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AN OLD MAID'S MONOLOGUE.

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CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Percival was with her son, but had remained in the city while Harry, with a lover's impatience, had rushed out to the 'Egypt,' as he called our country home.

Of course I insisted upon a visit from Mrs. Percival and during it discovered that she was sincerely and truly awakened from her prejudices against Catholicity, and I felt it was only a dread of what the world would say that kept her from openly embracing it.

They only stayed a couple of weeks, but that was long enough to make my darling perfectly happy, and then they went home and we resumed our quiet life again.

The next summer we went to Cresson and visited the summit, Harry, who, with his mother had joined us there, introducing us to the family who had been so kind to him, and to Father O'Malley.

We paid a flying visit to Philadelphia, and Harry went with us to Washington for a few weeks, but it was the winter of 60-1, and the war that was so soon to desolate the country had begun in words if not in deeds.

The engagement had been renewed on its old footing, though Harry begged hard that at least one year of the three should be remitted and they might be married in six months. He was willing to wait so long he said.

Hitherto if not wealthy I had considered myself fully justified in a liberal expenditure and had spent very little of Estelle's income, laying it by for her future, as my own was plenty for us both.

These business matters troubled me not a little; in the midst of it all I received a long letter from Harry begging me to shorten their probation six months and to allow them to be married next spring.

Which he accordingly did, arriving before the fort's early in May. I held out as long as I could, but the attacking party had a secret friend within the besieged ramparts and I was obliged to hang out the white flag.

In other words, I could not resist Harry's eloquence or my darling's silent pleadings and my heart got decidedly the better of my judgment.

The wedding day was fixed for the first day of June, and Harry returned to Philadelphia triumphant.

Little else was thought of during the next three weeks but preparations for the wedding and those who have gone through with such an epoch know what it is.

Two days before that fixed for the ceremony Harry and his mother made their appearance, and after that the precious hours when I had my child all to myself were over.

They were married! Ah, how much is conveyed by that little sentence.

I can see Harry now, how handsome he looked in his uniform. For he was married in 'full regimentals,' as our young officers were fond of being in those days, and even we old folks looked proudly on, and our old hearts beat with renewed vigor at the sight of the blue and gold.

I believe I have never said whether Harry was handsome or not. He was so, decidedly, tall, with a fine figure and dark chestnut colored hair that waved but did not curl, eyes of the same shade of brown, large and bright with life and lustre. He wore no beard but the military moustache. His features were not regular but his whole appearance was striking.

My Estelle had black hair and eyes, her hair curled in heavy ringlets, and grew very prettily round her forehead, not leaving the corners bald and bare; except for her bright smile, revealing pearly teeth, she had no regular claims to beauty, and yet many seeing her face once would turn to take a second look.

They made a handsome couple as they stood there in their youth and happiness and pledged their truth to one another, in the presence of many friends.

My darling turned to me as soon as the ceremony was over and hid her tearful face for a few moments on my bosom and her arms closed convulsively around me. Then she roused herself and received the greetings of her friends.

CHAPTER IX.

I was very lonesome after my darling had left me and all the excitement was over.

Estelle and her husband went to Philadelphia with Mrs. Percival and to Washington where Harry's regiment was quartered. She stayed there with him all through the summer. His regiment was very much 'cut up,' as the phrase was, in the sad affair of Bull Run, but Harry himself escaped unhurt. That was his first fighting, and after that followed the long inaction while McClellan was forming his army. During that winter, Harry received a staff appointment with the General in command of Washington City.

This made both his position and Estelle's more comfortable and enabled her to see and enjoy much of the society that crowded the capital that memorable winter.

They wrote to me that they were keeping house on a small scale in a suit of rooms, which in the crowded state of the city, they were fortunate to get. They begged me to join them, saying they had secured a snug little place for me in the same house with them; but I refused. To my thinking young married people are best left to themselves, and so much as I longed to see and share their happiness felt it more prudent and right to leave them to themselves.

My winter passed very quietly only enlivened by the weekly letter from one or other of my children. At last the spring came and the military world at Washington was in the mire. Harry expected to be ordered away early in the month of April and then I went to them to be with Estelle when her husband left her to bring her home with me.

I was with them a month. Each week, indeed each day, Harry expected the 'orders' which however, did not come till May and then he was obliged to go.

My poor darling suffered much in parting from her young husband, but I will not attempt to describe her feelings. We left the day after our home, paying Mrs. Percival a visit of a few weeks before crossing the mountains.

Those who had fathers, husbands, brothers or sons in the army can imagine how the summer was spent. From that time Harry's history was the history of the Army of the Potomac for he was with it in all its battles. We heard from him as often as possible, but frequently only from newspaper accounts could we glean any thing.

My dear child's first anniversary of her wedding was a sad and anxious day, different far from the happiness with which she had looked forward to it. But it was cheered in a measure by a letter from Harry and several days after she received another from him written on the day itself and full of tender anxiety and love. How it rejoiced my heart to find them so happy to each other!

