

CLING PEACHES

The seeds were placed in the hard dusty earth, and moistened with doses of water while lying, covered in darkness and buried. In two weeks fragile seedlings had appeared. They were tiny, and a pale green. Old Hiram, though stiffened with age, nurtured them conscientiously. They grew, it seemed to him, slowly, spindly. Perhaps old Hiram just felt time was outrunning him; nevertheless he waited, and watched them inch by half-inch. They developed more little leaves, and looked less fragile. Hiram gave them a gauzy shade awning, and carefully watered the earth from which they had sprung. In a couple of months Hiram could remove the awning, for the days had begun to shorten; and the now sturdier seedlings seemed robust enough to start some real growth as able before the resting dormancy of the colder months.

In spring new leaves had peeped out, and drank in the rains. Hiram watched; and as the days warmed the small shoots grew by bounds until they had reached a respectable and healthy height,

though still only about nineteen inches, encouraged by the spring sun. Hiram was pleased with their progress; and felt that next spring, barring unfortunate problems, they would have achieved the young size of adolescent trees. Still, it would take several years for them to mature to bearing. Nevertheless, Hiram could already anticipate their juicy fruits, and the remembered bounty of gone childhood—fresh in hand peaches, peach shortcakes, pickled peaches, peach preserve jam, peach cobbler and perhaps the *piece de resistance*, peach ice cream.

Hiram would remember how earnest, even then as a child under the sultry shade of an old pecan tree, were the churnings of the ice creams on those long and languorous summer Saturday afternoons. The sisters had peeled the peaches; with the flat side of an axe his aunt had cracked, wrapped in a tow sack, the ice block and finely chipped it with a pick. Hiram's job was to swirl the crank that would eventually yield forth a treasure. After the first half-hour he would call, "Is it done yet?"; but always he was admonished to continue churning for a while longer until feeling the sweet resistance, and the patience of waiting. Then, the even longer patience of waiting as the cream under

a wet towel in its' ice bath was left undisturbed to 'ripen'. So long ago—those lost days.

Of course, Hiram considered that the future was unpredictable—that the trees might continue on in their lives and that he might not see their eventual fruit if he himself did not last so long. One can not predict the future. However, one cannot but long for it; and undaunted hope is ever-present that one can expect to see a future unfolding as long as possible breath abides. Hope—the occupation enabling one day to the next.

Spring moved on into early summer, and Hiram noted delightedly that the trees were doing quite well; it was a season of warmth and comfortable breezes. Hiram was comfortable as well, and mostly content. It was noticeably increasingly more difficult to manoeuvre the outdoor expanse at the rear of the ancient house, but he felt compelled to persevere with certain chores on days when the weather was agreeable. Often he would anticipate again the likely arrival of glorious golden red peaches. At times he roamed among the rows of the orchards of memory—in a nostalgia for times of a luscious but foggy youth. Life had stretched into a long, wearying yet amiable, walk, up hills and down. Once, in reverie, he remembered again an ordinary

incident that had happened in his childhood, involving a simple family happenstance. Hiram had been about twelve years old. Hiram's father, who had become a parent only rather late in life, was a mostly stern father; but, nevertheless, was a man fond of occasionally having a good time, and of providing at some times the rare family diversion that was available to rural life centered on a small remote farm. It was a summer—a late-July—at that time in the year when everything was growing peacefully and work was at a doldrums. Father, thinking of the stories that might impress his village cronies, had decided that the family would be certain to enjoy a visit to a recently opened amusement park in a near city; it would be an educational as well as fun-filled day, that would assure familial camaraderie and great good will at a reasonable expense. He, according to his humour, planned a surprise for the kids, telling them only the day before, so they could excitingly plan to dress appropriately in light summer “duds”. Early, Mother had prepared a summery tropical ambrosia that would serve as a picnic, and would be a light repast while avoiding a hot kitchen when they returned home. That Sunday, they packed the car with necessities, maps, ambrosia, hats, water jug, as well as leaving a space for Father's sister. Weather was predictably hot—but perfect. Excitement was the

start of the day; and could only grow upward. And grow, it steadily did. Early in their arrival crowds were not exhausting, the park was clean, the educational aspects of the attractions and rides were glowing, such fun, the rides giddy and exciting, the sodas and snacks refreshing, and the day was exquisite. Best of all was that everyone was together, and together thoroughly engrossed in enjoying a fun-filled Sunday outing. There were no cares on that day. At the end there was exhaustion, but it had been a day of absolute bliss. Hiram's conclusion was that it was the best day he had ever had, and that that was the way every day in life should—always—be, fun, excitingly adventurous, easily together with people one cared about. Farm life was not easy, often mundane or lonely, monotonous, and much of Hiram's life was fraught, sometimes unexplainably. Today would remain a beacon, a gatelight illuminating out into those corners of darkness that fell like night. He would remember the feeling of this day.

The next summer eventually came again, past the time of Hiram's birthday in the spring, and Hiram became intent on re-living the experience that shone in his memory, the feeling of that wonderful day of togetherness in the amusement park, of the exhilarating contentment of the fun time. At first he hinted and cajoled; and then he begged his

parents. He begged them to make a return—the summer, the same day trip, the same place in the amusement park, the same ambrosia—the same everything as before. He begged, and so the plans were made. The longed-for trip arrived, and the plans were followed. This time the beautiful day, however, was not the same. Hiram's parents were grumpy. The park was too crowded. The day was too hot and humid. Hiram felt the depression of disappointment. Everything was the same, but it was just not the same. Hiram could not find the feeling of the year before. His feeling was not the same. It was not quite right. Attempted re-creation of his memory of the former glorious day was not happening, the feeling was just not the same. He could not get it back. Reviving it, as in the same feeling of that previous blissful day, was slipping away and not happening. Hiram felt confused, and bereft.

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Hiram stumbled from the cloudiness of his reverie, and shook his head to make sure he was sitting in his rocking-chair of the present. Yes. Ah, it was the peaches—he had been dreaming of the imminent arrival someday of fresh peaches. He looked out from the ancient verandah and across the expanse of yellow summer grass to where he

saw the young trees. They swayed in a sunny breeze. Unaware of a time when Hiram's parents had lived there, or of when Hiram was a young child, or of any thing but for their own stance in the warm bright sun.

Hiram wallowed in a reflective mood, one of the many such in which he sometimes lately indulged, as had been a handy method of circumspection for a great deal of his later life. Time had rushed onward. Perhaps circumstances nearly always fell into a circular eddy before flowing away into a current; perhaps Hiram had grown into a person quite unlike what he had expected to be. Perhaps Hiram had in time become his father after all,,or some tangled amalgam of the traits of both his parents. Somehow it did not seem quite possible; but, on the other hand, it did not either seem impossible. Who could predict such things?

As well, other people among Hiram's acquaintances did not seem altogether all that pleasantly satisfied with the details of the outcomes of their families—the disappointing employments, or the inertia, the early illnesses, the unfortunate devastation of lack of grandchildren, the distance, the movement of living away, the children who did not consider to call. The current of time took each family—each person—

down into its' own flow in the stream. Hiram, looking at the sparkle of sun on the leaves, considered, “It is never enough to attempt to take away the bad events, as it is quite enough so productive as to make, in the first place, the good events.”

--J. F. Lowe