



Tain't Human Lessen It Eergles

by

Perry A. Chapdelaine, Sr.

Naow you sit yerself' down Miss Abisinthe. Put yore books on th' desk an rest a spell, 'cause what ah has t' say is taken better thet-a-way.

Ah must look awful nervous t'ye, twistin mah hat 'round, an a'shufflin mah feet like first graders and not sixthes, but truth is downrite painful.

Ah knowed ye was diffrunt from them other teachers what seems t'come an go so fast, an the site of your hyacinth-blue eyes, your Peak's-Mountain-tallow-yeller hair, and that smile what makes men gulp down air 'till his belly is fuller than atter a catfish dinner with tripe fixins and all -- wal, ah was just plain taken with you and couldn't no more stop from proposin than a nanny goat could stop a'climbin Lover's Leap.

Ah meant it, too, knowing all along your polite refusal was just your sweet, kinliness ways of sayin' yes, you being too educated with manners and sech to come right out an accept at first call.

Yore face is sure a'turnin pink-red again, and that goes fine with Peak's-Mountain-tallow-yeller hair and yore fine ways, Miss Abisinthe, but please don't go a'pleadin for me. Grandpa done the trick and ah promised him t'lay it out as straight as chicken guts atter theys been tugged on a spell, when one hen pulls it from another, an all the time a'screechin an a'squawkin an a'scrawlin back an forth whilst the guts dangles first from one beak an then from t'other.

Ah'm fearful o' what you'll think when ah'm done, Miss Abisinthe. Odell's has always been honest folk, an straight, too, as any heareabouts can say. An we Odell's don't never go back on our word, oncet given. So ye can see how it pains me more than jes a little t' tell that ah cain't marry up with ye, though my word was near on it jes last week.

No! Please! You stay seated, Miss Abisinthe. Shore, you're confused and possible mad naow, an prob'bly thinkin t' throw one o' them logs by the black pot belly. Ah cain't blame ye none, effen you do, but Gramps Odell says we kin always be friends, an that's something, anyways.

There, you're settlin some, though yer hands is still a'twistin an a'turnin, pressin that ruler up and down and sideways like it was pork fat ready to pop into a greasy skillet. Wal, Gramps Odell give me permission to explain, out of courtesy to ye, and thet'll ease your feelins.

Bless you pretty little Miss Abisinthe, 'cause Gramps don't give permission easy, the last time bein' when them blues and grays played games on our acres, an Granny's onliest black-iron cookin pot was cracked by a cannon ball they was a'playin moughty rough with, an Gramps jest set daown them two fellers, a gray and a blue, with stars on their shoulders and a'sittin high an moughty on them horses directing it all. They all skeetdadled after thet talkin too

Gramps said it again yest'day, jes atter ah told him what you and me had arranged. "Cain't do it," says Gramps, and he eergled a stream o' cane-sweetened chawin' t'bacco, makin it fly like an Eagle atter a mouse, claws a'curlin an all.

"Why not?" ah asked, civil like. Gramps has always been close t' me, an not jes 'cause he raised me, neither. He's kind, easy goin, and thoughtful.

Gramps cut his knife into his whittlin stick an split off a big sliver. Then he ra'ed back in his rockin chair, purt' nighh droppin off th' stoop when his rocker hit a loose board an hung up. He caught hisself, then glared me in the eyes, but pulled back down to his whittlin again oncet he saw ah was civil an a'meanin it -- thet you and me was swore t' one nother, though ah'm the only one whut spoke up 'bout it.

By grabbies! Miss Abisinthe. There you went and snapped the ruler. Wal, it won't hurt so much when you hears the whole story, an ah'll go fast, makin the hurt t' ye smaller.

"Young'un," Gramps says, "Theys only one kind o' woman yew kin hitch to. Man en boy -- nigh ontu



four hundred years -- ah been a'tellin 'bout th' onliest things thet air perm'nent. Ah tole them same stories t' Thaddius and Trogan, 'fore they run off t' the circus, eh?"

