

**A Retelling of the Story of Frank and Ella  
by their daughter Frances**

Frank Nelson was swinging on the gate of his Aunt Ann's white picket fence. He was just eight and had gone to school that morning for the first time since his family had come north from New Orleans. He looked anxiously, every now and then, down the long shady lane that led to the village. Obviously he was watching for some one, but watching with a studied nonchalance.

The gate hinges had begun to creek, warningly, before he finally spied a red gingham dress turning into the lane. The nonchalance became exaggerated and despite the vigorously protesting hinges he swung with accelerated abandon until the wearer of the bright red dress came even with the gate when he slowed down a bit and said casually – too casually –

“Hello.”

The pretty little daughter of the village station Agent, looked at him shyly with her big black eyes.

“Hello,” she answered.

The sharp tang of fall was in the air and the cheeks of both children were as rosy as the fruit clinging to the gnarled apple tree whose branches over hung the fence and shaded the sidewalk where the small girl stood.

Frank dipped into his pocket.

“Want an apple?” and he leaned over the gate holding one out to her.

“Thank you.” She said demurely.

“I'm going on nine, how old are you?” he asked quickly as she took a step away.

“Just turned eight.”

“Where d'you live?” he hurriedly inquired in an effort to prolong the conversation. He knew. His sister Marie had told his sister Gertie when they were all eating their dinner in Aunt Ann's spot kitchen that very noon.

“Over the hill in the white house with the morning –glory vine on it – you know just back of your Uncle Asa's.

So she knew who he was alright. She knew that Uncle Asa, the richest man in town, was his Uncle. Only he wasn't. ~~He was Ma's Uncle.~~

“He's Ma's Uncle.” He told her. “My name's Frank. What's yours?” He knew that, too, but maybe she didn't know that he knew it.

“Ella – Ella Taisey. Thanks for the apple.” And again she started on her way.

“Say, want me to carry your books/ they’re too heavy for a little thing like you.”

“I’m not little. I’m big for my age.”

“Not as big as me. My Ma says she bets I’ll be six feet when I’m quit growing.”

She looked at him appraisingly with her wide, serious, blue-black Irish eyes.

“I’ll bet you will be, too. Maybe bigger.”

Just then Frank Doughty and Uncle John’s Ernie, both close on to thirteen came around the corner and took in the situation ‘quick as a cat kin lick her eye.’

“Oh, ho – oh ho, Frank’s got a girl, Frank’s got a girrul,” they sang impishly.

Frank’s face went scarlet and he gave them a baleful look that promised speedy vengeance.

“You shut up. Both of you.” He shrilled as they began their teasing refrain once more.

“Hey, you don’t hafta see a fight,” he said slamming the gate and grabbing her books. “Come on.” Then turning on his stubby shoes with their metal toes he shouted back at his tormentors.

“You just wait ‘til I get back an’ I’ll thrash you both. See if I don’t.”

She relinquished her books, and with them, then and there, her heart into his keeping. He cherished it more or less casually until sixteen years later she died leaving him a tiny five month’s old daughter. And because she wasn’t the son they had hoped for, Ella named her Frances that being the nearest she could come to the Frank that she adored.

Lake City, where they spent most of those sixteen years growing up together was a rambling little village situated on the widening of the Mississippi River, called Lake Pepin. It was said to be as full of Doughty’s as a dog is full of fleas.

Frank’s mother had been Alice Doughty before, at sixteen, she married a man twenty years her senior, and became Alice Nelson. Isaiah Rogers Nelson in those days was a real catch for any girl. He came of a fine family. His Grandfather was an officer in the English Army and had fought under Cornwallis, when defeated in America that General went back to England and was sent into Ireland to help put down the religious uprising there. Late, about 1801 Colonel Joseph Nelson brought his little Quaker wife and their family to the New World and settled near Lansingburgh, New York.

Joseph, the Colonel’s oldest son, Isaiah’s father, after the death of his first wife, made an unfortunate second ‘alliance.’ Unable to cope with the situation – the discord between his new wife and his children – he simply disappeared one pleasant day. He left his young family, of which Isaiah the oldest was only eleven, at the mercy of his shrewish wife and was never heard from thereafter.

Isaiah, convinced that his father had been impressed by the English and with the conditions at home becoming more and more unendurable, at the age of twelve ran away to sea, hoping to find his Father. For four years he served before the Mast. In every port he sought for Joseph. Hard, cruel years for any boy in those days of stern and cruel masters. It was a saga in itself. He shipped on boats plying up and down the Atlantic coast, around the Cape of good Horn, and lastly up the interior waterways of his country – the St. Laurence and the Mississippi. But never a trace of his father.

