

**From Kenny Miller's
A VISIT TO HARTINGTON**

A SNOWY DAY FOR MRS. LUBELY*

(*Pronounced Lube-a-lie)

She knew the snow had come. It started knocking at her bedroom window at three in the morning. Tink. Tink tink. Tink tink tink. She knew how the delicate crystals sounded as their journey to earth ended when they collided with the warm glass pane. She knew the morning would be bright, and for a while at least, the blanket of white would soften the busy world around her.

Her dawn always came at six. She had no need for an alarm clock. She awoke at six every morning even in the darkness of winter. She started her day as she always did, with a moment of prayer, a moment of reflection, and a moment of what the day could bring. She grabbed her cane, lifted herself from her bed, and carefully went to her bathroom and started a warm bath. Her knees hurt from arthritis but she pressed on. She would be better after a cup of tea and a hot bath.

As the tub filled, she went to the kitchen, filled the teakettle with water and put it on her stove. From one of the crockery jars on her counter, she took a bag of tea and put it in her teapot. Soon both the tea water and her bath were hot. She looked through the living room now reflecting the morning sunshine and the bright white snow she knew had come during the night. It was hard for her to look at the snow; her right eye was almost blind from a cataract.

“So pretty,” she said. Even through the blur of age, her memory could paint every detail of a snowy morning in her neighborhood.

If anyone were to ever see her in a robe, they would have to visit well before seven. By then, she was dressed in a silk dress, her ear rings on, a matching necklace, and a hint of rouge on her high cheekbones. Her silver gray hair didn't dare move out of place. She was ready for visitors should any decide to come.

She sat down at her kitchen table with her cup of tea. A touch of honey was in order on this morning. She had a slight chill from the wind as it challenged the door seals on her old house. Just as she finished her tea, the phone rang.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hello Bun, yes isn't it beautiful outside.”

“Oh no, I am not going out this morning.”

“No, I have everything I need except for some groceries that should come out on delivery.”

“Oh, the boy is already scooping the walk?”

“Well, whenever he has time to scoop my walk that will be fine.”

“Thank you, you have a nice day, too.”

“Bun, maybe when the snow gets cleared out a little, you can come over for tea.”

“This afternoon around three would be just fine.”

“Goodbye, Bun.”

“Well,” she said as she hung up the phone, “an unexpected pleasure.” Her dear neighbor was coming for tea and her son would have the walks scooped soon. She knew the boy would do a good job.

The boy's dad was a stickler for getting the walks cleared as soon as the storm stopped and getting them cleared the entire width of the walk. There would be none of this meandering path stuff. The entire walk had to be cleared from grass side to grass side. All of the walks to the house, whether they had been used in the last twenty years or not, had to be completely cleared. The boy's mom made sure he chopped an equally wide path through that mound of ice the snowplows left out in front of the house when they barreled through town clearing the highway. That stuff was like shoveling rocks. Quite often, it was slushy and heavy and if the boy did not get at it soon, the mess would turn to Titanic killing ice. The boy's mother made sure that wouldn't happen

Mrs. Lubely pushed back her lace curtain and could see the boy scooping away the foot of new snow. His breath turned white as it came through the heavy scarf wrapped around the hood of his blue parka. He would be at her walk in an hour or so. She had time to bake a cake and have some hot chocolate ready for him when he reached her front door. She took her purse and looked for a crisp five-dollar bill and put it on the coffee table in her living room.

She was ready for the boy but he wasn't ready for the winter. The shovel stood like a sentry at the intersection of the two sidewalks. The footprints across the snow to the front door of the house told the story. He was cold and tired and went in for a break.

"You have waited long enough. Get out there and get busy before Mrs. Lubely slips on the ice," his mom ordered.

"The snowplow is coming back, Mom," the son pleaded. "It won't do any good to scoop now. The snowplow will just fill the walk back up."

"Get out there this minute," she ordered. "The snowplow has already been by, I saw it half an hour ago."

Even the dog was loafing. She was hiding under the table next to the forced air duct where she could stay nice and toasty. The boy knew if he put his hands in kind of an "I'm gonna get ya" open choke hold, crouched a little bit, and approached the dog so the dog could see him, the dog would perk up and watch him--not as dog's best friend, but as dog's big threat. When the Scottie determined the threatening boy was close enough, she scrambled for protection under the mother's feet let out one loud bark causing the unsuspecting mother to jump about two feet in the air.

"Oh!" she hollered, "enough of that. Now get those walks cleared right now!"