Ah'm a'tellin ye jest like Gramps spoke it, but don't let his outspoken words bother ye none, Miss Abisinthe. Effen ye has a time understandin, jes stop me, an ah'll explain his words.

"You mean th' bible stories?" ah asked him.

"Yup! What else could ah be a'meanin?"

"Miss Abisinthe been tellin us stories from thet book, too, an she said we could read them ourselves oncet we learned how."

Gramps jiggered his knife out'n the wood an pinte it direct at me. His eyes was poke-berry red a'top his 'backy trickled, grey beard. He peeked up t'me like thet picture you showed of Moses, where he's a'lookin t' God an a'pleadin thet God don't strike down his kinfolk fer playin 'round with a yeller calf they made, an a'dancin, an other wicked things. "Naow thet is th' very thing ah bin a'tryin t' tell yew, Luke," he says. "Allus them stories ah bin a'larnin yew hain't in thar bible. Doan't yew think effen thet's allus thar wuz t' hit, ah wud hev gotten yew en Thaddius en Trogan book larnin long ago? Yew knows thet larnin hain't jes readin?"

"Shore, Gramps," I says. "But every story what you told us of your younger days was in thet book, what Miss Abisinthe showed us, and they was prettied up with pichurs, too."

Gramps most had a corn-squeezin fit right there and then, like the time Emeraldy Jane come up missin, an we didn't find her until the vat was drained an she lay there starin an stiff, embalmed-like, pretty white goose feathers a'layin in funny straggles across the bottom. Gramps snorted, sneezed twicet, an coughed a lot 'fore turnin back t' me mournful like to say, "Gran'son did thet interferin county teacher - - thet outlander -- tell yew 'bout Adam an Eve?"

Naow don't take no offense at Gramps, Miss Abisinthe. Gramps tells 'bout everybody like thet, even th' gov'ner oncet when he come to plead thet we let through a road atter young Ford invented thet leetle runabout.

"She mentioned on it," ah answered, careful like. Gramps can be daownright tricky effen he sets his mind t' it.

"Ah wants you t' tell me zactly whut thet female tole yew 'bout our kinfolk!"

Ah tole Gramps what you told us, Miss Abisinthe, how God created the heavens an earth an all the animuls, some poor loner named Adam, an catfish in jes six days. Ah told how God laid down t' rest, an whilest He was a'doin so, He seen thet Adam was lonesome, so He put Adam t'sleep, took out'n his rib, and turned it into a gal named Eve -- but I don't 'spect she was near as purty as you, Miss Abisinthe, an you don't hev't blush, 'cause it's true.

I explained like you tol us, they was a'settin purty, with no worry over vittels and sech, and Adam had no one else a'chasin atter Eve, and they had things a'goin fer them right off. Panthers an sech were as gentle as tabbies. Catfish was happy to get hooked, and when it rained it was warm, an ee'n though they had no clothes, they was content.

"God told them how they hed ever'thing 'cept some apples," ah explained to Gramps, a'lookin sorta sideways, 'cause Gramps is jest a'settin quiet, a'rockin a little, an a'whittlin big gashes, an ah figure he's a'trappin me somehow, but can't figure on it any better than the day Uncle Larny Tooley sniggered me into holdin off the revenooers, tellin me they was atter th' mash which I allus feed to Gorgey, our pet hog, when they wasn't atter the mash a'tall, but the makens an biler an things.

But Gramps hain't lettin nothin out, and so I tole 'bout the big snake what come along a'whisperin in Eve's ear, an a'sayin thet God don't want them with powers, too, which they git effen they ate the apples. Thet little gossip was passed on to Adam, though it turned out not true, anyways.

Soon they was both eatin apples, an a'waitin fer somethin big t' happen, an it did. God made them cold, an they had to put on clothes. Panthers got downright unfriendly, an cat-fish don't want t' get caught an



®
cooked no more.

"Oh!" God says, fierce an mad, "Ya'll cain't play the game like it is, we's goin' t' change the rules. From naow on you'uns gonna work fer yore bread!"

