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THE JOURNAL.
N. C. SUNN, Editor
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LOVE AND WAR.

Two Lovers, After Twenty Weary Years of Separation, Are Finally United.

"Van Bernard, I wish you to understand distinctly that I am at liberty to choose my own company, and I do not propose that you shall dictate to me, either," and Ellen Gilbert gave her worsted an emphatic jerk by way of emphasis.

"But, Ellen, this fellow is a stranger, and—well I do not like the look of his black eyes." Van spoke his convictions, for if his feelings had not been hurt by his evident interest in the maiden he loved, there was something so forbidding about this elegant stranger, who had been spending the autumn among the Ohio hills, as to put plain, honest Van on his guard.

"Henry Romans is a perfect gentleman, and understands how to conduct himself in the presence of ladies, which is more than could be said of some young men I knew," Ellen retorted, angrily.

"You know, Ellen, how people will talk, for—well, everybody knows we are engaged."
"Engaged! Van Bernard, when did I promise to become your wife! So far as I can recollect, you have never yet asked me, and it is not probable that I should consent to such a proposition without some such intimation on your part."

While Ellen was speaking a shadow crept over Van's honest face, and leaving his chair he came over and leaned heavily against the mantel. When he could steady his voice, he said, slowly and sadly, "Ellen, there never was a time when I did not look upon you as my future wife, though we have never gone through the formality of asking and answering that question, we understood each other perfectly. Is not the engagement-rings upon your finger at this very moment?" Snatching the ring from her hand she threw it towards him, saying: "So perish the last link that binds us together. I am glad to be free—to feel that you cannot hold me to a bargain that was never made."

"Ellen, you know I do not wish my freedom, and you are just as confident that I would never try to hold you to an engagement of which you are tired. You are not yourself this evening. When you think over your hasty words you will decide differently."

"Never! I despise you, and hope you will never come into my presence again," Ellen flashed back.

Van took his hat from the table, and walked slowly out of the doorway and down the path to the gate. He did not go home, but turning to a path that crossed the meadow, he wandered aimlessly along until he reached a secluded spot, where he sat down to think from his earliest boyhood he had known and loved Ellen Gilbert. As they grew up to manhood and womanhood their affections centered more and more in each other, and years ago it came to be understood that in due course of time they would make a home for themselves. Though more than ordinarily intelligent, Van was only a plain farmer; but, until the coming of Henry Romans, Ellen had been proud of his sterling qualities, and the whole wealth of her young heart belonged to him.

Romans had come to spend the season with a friend, and in making love to the pretty, little rustic maiden, he had no higher motive than to be amused for a few tedious weeks. Ellen was dazzled by his brilliant appearance, and enjoyed the attentions of her young companion, but although she wished to be not so old-fashioned, she loved him as well as ever.

Once or twice she was tempted to call him back and tell him that she did not mean what she had said, but calling her pride to her assistance, she determined to teach him a wholesome lesson.

"Poor Van! It is too bad, for I care more for him, rough and awkward as he is, than for this handsome stranger, with all his gold and knowledge of the ways of the world," she said to herself, after trying in vain to find an excuse for her harsh words. "But I will let him alone for a few days, for he must learn that he cannot dictate to a Gilbert."

Van did not come back the next day as she had anticipated, so for his special benefit she attended the concert in company with Henry Romans. Van was there, but away back in a dark corner, where his white face did not haunt the unfaithful girl, and so heart sick did he become at the careless remarks of those around him, concerning the turn things had taken, that before the entertainment was half over he slipped out, unobserved, and, stealing softly in at the cottage door, sought his own room; and there he spent the rest of the night in contriving plans for his mother's comfort, for he had fully determined to offer his services to the recruiting officer before another sun should set.

When, in the morning, he unfolded his plans to his widowed mother, silent tears rolled down her withered cheeks, but not a word of complaint did she utter. Other mothers were compelled to part with their sons, and why should she be spared the pain of separation? It was soon arranged that her son Ben should take charge of the farm and its work, and, before the stars came out that night, Van had taken the last kiss from the dear old mother's lips, and had watched away with the boys in blue. He had not spoken a word concerning Ellen's unfaithfulness, but the mother's intuition told her something was amiss between them.

When Ellen heard of her lover's enlistment she wept bitterly, but her pride prompted her to conceal her remorse by seeming careless. After Van was gone she flitted desperately with young Romans, and Ben's wife did not think her duty accomplished until she had repeated her opinion of the girl's conduct to Van. So thoroughly indignant was the young matron that she even confided to him Dame Rumor's report concerning the wedding that was to take place during the holidays. It might all have been different had not Van at this juncture implored his sister-in-law not to mention Ellen Gilbert's name at all in the future. So he went on believing that Ellen—his Ellen—belonged to another man, and, feeling that he was alone in the world, he became reckless of his life.

