

*Sheba Blake Publishing*

AUNT  
**JANE'S**  
NIECES AT MILLVILLE

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**EDITH VAN DYNE**

*Aunt Jane's Nieces at Millville*

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*Edith van Dyne asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.*

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## One

# *Uncle John's Farm*



**H**ow did I happen to own a farm?" asked Uncle John, interrupting his soup long enough to fix an inquiring glance upon Major Doyle, who sat opposite.

"By virtue of circumstance, my dear sir," replied the Major, composedly. "It's a part of my duty, in attending to those affairs you won't look after yourself, to lend certain sums of your money to needy and ambitious young men who want a start in life."

"Oh, Uncle! Do you do that?" exclaimed Miss Patricia Doyle, who sat between her uncle and father and kept an active eye upon both.

"So the Major says," answered Uncle John, dryly.

"And it's true," asserted the other. "He's assisted three or four score young men to start in business in the last year, to my certain knowledge, by lending them sums ranging from one to three thousand dollars. And it's the most wasteful and extravagant charity I ever heard of."

"But I'm so glad!" cried Patsy, clapping her hands with a delighted gesture. "It's a splendid way to do good—to help young men to get a start in life."

Without capital, you know, many a young fellow would never get his foot on the first round of the ladder.”

“And many will never get it there in any event,” declared the Major, with a shake of his grizzled head. “More than half the rascals that John helps go to the dogs entirely, and hang us up for all they’ve borrowed.”

“I told you to help *deserving* young men,” remarked Uncle John, with a scowl at his brother-in-law.

“And how can I tell whether they’re deserving or not?” retorted Major Doyle, fiercely. “Do ye want me to become a sleuth, or engage detectives to track the objects of your erroneous philanthropy? I just have to form a judgment an’ take my chances; and when a poor devil goes wrong I charge your account with the loss.”

“But some of them must succeed,” ventured Patsy, in a conciliatory tone.

“Some do,” said John Merrick; “and that repays me for all my trouble.”

“All *your* trouble, sir?” queried the Major; “you manage all *my* trouble—well, and your money. And a heap of trouble that confounded farm has cost me, with one thing and another.”

“What of it?” retorted the little round faced millionaire, leaning back in his chair and staring fixedly at the other. “That’s what I employ you for.”

“Now, now, gentlemen!” cried Patsy, earnestly. “I’ll have no business conversation at the table. You know my rules well enough.”

“This isn’t business,” asserted the Major.

“Of course not,” agreed Uncle John, mildly. “No one has any business owning a farm. How did it happen, Major?”

The old soldier had already forgotten his grievance. He quarreled persistently with his wealthy employer and brother-in-law—whom he fairly adored—to prevent the possibility (as he often confided to Patsy) of his falling

down and worshipping him. John Merrick was a multi-millionaire, to be sure; but there were palliating circumstances that almost excused him. He had been so busily occupied in industry that he never noticed how his wealth was piling up until he discovered it by accident. Then he promptly retired, "to give the other fellows a chance," and he now devoted his life to simple acts of charity and the welfare and entertainment of his three nieces. He had rescued Major Doyle and his daughter from a lowly condition and placed the former in the great banking house of Isham, Marvin & Company, where John Merrick's vast interests were protected and his income wisely managed. He had given Patsy this cosy little apartment house at 3708 Willing Square and made his home with her, from which circumstance she had come to be recognized as his favorite niece.

John Merrick was sixty years old. He was short, stout and chubby-faced, with snow-white hair, mild blue eyes and an invariably cheery smile. Simple in his tastes, modest and retiring, lacking the education and refinements of polite society, but shrewd and experienced in the affairs of the world, the little man found his greatest enjoyment in the family circle that he had been instrumental in founding. Being no longer absorbed in business, he had come to detest its every detail, and so allowed his bankers to care for his fortune and his brother-in-law to disburse his income, while he himself strove to enjoy life in a shy and boyish fashion that was as unusual in a man of his wealth as it was admirable. He had never married.

Patricia was the apple of Uncle John's eye, and the one goddess enshrined in her doting father's heart. Glancing at her, as she sat here at table in her plain muslin gown, a stranger would be tempted to wonder why. She was red-haired, freckled as a robin's egg, pug-nosed and wide-mouthed. But her blue

eyes were beautiful, and they sparkled with a combination of saucy mischief and kindly consideration for others that lent her face an indescribable charm.

Everyone loved Patsy Doyle, and people would gaze longer at her smiling-lips and dancing eyes than upon many a more handsome but less attractive face. She was nearly seventeen years old, not very tall, and her form, to speak charitably, was more neat than slender.

“A while ago,” said the Major, resuming the conversation as he carved the roast, “a young fellow came to me who had invented a new sort of pump to inflate rubber tires. He wanted capital to patent the pump and put it on the market. The thing looked pretty good, John; so I lent him a thousand of your money.”