When about seventeen, he learned of the death of his stepmother, he returned to Lansingburgh. His Father's sister, Auntie Crabbe, who had taken his brother and sisters to care for, welcomed him as the prodigal son. Several peaceful and happy years were spent under her generous and kindly mothering.

Luckily this Step-Mother had not dissipated his father's heritage, and the children all came into a tidy inheritance at her death. Acceding to the urgent wish of Auntie Crabbe he used his patrimony to study medicine under the tutelage of their much loved physician. He remained with him long enough to earn the prefix of doctor before his name but his heart was not in it. The wanderlust was in his blood.

The years between are almost a blank record but finally at thirty-six he was a well-established merchant in Toledo, Ohio. Whatever those years had held of adventure in a new, wild country for others, they had certainly brought to him success and financial advancement.

He went into partnership with one Increase Decker and their friendship as well as their business had thriven. They bought a block of stores in Toledo—use part of them for a grocery business, wholesale and retail, of their own – and rented out the rest. Among their several enterprises was the first agency in their city for the American Express Company.

It was through Increase Decker that he met the sister of Decker's wife, Alice Doughty, who very shortly he married.

Alice was a tall slender girl with blue eyes and soft brown hair. She was dignified even at sixteen, but had an inner gayety that would effervesce in spite of her effort at the serious decorum then proper for the young wife of a successful gentleman. Fortunately Isaiah loved to see her gay and as he grew older and the difference in their ages became more apparent, it was he that saw that she had dancing partners, and that she did not want for young society. He loved to see her somewhat serious young face aglow with smiles. He was proud of her and fostered in her a pride of person. She was vain of her thick brown tresses, only wishing that they were curly like her sister Mira's. Overcoming obstacles was one of her strongest traits. So heating a big nail in the kitchen stove, she curled her hair over it. Once sanctified-Cousin-Letty reproved her for this indiscretion. "Alice, had the Lord intended you to have curly hair, he would have given it to you."

To which Alice saucily replied,

"He didn't have to give me curly hair for he gave me sense enough to curl it myself, and she went her merry way, rubbing her cheeks and biting her lips to make them pink and curling her hair to

make herself more attractive. When she was seventy, someone reproved her of dressing so meticulously, to which she answered, "The young look well no matter what they wear. The old must dress with care. I am sure that the Lord meant every woman to make the most of her looks."

Alice and Isaiah had been married sixteen years when Frank swung on the gate in Lake City and waited for Ella. And the prosperity of Isaiah's first years had melted away as the snows melted each succeeding year. The Civil War had come and gone – ending for them, as War always does for myriads of people, the warm sweet years of comfort. Beyond the age, Isaiah had not himself enlisted, but as many did in that war, he had sent a paid substitute and had cared for the man's family while he was absent. He had not come back and Isaiah felt like a murderer.

During those sad years from 63-65 their business block had burned. Even before this greater misfortune had befallen them. Their first two children, Frances and Mable Ann, named for Isaiah's two sisters had died, each in their first year of infancy. Frank was their third child, born when Alice's soft brown hair had turned quite white – so great was her grief for her two first born. Three other children followed Frank, Sarah Gertrude Alice, I.R. and Mary Elizabeth – first called Libby and later Marie.

One piece of land in the country that would have furnished them a home Isaiah had sold to buy Alice one of the new-fangled sewing machines – one of the first to come to Toledo.

The war over, their buildings burned, Increase Decker and Isaiah dissolved partnership. Isaiah pondering what to do with his money that would be most likely to increase it, looked to the south. What he saw looked hopeful so he migrated with his family to New Orleans. It was a disastrous move. First because he was a patriot and abhorred all of the carpet bagging tactics and second, because a pestilence broke out in the city almost before they were settled there. The yellow fever was raging. So neglecting his new business in which he had invested his entire fortune he resurrected his almost forgotten little black medicine bag wherever and gave his service to whomever they were needed.

Luckily his family escaped the scourge, but he labored hard, long and late among the sick and dying. Finally, an ill and broken man, practically penniless, he took his family north up the Mississippi to the home of his wife's people in Lake City, where Frank swinging on the gate made friends with his daughter's mother.