It was on Thanksgiving Day, '62, that Ellen drove him from her presence, and when that festal day came around again, he lay wounded and bleeding on Lookout Mountain's gory field. Early on that memorable day, the color bearer was shot down, and it was Van Bernard who saved the tattered flag from capture, carrying it with him right in the thickest of the fight. He was seen to fall amid the storm of shot and shell that darkened the air, and when the smoke of battle cleared away, his comrades took up what they supposed to be his mutilated body, and, wrapping it in the riddled flag he had borne, laid him tenderly in the grave their own hands had hollowed.

But poor Van found a far less restful bed than the one they had prepared for him, for wounded, ill and in a Southern prison, the sun beat down unmercifully upon him, while his friends in the North thought him safe with God. Having learned through a comrade who had been brought into the hospital in a dying condition that his mother was dead, and that the papers had been full of eulogies concerning his own heroic end, he determined not to undecieve the world, but, when the struggle was over, to bury himself in some secluded spot in the Sunny South, and to let his old friends and neighbors go on believing him asleep on the battlefield where he had fallen. He was not exchanged until the war closed, and then among strangers, he began his new and solitary life.

Though Ellen feigned indifference, she would have sacrificed her life to have saved the noble one of her lost friend. Even while engaged in playing the part of a coquette her heart was aching for one word from the honest, sensible man she had sent from her so cruelly. Week after week and month after month she looked in vain for the letter that she hoped he would be so forgiving as to write.

At times she was tempted to lay aside her reserve and send him a penitent letter, that she was certain would bring a reply; but Ben's wife would say that she was courting his favors because the city fellow had cast her aside. So it was that no explanation was ever made, and when the news of Van's

noble death came, Ellen was almost prostrated with grief. She went around the house pale and wan, and at times her friends feared that reason itself would be dethroned. But trouble is not apt to kill, and poor Ellen was destined to carry her heavy sorrow many long, weary days. Her brothers and sisters married, and in due course of time her parents went to join the sleepers in the silent city of the dead, and Ellen was left alone in the house that had once been so full of song and laughter.

Three days before the anniversary of the battle of Lookout Mountain, twenty years after he had been carried into captivity, an uncontrollable longing to look upon home and familiar faces seized Van Bernard. Before, he had stifled all such desires, but somehow he could not quiet the heart yearnings this time, so his valise was hurriedly packed, and his landlady was informed that he would be absent a fortnight. An hour later he was flying northward and homeward.

Day was dawning when he stepped upon the station of his native town. Not wishing to arouse Ben's family so early, he determined to take a stroll through the graveyard and down past the old Gilbert homestead. There were many familiar names cut in the monuments in the cemetery, but he only paused long enough to read the inscription on his mother's tombstone and drop a tear upon her grave.

The sun was just beginning to tint the treetops when he halted at the gate leading to the porch, where he and Ellen had spent so many happy hours. But little change had taken place in the appearance of the old house and its surroundings since the day he went away, just twenty years before. Opening the gate he walked up the path, and was about to occupy a rustic seat, which his own hands had fashioned, when a woman who had been gathering China asters and autumn leaves came suddenly from behind the old elm tree, and once again Van Bernard and Ellen Gilbert stood face to face. Ellen was the first to recover her voice, and there was a perceptible tremor in her tone as she faltered:

"Van Bernard! Has the grave really given up its dead, or is it a spirit I address?"

"It is Van Bernard, flesh and blood as of old, who stands before you, Ellen—but I do not know by what name I should address you now," Van replied, in a voice that convinced his hearer that it was no supernatural being who had made her such an unreasonable call, but that the real Van Bernard, whose face had haunted her for more than a score of years, now stood in her presence.

"Call me Ellen, Ellen Gilbert, as you did in the long ago," she said, quietly.

"But I thought you were married—Henry Romans?"

"Is not, and never was anything to me," she answered. "But you look faint. Come in and get a mouthful of breakfast."

"Not now, Ellen. Sit down and let us understand each other."

And there, amidst the old familiar scenes, the breach of three times seven years was healed. All the long, doleful past was forgotten in the new hopes that had come so suddenly to them. An hour later, when old Mrs. Goodman came in to help with the Thanksgiving dinner, she found them still on the porch, forgetful of their breakfast and everything else except that they had found each other, and nothing but death would ever separate them again.

That was a real Thanksgiving to them both, and the quiet marriage that was celebrated in the old-fashioned parlor that night was as full of love as if there had been no gray hairs in the locks of the bride and groom.

BELLE V. CHRISOLM.
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