“Quite right,” returned Uncle John, nodding.

“But pretty soon he came back with a sad tale. He was in a bad fix. Another fellow was contesting his patent and fighting hard to head him off. It would take a lot of money to fight back—three thousand, at least. But he was decent about it, after all. His father had left him a little farm at Millville. He couldn’t say what it was worth, but there were sixty acres and some good buildings, and he would deed it to you as security if you would let him have three thousand more.”

“So you took the farm and gave him the money?”

“I did, sir. Perhaps I am to blame; but I liked the young fellow’s looks. He was clean-cut and frank, and believed in his pump. I did more. At the climax of the struggle I gave another thousand, making five thousand in all.”

“Well?”

“It’s gone, John; and you’ve got the farm. The other fellows were too clever for my young friend, Joseph Wegg, and knocked out his patent.”

“I’m so sorry!” said Patsy, sympathetically.

The Major coughed.

"It's not an unusual tale, my dear; especially when John advances the money," he replied.

"What became of the young man?" asked the girl.

"He's a competent chauffeur, and so he went to work driving an automobile."

"Where is Millville?" inquired Uncle John, thoughtfully.

"Somewhere at the north of the State, I believe."

"Have you investigated the farm at all?"

"I looked up a real estate dealer living at Millville, and wrote him about the Wegg farm. He said if any one wanted the place very badly it might sell for three thousand dollars."

"Humph!"

"But his best information was to the effect that no one wanted it at all."

Patsy laughed.

"Poor Uncle John!" she said.

The little man, however, was serious. For a time he ate with great deliberation and revolved an interesting thought in his mind.

"Years ago," said he, "I lived in a country town; and I love the smell of the meadows and the hum of the bees in the orchards. Any orchards at my farm, Major?"

"Don't know, sir."

"Pretty soon," continued Uncle John, "it's going to be dreadfully hot in New York, and we'll have to get away."

"Seashore's the place," remarked the Major. "Atlantic City, or Swampscott, or—"

“Rubbish!” growled the other man, impatiently. “The girls and I have just come from Europe. We’ve had enough sea to last us all *this* season, at least. What we pine for is country life—pure milk, apple trees and new mown hay.”

“We, Uncle?” said Patsy.

“Yes, my dear. A couple of months on the farm will do all of my nieces good. Beth is still with Louise, you know, and they must find the city deadly dull, just now. The farm’s the thing. And the Major can run up to see us for a couple of weeks in the hot weather, and we’ll all have a glorious, lazy time.”

“And we can take Mary along to do the cooking,” suggested Patsy, entering into the idea enthusiastically.

“And eat in our shirt-sleeves!” said Uncle John, with a glowing face.

“And have a cow and some pigs!” cried the girl.

“Pah!” said the Major, scornfully. “You talk as if it were a real farm, instead of a place no one would have as a gift.”

Uncle John looked sober again.

“Anyone live on the place, Major?” he inquired.

“I believe not. It’s gone to ruin and decay the last few years.”

“But it could be put into shape?”

“Perhaps so; at an expense that will add to your loss.”

“Never mind that.”

“If you want farm life, why don’t you rent a respectable farm?” demanded the Major.

“No; this is my farm. I own it, and it’s my bounded duty to live on it,” said Uncle John, stubbornly. “Write to that real estate fellow at Millville tomorrow and tell him to have the place fixed up and put into ship-shape order as quickly as possible. Tell him to buy some cows and pigs and chickens, and hire a man to look after them. Also a horse and buggy, some saddle horses—”

“Go slow, John. Don’t leave such a job to a country real estate dealer. If I remember right the fellow wrote like a blacksmith. If you want horses and rigs, let Hutchinson send you down the right sort, with an experienced groom and stable hands. But I’m not sure there will be a place to put them.”

“Oh, Uncle!” exclaimed Patsy; “don’t let us have all those luxuries. Let us live a simple life on the farm, and not degrade its charms by adding city fixin’s. The cow and the chickens are all right, but let’s cut out the horses until we get there. Don’t you know, dear, that a big establishment means lots of servants, and servants mean worry and strife? I want to let down the bars for the cow when she moos, and milk her myself.”

“It takes a skilled mechanic to milk a cow,” objected the Major.

“But Patsy’s right!” cried her uncle, with conviction. “We don’t want any frills at all. Just tell your man, Major, to put the place into good living condition.”

“Patrichia,” softly remarked the Major, with an admiring glance at his small daughter, “has more sinse in her frizzled head than both of us put together.”

“If she hadn’t more than you,” retorted Uncle John, with a grin, “I’d put a candle inside her noodle and call her a Jack-Lantern.”

## Two

### *The Agent*



**T**he Major hunted up the real estate dealer's former letter as soon as he reached his office next morning. The printed letter-head, somewhat blurred, because too much ink had been used, read as follows:

Marshall McMahon McNutt, Real Estate Dealer & Horses to Pasture by the week or month.