Isaiah was not without resources. He was a sailor and a good one and he loved the water. So he changed his title from Doctor to Captain and was soon making a good living for his family plying his boat up and down the beautiful Lake Pepin, from Maiden Rock to Stockholm. The ----- carried produce, grain, lumber and passengers from village to village. Frank and I.R. (known as Cap) were his able assistants and were as much at home on the water as they were on the land.

Practically all of Lake City was populated by Doughtys. Alice's Father Henry and his brothers and sisters had migrated from New York State in covered wagons with their Grandmother and their Uncles and Aunts. Some were well to do and some were poor, but all were sturdy, independent and clannish.

As the years rolled by and Frank grew older it was only natural that Uncle John Doughty should take him into the flour mill as an apprentice, and almost before he knew it he was a full-fledged miller. He knew all about wheats and ryes and corn meal – and the kinds that made the best flour. And until he died he never took up a piece of bread to eat it – that he didn't first break it and smell it to see if the flour was good – often to the embarrassment of his and Ella's daughter Frances.

Then, as the war had finished one period of his life, the steam boats came to Lake Pepin and finished another for Isaiah. Again he turned South ward – this time to Cairo – taking only his two sons to with him. That was a more disastrous trip than the other southern venture. The boys and their Father were wrecked on an island and there is a description of that trip by I.R. – the youngest son.

Finally Alice heard of their plight. Tried to borrow money of her relations but they couldn't see throwing good money after bad. At last she applied to Uncle Alan – an old Toledo friend and business associate of Isaiah - whom rumor had it had been much in love with her. He sent her the necessary funds and she started a -----less saga looking for her lost ones.

Found, emaciated for lack of food, they were nursed back to health in Uncle Alex's home in Cairo and then sent back to Toledo. How their fortunes were recouped is not on the record. But son Isaiah was once more selling groceries in his own store in Toledo and making a reputation for himself on the side as Doctor Nelson.

He was making an herb medicine whose concoction was taught to him by the Indians. He called it "preventative" and was soon quite famous for the cures it made. He neglected his legitimate business for it, and his daughters were ashamed of this side line of their father's.

His little old black bag was often in use and he was a loved figure on the streets of Toledo. But while Alice was still hale and beautiful at fifty, he was frail and gaunt and seventy.

Their income was insufficient for their needs and she had to do something to keep her two girls – now grown and talented in school. So she took up practical nursing among her friends and Gertie and Marie took over, with their school work, her household duties.

Frank had a job in a mill in Toledo – and while the wolf wasn't far from the door, they were happy and gay. Gertie and Marie were developing just into able elocutionists which was to mean a living for them for years.

One autumn Frank took a trip up to Lake City to see Ella. Two friends of theirs asked them to go across the lake with them and be witness to their marriage.

They hadn't planned to do it there but example was too much for them and when the party came back, Frank & Ella had to break the news to Harriet and Albert Taisey that they too were man and wife.

It was not a pleasant return from an elopement. Harriet had never liked Frank. He was gay and she felt fickle – also she was sure that he like most young men of his era drank and she felt sure caroused.

Also he was not prepared financially to take his wife home with him. He had no place to take her. Harriet – a staunch, able, harsh woman who had been thrown upon her own resources as a girl was angry with an anger that never left her till she died.

The parents of Harriet Conway had come over to this country from Ireland before she was born. They had made a struggling existence but had been happy. Harriet was of the dour Irish – not the gay, carefree breed. Perhaps because the rest of her family were so indolent that very little suffered them. She was the oldest and to help support the rest she had learned tailoring – and helped to keep them all until her marriage to Albert Taisey. ~~His father appeared to have been a ne'er do well, but both his Mother and his Grandmother who lived with him for years were~~

~~She was bring up her daughter to be a lady and this marriage was~~

And when anger struck her the Irish in her always stood out boldly.

“And now, my fine lady, what do you mean to do. Frank will have you with child at once no doubt – and what will happen to your school teaching then, -- With him gone back to Toledo and you here with no husband to show for your condition.”

“Frank’s leaving in the morning and we’ll be sitting up the night, Ma – so you needn’t worry. I’m sorry you’re mad, Ma, but you’ve known about Frank & me always. There would never be any one else for me. So you’ll just have to forgive us both for your love of me.”

That was a long speech for Ella and mollified, though no less angry, Harriet prepared them a fine wedding supper and the four young elopers had a gay evening and made ready to sit them up all night. But when bedtime came Harriet gruffly bade them be sensible and sent them off to bed.

In the morning Frank left Ella with a promise of a speedy return to take her with him.