

“AN AFTERNOON’S STROLL”

by Virginia Cary Hudson

When I go strolling down to the post office to buy stamps to write to my cousins, my mother says, “Don’t walk on the Court House side.” That is where the checker players sit. When I get to the pansy bed, my mother calls, “Don’t walk past the barber shop.” That is where the men take off their collars. When I get to the linden trees, my mother says, “Don’t pass the saloon.” That is where the door is sawed off at the top and the bottom and the music box is. So I walk in the middle of the street and jump the stepping stones.

And when I get back, my mother says, “Oh, oh, your best ankle strap slippers, they are covered with dust.” Some people sure are hard to please. If the Court House is on one side of the street and the barber shop and saloon are on the other side of the street, and I can’t walk in the middle, I guess my mother wants me to fly to the places I go, just like St. Francis of Assisi.

Strolling is walking slow and easy like getting married. I guess walking slow getting married is because it gives you time to maybe change your mind. You stroll when you are a baby sitting in your carriage. You stroll when you are a young lady and have a beau. Then you stroll when you are an old lady and it doesn’t matter where you are going or when you get back. When you stroll, you get dressed up. Only when I stroll up on Holton Street, I wear my fighting clothes.

Holton Street is where I have my worse trouble. That is another part of town. That is where the Campbellites live. They asked me to their old church party and my mother made me go. And I wore my hat and it was summer, and Alice Coleman laughed because I had on my hat. I said to her, I said, “You shouldn’t go in church without your hat.” And she said, “You should too.” And I said, “You shouldn’t.” And she said, “You should.” And I said, “You shouldn’t.” Then she said, “Who said so?” And I said, “St. Paul said so.” And she said, “He didn’t.” And I said, “He did.” And she said, “He didn’t.” And I said, “He did.” And she said, “Fooie on St. Paul.” And that is when I slapped her. Once for St. Paul, and I slapped her for the whole state of Christ’s church universal, and then I pinched her for myself. That slapping was righteous indignation, but that pinch was my own and the devil’s idea.

She ran home from the church party screaming and yelling, but I stayed and ate my ice cream. And Miss Billie called my mother up. Miss Billie is Alice’s

mother. Whoever heard of a mother named Billie? My mother made me sit in my chair one whole hour and read St. Paul. She said that it was a good day to read ALL St. Paul said. So I read about enduring all things and not to behave yourself unseemly. But I bet one thing. I bet St. Paul didn't know any Campbellites and didn't ever go strolling up on Holton Street.

Mrs. McLean strolls in her flower garden with a shawl around her shoulders and her chain and fan around her neck. Strolling time is before four and five and that makes it just right for me, because then I am dressed up. I sit up on the fence and wait for Mrs. McLean to ask me over. My mother won't let me go unless I am invited. Then we stroll all around the little paths and Mrs. McLean tells me the name of everything. She must sit up all night learning those names.

I love Mrs. McLean. She is my good sweet neighbor, but I have thought for some time she was a little cracked. When we sit on her garden bench, I get to hurting. Those iron grapes sure are hard. Mrs. McLean is fatter in the back than I am and I guess that is why she can sit there so long. Judge Williams has a bench. That's what Mrs. Williams says. She says the judge is on the bench today. I went down to the court house to see for myself if his bench was as hard as Mrs. McLean's bench. If it was, I was going to give him a pillow for Christmas. And after I went all the way down to the court house, there Judge Williams was sitting in a big soft chair.

When you stroll, you never hurry back, because if you had anything to do, you wouldn't be strolling in the first place. If I get a zero on this paper, I just don't care. Maybe next time I will get 99. I never get 100. Something is always wrong. Maybe one day I will. Maybe one day the Lord will help me get 100.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Selah. Oh lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, grant me peace and not zero. Amen