Jes like I tol you the day the story was read, Miss Abisinthe, we always has corn sticks, so's it don't make no difference there, but thet hain't what upsets Gramps. He doan't say nothin for a mite, though he knows ah'm finished a'tellin. He jes sets thar a'chawin, a'whittlin, an oncet in awhile a'eerglin in th' corn squeezins. Gramps was billin mad, ah cud tell!

Everythin was quiet -- too quiet -- with nothin a'tall but the rockin, the chawin, the whittlin, and the eerglin. The wind was singin low, too, a'moanin softly now and then, like maybe Aunt Jessie was still up in the live-oak what leans on the porch, an where she eergled one night atter the comin out party for leetle Bessie and her new family relation, Fat-John, what Bess caught the night Louie Sims spooked them funny city-slick folk off the Indian burial grounds where great, great, grandpaw was buried atter them leetle Spanish fellers accidental-like shot him when they was lookin fer a fountain of youth. Leastwise, thet's what they says they was a'lookin fer, though, like Gramps, ah've had mah doubts, a'thinkin maybe they was lostes an don't want to confess to it.

Ah couldn't hardly tolerate Gramps silence, with the wind a'moanin, and all remindin of Aunt Jessie. At last Gramps asked, "D'ye think I be lyin?"

"No, Gramps," I says

"Take it from me, ah hain't."

"Is Miss Abisinthe a'lyin, Gramps," I asked, tryin t' be as shrewd as Gramps.

Ah thought he'd jest go t' his whittlin again, makin everything quiet, but he pinte at me and spoke right up, right away. "Ah hain't ta go 'round a'sayin thet others lie. Thet story 'bout feller Adam and lady Eve may be th' way t'was fer her kinfolk. Ah'm a'goin t' tell the' story whut be fer yere kinfolk."

Right then Gramps eergled from th' jug again, and then begun: "Like, they sez, ever'thin was peacable with catfish whut want tu get caught, storms and such bothered nobody, and no one a'tall went hungry, but all o' thet was 'cause o' th' power.

"The firstest two critters was Nute and Enute, an they was your fustest kinfolk, too, an mine. Their heads sloped back unnatchurel like -- leastwise for us'n -- an their jaws stuck out some like Rafe's bulldog, only not so round.

"Wal, Nute and Enute was a'settin by a golly-wash one day, jes sneakin in the sun, and a'thinkin 'bout what they should use their power for thet day. Nute says he wants fried chittlins, not havin any for so long, but Enute, the contrariest female ever, she wants a vacation. They wuz near t' slingin atter one 'nother when they seed a big fiery light above, all yellow-orange and red, a'comin brighter and brigther through the clouds. They used th' power tu git close to see whut looked like old man Ledbetter's silo burnin in the air.

"They wuz both moughty surprised t' see it come down right on its fiery tale, and then put the fire plumb out.

"Enute's curiosity got tickled, and so she sasshayed close, and Nute, of course, hed to follow. Strange animuls come out o' the silo, a'carryin peculiar boxes whut they set down an left. Then the silo got t' burnin again, an that musta' scared it off, fer it jumped into th' air whar it jest kept a'goin, a'burnin, until it was all gone.

"Enute couldn't shut the box thet was left from her mind, and Nute couldn't get her back to 'portant things, like maybe catfish and rest.

"They went up t' thet box. Enute wiggled inside whar she vanished jest as though the power was used, but they wuz no way Nute could trace her with his power, so he squeezed inside t' see what wuz a'goin on.

"Wal, I'm a'going t' tell you," Gramps said, a'pointin his whittler at me again. "Nute and Enute came



®
outen inside a second box jest like the firstes, hundreds o' miles from whar they went inside, an atter that there was no stoppin Enute, no matter how Nute tried to arguefy her out of sech travels. 'Cum home, take care o' leetle Cain,' Nute would argue. Or, 'Effen God hed wanted us t' use boxes, 'stead o' the power, he would'a borned us thet away."

"Thet don't sound bad to me, Gramps," I says.

Gramps looked at me with sorta soulful, sorryful eyes, jest like the day Candy Leo drawed that lightnin bolt with her fancy experiments in eerglin, and got burned bad fer her troubles, en she should'a knowed better, ah always say.