Also Plymouth Rock Hens & Road Commissioner Agent for Radley's Lives of the Saints Insurance and Watermelons My Specialty

Millville, Mount County, N.Y.

The Major shook his head doubtfully as he read the above announcement; but Mr. McNutt was the only known person to whom he could appeal to carry out John Merrick's orders. So he dictated the following letter:

*Dear Sir,*

*Mr. John Merrick, the present owner of the Wegg farm at Millville, desires to spend his summer vacation on the premises, and therefore requests you to have the house and grounds put in first-class shape as soon as possible, and to notify me directly the work is done. Have the house*



*thoroughly cleaned, the grass mowed around it and the barns and outbuildings repaired wherever it may be necessary. You are also instructed to procure for Mr. Merrick's use a good Jersey cow, some pigs and a dozen or so barnyard fowls. As several ladies will accompany the owner and reside with him on the place, he would like you to report what necessary furniture, if any, will be required for their comfort. Send your bill to me and it will receive prompt attention.*

After several days this reply came:

*Mister Doyle you must be crazy as a loon. Send me fifty cold dollars as an evvidence of good fayth and I wull see what can be done. Old Hucks is livin on the place yit do you want him to git out or what? Yours fer a square deal Marshall McMahan McNutt.*

“John,” said the Major, exhibiting this letter, “you’re on the wrong tack. The man is justified in thinking we’re crazy. Give up this idea and think of something else to bother me.”

But the new proprietor of the Wegg farm was obdurate. During the past week he had indulged in sundry sly purchases, which had been shipped, in his name to Chazy Junction, the nearest railway station to Millville. Therefore, the “die had been cast,” as far as Mr. Merrick was concerned, for the purchases were by this time at the farm, awaiting him, and he could not back out without sacrificing them. They included a set of gardening tools, several hammocks, croquet and tennis sets, and a remarkable collection of fishing tackle, which the sporting-goods man had declared fitted to catch anything that swam, from a whale to a minnow. Also, Uncle John decided to dress the part of a rural gentleman, and ordered his tailor to prepare a corduroy fishing costume, a suit

of white flannel, one of khaki, and some old-fashioned blue jean overalls, with apron front, which, when made to order by the obliging tailor, cost about eighteen dollars a suit. To forego the farm meant to forego all these luxuries, and Mr. Merrick was unequal to the sacrifice. Why, only that same morning he had bought a charming cottage piano and shipped it to the Junction for Patsy's use. That seemed to settle the matter definitely. To be balked of his summer vacation on his own farm was a thing Mr. Merrick would not countenance for a moment.

"Give me that letter, Major," he said; "I'll run this enterprise myself."

The Major resigned with a sigh of relief.

Uncle John promptly sent the real estate agent a draft for five hundred dollars, with instructions to get the farm in shape for occupancy at the earliest possible day.

"If Old Hucks is a farm hand and a bachelor," he wrote, "let him stay till I come and look him over. If he's a married man and has a family, chuck him out at once. I'm sure you are a man of good taste and judgment. Look over the furniture in the house and telegraph me what condition it is in. Everything about the place must be made cozy and comfortable, but I wish to avoid an appearance of vulgarity or extravagance."

The answer to this was a characteristic telegram:

*Furniture on the bum, like everything else. Will do the best I can. McNutt.*

Uncle John did not display this discouraging report to Patsy or her father. A little thought on the matter decided him to rectify the deficiencies, in so far as it lay in his power. He visited a large establishment making a specialty of "furnishing homes complete," and ordered a new kitchen outfit, including a modern range, a mission style outfit for a dining-room, dainty summer

furniture for the five chambers to be occupied by his three nieces, the Major and himself, and a variety of lawn benches, chairs, etc.

“Look after the details,” he said to the dealer. “Don’t neglect anything that is pretty or useful.”

“I won’t, sir,” replied the man, who knew his customer was “the great John Merrick,” who could furnish a city “complete,” if he wished to, and not count the cost.

Everything was to be shipped in haste to the Junction, and Uncle John wrote McNutt to have it delivered promptly to the farm and put in order.

“As soon as things are in shape,” he wrote, “wire me to that effect and I’ll come down. But don’t let any grass grow under your feet. I’m a man who requires prompt service.”

The days were already getting uncomfortably warm, and the little man was nervously anxious to see his farm. So were the nieces, for that matter, who were always interested in the things that interested their eccentric uncle. Besides Patricia Doyle, whom we have already introduced, these nieces were Miss Louise Merrick, who had just celebrated her eighteenth birthday, and Miss Elizabeth—or “Beth”—De Graf, now well past fifteen. Beth lived in a small town in Ohio, but was then visiting her city cousin Louise, so that both girls were not only available but eager to accompany Uncle John to his new domain and assist him to enjoy his summer outing.