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OUR ATTIC

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Our Attic

When a bit of furniture or an article of clothing is placed in our attic, it is not just a bureau or just a coat being put aside; it is the discarding of a mode of living, a manner of thinking. As soon as a new chair is bought for the parlor the old one finds its way to the attic, where it is stored for possible future use. It is almost a creed with Mother to put into the attic the dresses and trousers that have been outgrown, for she believes that "they may come in handy sometime." It was because of this idea of Mother's that I had to wear, in my early years, Mary's dresses that were already handed down to Ann three years before. As I idle in our attic among these stored things, ~~of~~ the past is revived for me. To finger a bedstead means to touch an old life; to don a gown is to wrap myself in an atmosphere of a past concept of living.

Perhaps nothing focuses the past before my eyes more vividly than the pictures of bygone days. I can always find a storehouse of photographs in a worn, red plush album with a Liberty Bell mirror on the cover. There is Mother and Dad's wedding picture, yellow with age. Dad, minus his moustache, and Mother, slim as a reed, make such a charming couple. As I turn over a

page of the album I come upon a postcard family photograph of one of Father's friends. Something about the picture makes me pause before turning. There, before a "company house", almost in the center of the picture, sits a middle-aged miner in shirt sleeves and suspenders, awkwardly holding a gaping baby. On his left stands his wife wearing a full, white skirt and a white, fringed scarf on her head, in contrast with her black blouse. But on his right, occupying a prominent position in the picture, lo and behold! stands a beer keg. From this picture I am led to believe that the beer keg formed an integral part of the family in some homes in those days. On another page Miss Mary, the neighbor spinster, beams up at me, clothed in the height of fashion of two decades ago — a wide, brimmed straw hat decorated with bluets and cherries set evenly upon her head, and a dark, lapelled suit, the skirt of which reaches the pointed toes of her oxblood shoes. I can hardly imagine why anyone would ever want to wear such clothes in order to be well dressed; I can imagine how foolish I would look in such a costume. But this outfit is not so odd when I compare it with the bizarre clothes worn by the young woman in the tinted picture. Garbed in Slovakian dress she sports an embroidered scarf and four or five gay-colored aprons each a couple inches smaller than the one under it. Her blouse with puffed sleeves is of very flowery material and is embroidered with bright-colored threads. As I look over these old pictures of Mother and Dad, of my brothers and sisters, of friends and

neighbors, as well as of myself, I am, for a moment, amused. But as I linger among them I am transported back to gone days, to foreign lands, and I take part in the events of the past in a fanciful life.

If the old album contains a past that I can see and re-live, the scarred trunks in our attic are filled with a past that I can touch as well, for here are kept the clothes of those days, of those pictures. Neatly folded near the top of an "old country" trunk is Mother's wedding dress. It has long puffed sleeves and Slovakian lace forms the collar and cuffs and cuffs. Made of brocade taffeta, it is already beginning to crack. As I run my fingers delicately over it I can visualize my mother, a girl thousands of miles from her home, bravely marching to the altar, and to a new home in a new country. In the same trunk are two white and two black silk scarfs. These have not been laid away for many years. I can remember when all the Slovak women in the neighborhood wore such scarfs instead of hats. Mother was one of the first few who began to put to put aside this Slovak custom, much to the scorn of Mrs. Micklus and Mrs. Kolman and Mrs. Saksa. And now all the scarfs have been put away and hats reign supreme. There are still a few a few dresses that had been handed down to me by my older sisters. ^{Among them} ~~There~~ is the yellow flannel jumper that I liked so well and ^{which} ~~that~~ shrunk the first time I washed it. A large trunk behind the chimney contains mostly long woolen underwear. When I was in the primary grades I could ^{not} put on my stockings without leaving a big hump above the ankle where the the legging bunched. As rayon and silk replaced the woolen

"undies", these woolens began to fill the trunk in the attic. A pair of trousers, which Father wore when he came to America are seemingly displaced in this overflowing chest. Fitting snugly about the ankles they must have made Dad look like an Ichabod Crane. Most of the clothes are useless, but Mother doesn't like to throw things out. I think she is as much a sentimentalist as she is a practical person and wants to keep them for their meaning to her more than for their monetary worth.