"Enute wuz a'soakin in thet artyficial power like Joey Weeld gits grabbed by crazy weed, only unlike Joey, Enute kin tell when she's hit daylight side and Joey cain't.

"Thet still don't sound bad," I says.

"They was a'changin shape with use of the artyficial power t' move from place to place, an a'losin their own power," shouted Gramps, his eyes a'peerin outen red-buried-in-white, an his nose a'quiverin.

Gramps is allus like thet. He gets things a'goin calm an peaceful like, and then bang! Reminds of Rig Couchy's temperment when they makes him hold his breath more'n ten minutes -- red and sorta crackly.

Wal, Miss Abisinthe. Don' think I didn't suck wind. Gramps was a'tellin me somethin 'portant naow.

"They lostes their tails firstes," Gramps says, "an they couldn't eergle as far as the day before on each day, nor could they git catfish to like gettin caught, neither, an cold winds began t' bother them, and so's they had to find covers to protect theyselves. Don't think Nute didn't lay into Enute. 'Effen God hed wanted us 'thought tails an t' move about from place t' place in leetle boxes, he'd've hed us borned thetaway.'

"But powerful as the argyment was, Enute got her stubborn streak near like yore cousin Aimee when she an her mule, Tucker, bluff one 'nother, neither bein willin to admit to tirin' 'till the other does, an both a'ploddin the same ground 'til sunup.

"So, when they was finished with thet firstest and biggest argyment, Enute went a'trailin from box t' box, jest for contrariness, an Nute, like any fool, a'chasin behind."

Gramps stopped a'whittlin an a'talkin long 'nough t' look up at me an to eergle in some more corn squeezins. "Thet's the actual truth if'n ah naiver tole it," he says.

Wal, Miss Abisinthe, effen yew knew Gramps, you'd be as struck with his reasonin as ah was. "Ah knows ye t' be truthful, Gramps, 'ceptin thet time Grandma was makin th' river sprinkle o'er the corn during the dry spell, an she accidental like dropped widder Muscravory whut you said was a'helpin out'n th' woods -- but thet don't count none," I said quickly. "But how can ah sure 'nough tell you hain't jest a'joshin me?"

"Eergle out'n mah jug effen you wants, Gramps says, and so ah did, a big one, 'cause Gramps don't often invite thet, kinfolk or no.

"Naow tell me, Grandson, has yew ever seed any flatlander eergle?"

Wall, Miss Abisinthe. Ah thought back 'til a crick formed inside -- like it does when you hold them flash cards up so long with those wiggly marks, an ask effen th' sum is three or four -- an ah finally has to confess to Gramps that "No, ah hain't never seed no flatlander eergle."

"Wal, then, thet proves they hain't got none o' th' power, don't hit?"

Ah don't jes let Gramps jump me t' fast conclusions, like yew taught us, Miss Abisinthe. The thought biled away fer a spell, an ah eergled more outen his jug, an then ah says, "Ah reckon yore right, Gramps, or they would't be a'wastin all thar energy a'fliten an a'toten when they could just as easy eergle hit around. And when hit comes to travel, wal, I myself has seen Miss Abisinthe ride into our leetle community in a black box with wheels, instead o' jes eergling in, like most folkses hereabouts."

Gramps eergled a little, and so did I, until we had thet jug gone. Then Gramps eergled himself to his favorite thick live-oak, the big bushy one all covered with greenness, where, he says, his firstes



® sweetheart, Nell, and he, used to meet when it was jes a bare spot. It came all peaceful again.

You hain't a'deservin what I done t' ye Miss Abisinthe, and you probably been pullin up big pictures in your mind of our fancy weddin to come, with relatives an all, but atter Gramps talk, ah jest got t' say it outright. Ah hain't gonna call you an animul, or any names like thet, but you kin see how 'tis.

We'uns is diffurt, you and me. And like Gramps has said it, "Tain't human lessen hit eergles!" Here, let me eergle thet ruler back together for ye, Miss Abisinthe. Thet's the least I kin do.