The family Scottie had a proper Scottie trim—a big mustache and bottom third uncut. With this kind of cut, and with a large drift of fluffy snow, loafing boy could have a great time with the dog. He picked her up and tossed her into the top of the drift. She instantly sank into the soft fluffy snow and had to burrow and jump her way out of it. As a result of her effort, and the friction and heat the effort generated, the pooch would ice up in the bottom third, and the mustache, of course. When she was totally iced up, the boy let the snow and ice covered dog back into the house and went back to his snow shoveling duties. He snickered as he heard the muffled barks and yells as his mom chased the thawing dog throughout the house.

"Penny, ca'mere!" Penny, get on the rug, you're getting the house all wet! My rugs....!"

Around noon, he reached the front steps of Mrs. Lubely's house. She could now walk unobstructed and safe down the front walk.

"Come in and warm up," she said as she pushed the front door open.

He smiled at the old lady, brushed the snow off his parka and headed for the front door.

"Do you have a broom I can use, Mrs. Lubely?"

"Why sure, come in."

"Let me use the broom to brush the snow off my boots so I don't track up your rugs," he said. He was well mannered even though he

had thoroughly enjoyed setting a thawing dog loose on his mother's rugs.

"Maybe you can just slip out of them and we'll put them on this little rug just inside of the door. Would that be all right?" she asked.

"That would be fine, Mrs. Lubely."

He went inside the small wooden house and stepped on the rug where he unbuckled his overshoes and took off his parka. She handed him a towel to wipe his face, hands and hair.

"Have some cake and hot chocolate," she said to him as she leaned against her cane and motioned for him to sit on the couch. The hot chocolate had a marsh-mellow floating and melting in it. The cake sat tall, layered with chocolate frosting, on one of her good china plates. One of her best silver folks lay on a freshly laundered cloth napkin. Even though he was only a boy, in this home, he would be treated as any honored guest. She didn't know the meaning of everyday wear and paper napkins.

"Oh, that looks great," the boy said as he went to the couch and sat down. "Thank you Mrs. Lubely."

"It's the least I can do for all of the work you do for me."

She reached out for the arm on her chair but may have misjudged slightly as she started to stumble. The boy jumped from the couch to steady her.

"Are you all right Mrs. Lubely?"

"Oh yes," she said. "I wasn't paying proper attention. Finish you little snack. I am just fine."

As the boy got up to leave, she picked up the five-dollar bill and followed him to the door where she put it in his coat pocket.

"You buy something nice for yourself," she said as she patted the pocket.

"Oh, I can't take that Mrs. Lubely.

"Well I want you to have it just the same."

"Well thank you and thank you for the hot chocolate and the cake. It was really good."

"You're welcome," she said as she held her front door open as the boy left the house.

"Bye, Mrs. Lubely," the boy said as he turned toward the snowy front yard. He still had some cleaning to do on her walk but he was done for the day unless the wind or the state snowplow decided to rearrange things.

“Did you get Mrs. Lubely’s walks done?” she asked her son as he walked in the door. He laughed as he saw the damp dog penned up in the corner by a stack of clothing baskets. “Don’t let the dog out of there until she is dry,” his mom ordered. “Did you see Mrs. Lubely?”

“Yup,” the boy said. “She gave me five bucks.”

“You don’t need to be paid to do her walks.”

“She insisted, Mom. Plus, she was lucky I was there, she almost fell.”

“She fell?” his mom said as she wheeled around to verify what the boy was saying.

“I caught her.”

“Was she outside?”

“No. Her living room.”

“What were you doing in her living room?”

“She made cake and hot chocolate for me.”

“You didn’t make her trip or anything did you? She isn’t very steady even with that cane.”

“No Mom, I didn’t make her trip. She was reaching for a chair and misjudged the distance I think.”

“Oh the poor soul, her eyesight is really getting bad. I am going to call and make sure she is OK.” She turned and walked to her telephone stand and sat down. She picked up the receiver and said, “Buena, give me Anna Lubely, Please.”

“Hello Anna? This is Bun. Are you OK? I heard you almost fell.”

“Well that’s what he said but I just wanted to check and be sure you were OK.”

“Are you sure? I can call and take you to the doctor if you don’t feel well.”

“Oh. Ok. But you call if you need anything, please.”

“Ok. Oh yes, I’ll still come for tea at three. Oh Sister will be there? How nice. I will see you then. Bye.”

“She’s fine,” she said to her son. “I am going over there this afternoon at three and have tea with her and the big nun.”