Leafing thru the pile of magazines which Mary insists upon keeping in one corner of the attic I see numerous instances showing how rapidly progress is assimilated by us. The Liberty for March 15, 1930 carries a full page advertisement of the American Federation of Musicians. In the background of the cartoon is a "Theatre with Sound" next to a grocery store. Coming out of the store and the theatre is a flock of cans. There is Corn escorting Baccini; Beets dances with Beethoven; Apple Sauce grinds his organ, "Penny Music" and Verdi applauds. Marching down the street are the Robot Brands bearing a sign reading "Profits before Art." In the foreground Raspberries has come upon the platform and is gallantly congratulating triumphantly smiling Canned Opera, and Schubert, Beans, Mozart, Peas, Bach, and Prunes cheer from below. A sign on the piano padlocked piano reads "Out of Order." Beneath the cartoon is the verse:

--I went to the Canned Goods fair,
The prunes and the tunes were there--"

while the headlines blaze: "Have you, too, heard the Cannery racket---the little tin-clad 'Sound' operas and jazz numbers, so joyously welcomed here by the delicatessen set?" This advertisement vividly recalls to memory the change from silent to "sound" movies. I remember well my first experience at a Talking picture. The Orpheum was showing "Vitaphone" pictures for the first time. The theatre was crowded. I waited in anxiety. The picture started. The voices sounded harsh and loud. The change was too complete; but I had no doubt that this "Canned Music" was here to stay. Satirizing advertisement would not drive it out. Taken for granted now, yet in so recent years had there been controversy over "Canned Music"--- the conflict between the new and the old.

Each piece of furniture tells a story of happiness, of struggle. The parlor suite---very delapidated-- stands in mute evidence of days of hardship; days when the worn plush plush could not be replaced; days when Mother knelt on the thin rug to clean the sawdust which kept sifting out in spite of the many times the bottom had been sewed and boarded. Lumps in the sofa are the result of a brood of lively children who delighted in jumping up and down on anything that would give. I think everyone in the family had slept in the folding bed at one time or another. In the days of its active life every space had to be utilized. Each morning it was folded up and pushed into the corner. This bed was a favorite of mine for on it I could play tunes when I couldn't fall asleep; fine wires

were strung across the head~~ing~~. The oaken cradle is a
veritable relic .In it all eight of us children were
rocked to sleep to the tune of "Bubkaj Baby". In it I was
was rocked; In it I rocked my younger brothers and
sisters. From it have come wailings and laughter. The
dirty rag rope with which I rocked it still hangs from
its side looking so forlorn and hanging so limply. I
can still feel the tug I gave this rope and the sudden
pull on me when the cradle was ~~on~~ the end of its runners.
The rope served as a kind of warning to me for my eyes
were always in a book, and to spill the baby out of the
cradle would mean giving up my book—I found nothing
more dreadful than rocking a cradle and, just rocking.
Happy days were those in spite of hardships, for there
was always a baby to care for and to make the wolf at the
door leave in disgust.

In the heavy boxes which are where the rafters
make an angle with the floor are souvenirs of my
"playdays". The babydolls with broken heads, baldheaded,
minus an arm or leg remain here just as I left them
years ago. "Poodie", my "niggerdoll" that Buster gave me
on my fifth birthday still is exclusively lying in a
separate box, keeping warm against the fur of my nanny-
goat for she was my favorite at the time I put her away.
Her hair was my especial worry; it was always tangled and
always needed combing. These dolls were my children;
they were as much alive to me as Mother's babies; were to be

they needed washed, and I gave them baths; They had to be fed and I fed them with tiny spoons from Red Riding Hood dishes. Great indeed was the change when I found greater pleasure playing ball in the field or shooting "aggies" in the back yard with my brothers than taking care of sick dolls or playing house with them.