

telling you that I succeeded, but both enclosed and shut in, not out, this fair woman. It must be, it is I know, inexcusably wicked, but when I saw your patient to-day my heart bounded as it did when I first gazed upon those rich brown tresses, and I feel sure that she is Mrs. Burton, though you call her Nancy Prior. I cannot understand it."

"Well, Dr. Hannaford, you are not going to leave your story half told. Tell us how you got along after that night?" said Mabel.

"I remember nothing more of that night. When I again awoke I heard voices in my room."

"I believe you care more for him than you do for me. He is a brave, noble fellow, he saved your life, perhaps it belongs to him. I do not blame you, but it almost maddens me, though I feel grateful to him."

The voice was Burton's.

"Oh! he is stirring, come out" The words were spoken in a whispered woman's voice. I heard the door open and shut. After a while the door again opened, footsteps approached softly. I felt lips press my cheek and a voice say, "Good-bye, you saved my life, may the good Father above save yours. Good-bye!" The footsteps retreated, the door again opened and closed and I felt lonely and dreary as if my life was a blank before me, aimless and hopeless.

Burton watched with me the rest of the night but only spoke when actually necessary.

Next day when I awoke, Mrs. Burton was at my bedside and was in and out during that day, and afterwards, while I kept my room she would read to me, sing to me, converse with me. Mr. Burton shared with neighbors, who were all very kind and attentive, the task of watching at night. I rapidly improved when improvement commenced, and on the day before Christmas the doctor said I might, if very careful, mingle with a grand Christmas party to be held in honor of my convalescence, my host and hostess having crowned their much kindness by throwing their house open for the purpose.

During the time that I had been laid up my mother had also been confined to her bed, and neither my brother nor his wife could leave home.

My friend who had employed me had several times come long distances to visit me, and he and his corp of agents attended our Christmas party. I need not describe the profuse and beautiful decorations, or tell about the homage your humble servant received. I was the honored guest and the hero of the occasion and received many Christmas presents. A pair of beautifully worked slippers "from a friend," excited my curiosity and admiration. After I had examined and admired these gifts, I was led to the window in front of which stood a fully equipped turnout of sleigh and robes and horse with silver-mounted harness. Mr. Burton stood at the horse's head. Mrs. Burton, who was standing beside me, said, "Dr., do you feel well and strong enough to take a short drive?"

"Yes, I think so," said I, "but you must remember that I have no winter wraps with me."

Away she went, returning with a splendid buffalo overcoat, sealskin cap, fur gloves, and felt overboots. On each of these articles was a card, on which I read these words: "For Dr. Hannaford from Nancy Burton's brothers. A token of gratitude for a dear life dearly saved. Happy Christmas and A Happy and Prosperous New Year to you."

I had been too much surprised, dazed, I may say with the whole affair, so entirely unexpected as it was, to feel emotion of any kind except surprise, but this episode, the magnificent gratitude overcame me, emotion choked utterance, a flood of tears burst from my eyes. I could only seize Mrs. Burton's hand as I exclaimed.

"This is too much, I am very weak. Pardon me."

"Come, put on those things. Shall I drive you?" said Mrs. Burton as she withdrew her violently trembling hand, in a voice evincing almost as much emotion as my own.

I expressed the pleasure the proposal gave me, and donned my wraps, assisted by Mrs. Burton, who, after a few moments absence, returned ready for the drive.

The horse and sleigh were brought round to the door. As I stepped up to take my seat beside my fair driver, I found a card on the cushion addressed to me, and turning it over I read the words, "Will our friend, Dr. Edward Hannaford, please accept this sleigh, robes, horse and harness, from John and Mary Burton. A small acknowledgment for a life saved and a life risked. Wishing you a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

I assure you I couldn't feel any more. I had already been overcome with gratitude for gratitude. I could only take my place beside Mrs. Burton and lift my hat and bow to the acknowledgment of the cheers from the crowd of friends assembled at the door and in front of the house.

We dashed out of the lawn and up the hill, past the scene of my nearly fatal adventure, through the woods at the summit of the hill, turned off and sped over a lonely by-road through the fields and out upon the highway down which we proceeded to the river. River roads are always picturesque—this one is I think especially so. From it the river is seen sweeping in graceful curves through elm parked intervals, then down at your feet hugging closely the precipitous banks on the very verge of which the road runs. Further on it disappeared from view behind a low hill, on the gentle slope of which, among stately poplars and ancient wide-spreading willows, nestled a farmhouse and clustering barns. Still further on we crossed a long bridge,—I can still hear the hollow frosty creaking of the sleigh runners, and the tramp, tramp, of the horse's hoofs—then around and up a sharp steep curve and into a brown spine carpeted grove of gnarled and rugged pines, among whose solemnly swaying arms the winter breeze played mournful anthems and funeral dirges for the dying year. Emerging from the pine wood we came suddenly and to me unexpectedly in sight of the mills and miller's home, and beyond the cozy village.

(To be Concluded.)

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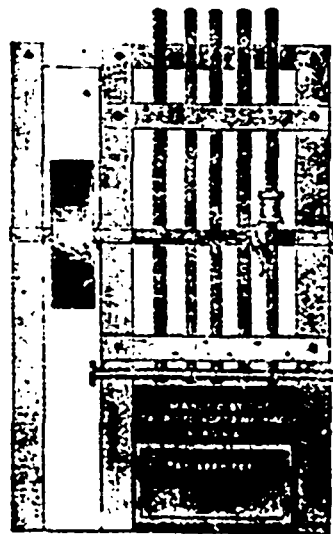
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