“The one that wears that black outfit and looks like a big black tablecloth blowing on the line when she comes down the street?”

“That’s her and she is very nice.”

It was hard for Mrs. Lubely to bend over and look in her oven to check on her prize baking. Marcia sent her some nice tart Granny

Smith apples and she turned them into a prize pie, a perfect treat for her afternoon guests. She learned against her can as she opened the oven door, pulled on the shelf, and slid the masterpiece pie out of the over. She clutched the cane close to her side, reached for the other hot pad, and gently picked up the pie and slowly brought it up to the counter top and the waiting hotplate. It seemed like minutes instead of seconds as she balanced the pie and herself and leveraged the pie to the counter.

She looked at her hands. They were once as white and soft as fresh cream with a hint of pink. Now they were nothing more than thinly covered bones, the knuckles ravaged by arthritis. The brown spots of age had stolen her youth but not her dignity. She was still the gracious lady. It just took more concentration and more time to prepare a memory for her guests.

“Come in Bun,” she said as she opened the door for her good neighbor.

“Oh your house always smells so nice, Anna.”

“I put a cinnamon stick and some cloves into a hot apple cider.”

“Oh that’s what it is.”

“Well look who is right behind you Bun.”

Her neighbor turned just in time to see the big nun in her black habit doing battle with the wind.

“Hello, hello,” the nun said as she came up the step with open arms. “Bless you good neighbor Bun,” the nun said as she gave Bun a hug, “and just look our perfect China doll,” she said as she gently put her hands on Mrs. Lubely’s face and kissed her on the forehead.

“Come in, come in,” Mrs. Lubely said as she leaned on her cane and held the door for her two friends as they came in out of the cold.

“Look at you,” the nun said. “Perfect white hair. Perfect nails. Perfect jewelry with brooch on her coat lapel. Why if I weren’t sworn to simplicity, I would be jealous. Aren’t you jealous, Bun?”

“Why no, Sister,” Bun said. “Envious but never jealous. Jealous is a Lutheran sin, don’t you know.” The nun howled at the friend joust.

“Please sit down,” Mrs. Lubely said as she motioned to her couch and matching Queen Ann chairs.

“You have such beautiful things, Anna,” the nun said as she took her seat on the couch. “They show a lifetime of love.”

“And memories,” chimed in the neighbor.

“To be sure,” the nun said.

“How is your son?” the nun asked. “George isn’t it?”

“Why he is just fine and his family is fine she said as she beamed from the question.” She turned and took a picture from the end table. “This is George and his family. They sent it to me for Christmas.”

The nun took the picture and squinted. “What a lovely family,” she said. “Very blessed.”

“And all is well with you, Bun?”

“Oh fine. We’re all fine.”

“You should bring Anna to the convent for tea some afternoon. We would love to try and convert you,” she said as she threw back her habit and head and chuckled.

“I’ve only just learned how to pray the Lutheran Rosary, Sister.”

The nun howled with laughter and slapped her knee. “You must come some afternoon. I cannot deny the other sisters an afternoon of your company. Even Mother Superior might split a lip.”

“OK, we’ll come someday.”

“Wonderful, oh Anna can I help?” the nun said as she saw her old friend trying to carry the hot teapot into the room.

“Yes I suppose you could. It’s a little heavy for me with this cane and all.”

“I know how perfect everything usually is here, but let’s bend the rules a little today,” the nun said as she took the teapot and helped the old lady to her chair.

“Here we go,” the nun said as she poured the tea in each of the three cups on the silver tray. Maybe we should call Lenyce and make sure this gets in the Cedar County News® that I poured, “ she said as she laughed.

“You would be the toast of the town, Sister,” Bun said.

“Is that apple pie I smell?” the nun asked as she headed back to the kitchen with the teapot. “Why it is! And here are three plates ready for a nice warm slice.”

The nun cut the pie and brought the plates to the living room.

“What else?” she asked. “Oh a prayer.” She reached out for a hand from each of the two ladies.

“Blessed Mother hear our prayer on this beautiful snowy day that we may always cherish the friendships you give us, that kindness becomes the warm tea of our hearts, and that love holds us together

like a warm apple pie. Thank your for good neighbors, even though they be Lutheran and good fiends. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.”

They chatted and laughed and sipped tea and ate pie. By nightfall, a new prayer card lay on the kitchen table, the China was washed and put away, and a pie with four pieces missing, sat under a cover of waxed paper. Nothing but the sound of the tick-tock of the mantle clock could be heard in the house except for the bedside prayer of a little old lady who was grateful for another day of life.