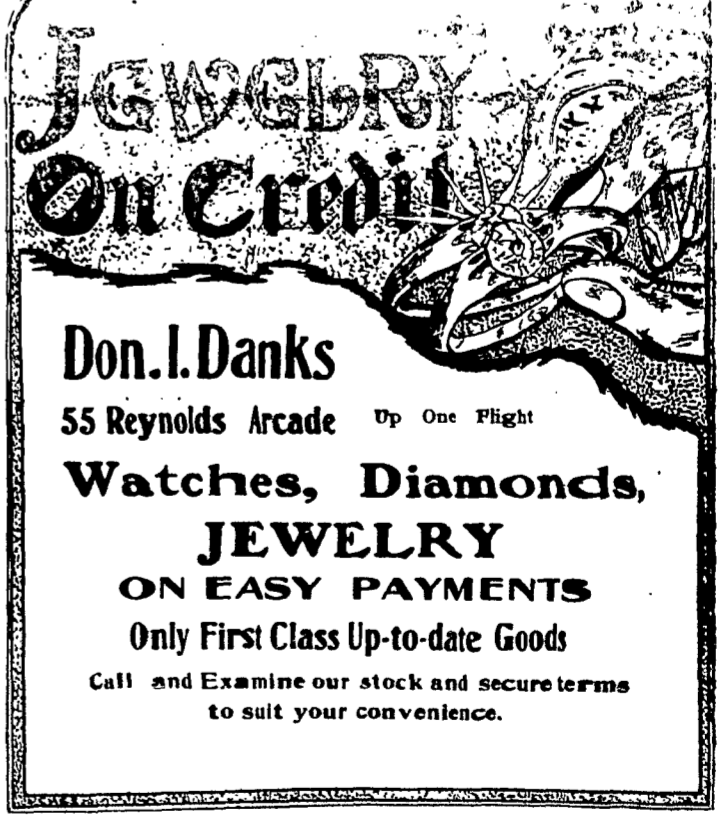
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