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The Evening Telegram

ST. JOHN'S, FEBRUARY 28, 1888.

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Letters relating to advertisements, job work and other business affairs, to be directed to Wm. J. HERDEES, Proprietor.

All communications intended for publication or containing intelligence, must be addressed to ALEX. A. PARSONS, Editor.

HIS VISION OF DEATH.

A Curious Tale of the Late Civil War.

THE WARNING OF FATE.

How a Union Soldier Gazed Upon His Own Tombstone.

(Concluded.)

'I confessed that was our destination, but tried to cheer him up by telling him there was little likelihood of a fight, and, if there should be one, little chance that he would be in it.

'I couldn't do it," he said. "Besides, it would do no good. One can't avoid what is decreed."

'I trembled as I saw how thoroughly he was possessed of that fatalistic idea I had known so many soldiers to entertain, and which I had never known to fail in its forecasting in the end.

'Poor Emily! Poor Emily!'

'He told me he had made his will and named me one of his executors. His wife was the sole heir and also executrix. He did not suppose I could act now—he had not looked for the end quite so soon—but he wanted me associated with her. If I could, he hoped I would counsel and assist her.

'Poor Emily!' he said. "She is but a child and she will not be as well off as many think; I spent a good deal of money raising the regiment. I did not think of going in it then. I thought that was the part that I could do and was glad to do. I shouldn't have come at all, but Emily got the notion that I was going to do so and talked about it so that I saw it would gratify her pride. So I came. I don't think I was intended for a soldier, though I am willing to do what I can. If they had made me a Quartermaster now—that is in my line. But I was not going to lobby for it, and besides I don't think Emily would have liked it as well."

'All this talk in his quiet, pathetic voice was too much for me. The idea of being an executor, too, was only less terrible to me than of being an executioner. I was only just 22, a stranger to such things, and having an unusual dread of all legal complexities I knew nothing of Bridges' business, living as I did in a distant part of the country, had never seen his wife but once, when she came to bid him good-by as we started for the field. She was a beautiful woman. I wondered then how she came to marry Bridges. I understood now. I was very diffident at that time, and, like most country lads, shy of ladies society. The very idea of being associated with a pretty widow in the administration of her husband's estate threw me into a perspiration. I think I had an idea that there was no way out of such a duty if it were once devolved on me. So I begged him to excuse me, but to no purpose. He said his wife had the will and he would rest easier if he knew I was interested in her welfare. Why he should, I could not imagine. I was nothing but a schoolboy, and not a very bright one either.

'In trying to find a way out of this, it occurred to me that an officer with a little detail of men was to be sent back in the morning. I urged him to take this, but he declined. Determined to get out of what seemed to me a desperate scrape, I finally asked him outright why he did not resign, take this detail back to the city and leave the service. I thought I might help my friend Edson by persuading him to this course, as well as save the man's life and benefit the service at the same time. I did not hesitate to tell Bridges what he already knew, that he was not fitted for his place, and it would be a patriotic duty on his part.

'He hesitated, chiefly I am sure on account of his wife. At the same time his love for her and the conviction he had of her helplessness inclined him to follow my counsel. The result was that before sunrise his resignation was made out, approved by the Colonel, and he was on his way back to Nashville in command of the squad detailed to take in a few sick, some wagons and dispatches. A week afterwards he was relieved from duty and went back to private life.'

'Did you have a hard fight at Mumfordsville?' asked one of the listeners.

'We carried it by assault at daybreak of the 26th,' said the Captain, with a smile, without firing a shot or losing a man, capturing one mule very far gone with the glanders, which was all the trace the enemy had left, they having departed twelve hours before we arrived.'

'So he wouldn't have been hurt after all,' said one.

'He must have thought that vision of his was a tremendous sell,' said another.

'Poor Emily!' exclaimed another in lugubrious tones.

This sally brought the laugh that the quaint ending of the narrative seemed to deserve and there was a movement to retire, when, curious to know the feeling of the man after this ludicrous anti-climax, I asked:

'What ever became of the fellow?'

'That is the strangest part of the matter, gentlemen,' said the Captain soberly. He had not joined in the laugh, and every one settled back into his place to wait for the sequel. 'In February, 1864, I was ordered home on recruiting service. The train was delayed at Mumfordsville for repairs to the track, which had lately been disturbed by bushwhackers. Hearing that we were likely to be delayed all day, I strolled into the little town, and remembering Bridges' dream after a time, sauntered up to the crest of the hill where he had read his doom. As I did so I could but remember how accurately he had described what he had never seen. Queer enough there were even some fresh graves on the crest where he had located his own. As I came nearer I saw a woman in widow's weeds kneeling by one of them. I do not know why, but my curiosity was piqued to see her face, and I drew near at the risk of intruding on her grief. I was within a few yards when the noise of my footsteps came to her ears and she turned a wild, startled look upon me, and cast herself prone upon the grave, clasping the headboard wildly and protesting vehemently against being removed. As she did so I saw the headboard previously concealed by her form. On it was distinctly traced:

'J. S. Bridges, Lieut.—Ind. Vols. Killed in action at Mumfordsville, Ky., Dec. 26, 1863.'

Everyone drew a long breath at this announcement.

'And the woman?' asked one.

'His wife. She had come for his body and had become insane with grief. A family in the town had kindly cared for her.'

'How did it come about?'

'Well, the story of his resignation leaked out, and the ludicrousness of the subsequent events was too much for the people at home. He was jeered and taunted until even his young wife hung her head with shame at the thought of having married a coward. Bridges stood it for a while, then went and joined a regiment which was being recruited in the next country, as a private. In a fight which occurred just after it was mustered into service he showed such desperate valor, and withal such soldierly capacity, that he was promoted to his former rank, to date from that day. By mere accident he was at Mumfordsville when Morgan made his attack on the garrison, demoralized by the soldiers, and in trying to rally the troops in the early morning was killed and buried on the very spot he had described so well a year before.

Nobody spoke for some minutes. Then one, interpreting the look in all our eyes, shrugged his shoulders and said: 'Strange, wasn't it?'

'I was thinking of the young wife, and almost involuntarily asked:

'And the wife?'

'She was so overcome with remorse at this catastrophe, which she blamed herself for having caused, that, as I said, she became insane. I took her home, secured proper care for her, qualified as an executor of her husband's will, and, when my recruiting leave expired, tendered my resignation and wound up his estate. It was at some personal sacrifice that I did so, for I had been promoted in the meantime, and a pair of eagles were waiting my acceptance of the commission. I thought it my duty to do what I could to repair the harm I seemed unintentionally to have been instrumental in causing.'

'Did she recover?' asked one, with the sympathy we all felt in his voice.

'She is my wife,' said the Captain, and his lip quivered as he added: 'I dread to be away from her at this season. Instead of being a time of hilarity it is always one of apprehension to me. But for an accident to a train I should have been at home last night. As it is I am trying to divert her attention from the past by frequent dispatches showing my progress homeward. I hope it may not be in vain. Pardon me, gentlemen, if I have marred your pleasure. Christmas time is not always a synonym for pleasant memories.'

The whistle sounded as he ceased speaking. 'There is Dodge City,' he exclaimed springing to his feet. 'I must send a dispatch from here so that she will get it early in the morning.'

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100 Tons Bright, Round Sydney COAL, EX STORE.

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J. F. CHISHOLM.

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