But sorrow most crushing and severe was yet to come to try my child's spirit and render it purer and stronger. A battle, one of those fierce and seemingly useless struggles that desolated the Potomac Army, was fought, and Harry's name was among the missing!

How shall I describe Estelle's agony, when day after day brought no further news! Mrs. Percival went to Washington and tried to get some more decided intelligence, but General H—'s report said only that, 'Captain Harry Percival, Aid de-Camp and Acting Assistant Adjutant General, having been sent through a cross fire which he braved bravely to deliver an important order, was seen on his return to fall from his horse near a woods which afterward took fire, and when the battle was over no trace of him could be found; the woods where he fell were burned and it is feared if he had not fallen into the hands of the rebels that he was burnt to death. Of the gallantry and devotion shown by this young officer too much can be said, and the service can ill afford to lose so brave and efficient a member.'

But what a mockery of our woe those kindly words of praise were.

I trembled for the effect the news on my child. The blow seemed to crush her completely. I tried all I could to comfort her for you may be sure, as did our dear Father O'Brien who

was still our parish priest, but neither love nor religion could bring aught of relief to her stricken soul at first, and we at length gave up, trusting to time that great soother of all human woes.

"Oh there is such a depth of woe In a young blighted spirit—manhood rears A haughty brow—and age has done with fears But youth lies down to misery in arms; As the dark clouds o'er mantling its fresh days."

Mrs. Percival came out to us as soon as she had done all she could in Washington and together we bore our grief as best we could. But in November a little messenger from heaven came to heal my darling's heart and teach her she had other duties and ties for which she must lay aside her grief, arouse herself from her despair.

Our baby boy was a great comfort to us all and receive a far larger share of our love and blessings from the thought that his father would never perhaps, know or see him.

When the baby was baptized Mrs. Percival also stood at the font and was received into the church, and her grief was solaced as only religion can solace it.

"Baby fingers, waxen touches" wakened Estelle from the sad state into which she had fallen and gradually she acknowledged how wrong her despairing grief had been. It was very touching to see the young widow of twenty with her baby in her arms, crooning over it with all a young mother's fondness rendered deeper by the feeling that it would never know a father's love.

No household can be gloomy where a baby is, the young soul so late from heaven seems to bring a faint reflection of the delights it had known there down upon the troubled earth and while that reflection lasts all around are refreshed by it. Thought, our hearts were sad and sore enough we let no shadow from them fall on Master Harry's baby forehead.

But God was merciful, and when the summer had come with her long bright days and rustling foliage and song of birds that seemed to mock our grief our sorrow was turned into joy.

One day I was sitting under my favorite tree with Harry, who was just beginning to sit alone, established at my feet busy with a string of bright beads and buttons; the nurse was not far off, and I was aroused by an exclamation from her, from the book I was trying to read.

I looked up and my heart stood still. A figure, a man ragged and tattered, with unkempt hair and beard, had entered the gate and was staggering rather than walking towards me. In alarm I picked up the baby and gave it to the nurse, then stood and waited the man's approach. He came near and held out both hands.

"Aunt Ellen don't you know me? What of Estelle? his voice was hoarse with intense feeling, and he reached my side and sank into the seat from which I had just risen.

It was Harry! could I credit my senses? But it was indeed he, and instantly my heart sank as I thought of the effect this too great joy would have on my child. Not that I was not glad to see him. I blessed God then and there for the mercy.

CHAPTER X.

Estelle was fortunately in her own room which did not overlook the entrance gate, so I smuggled Harry up to me, and locking the door administered a glass of brandy and water to refresh him and there left him to make himself a little more presentable, just trimming his hair which had not seen comb and brush for many weeks.

I left him and went down stairs and wandered about the house till I thought he had had time to recover a little of his former looks before I broke the news to Estelle, for I knew in two minutes she would comprehend me and I did not want her to be shocked by the frightful appearance he had made to me.

Then I went into Estelle's room. She was sitting, and looked up with her usual smile of welcome, but a glance at my face told her something had happened. She sprang up and cried, 'What is it auntie, your face tells something.'

'Yes dear; can you bear some very good news can you—'

'Harry! you have heard from him? He is here?' for her quick ear had heard my room door open and the familiar step across the hall. He opened the door and stood on the threshold.

'Harry!' She gave a convulsive cry and staggered a few steps, then would have fallen had I not caught her slight form in my arms.

He did not speak but took her out of my arms and tears fell on her thin face as he clasped her to him. I left them alone to their sacred joy.

Baby Harry now claimed my attention, and making the little rogue as presentable as possible on so short notice, I carried him in to see his father.

But the spoiled fellow would have nothing to say to him, keeping his face persistently turned over my shoulder. At length after repeated

coaxing he turned around and scanned the sun-burnt bearded face with shy glances. Evidently the novelty of the beard was too great an attraction, and suddenly with a chuckling crow he plunged both baby fists into it and Harry took him from me without resistance on his part.

Then I dispatched Joe to town to send a telegram to Mrs. Percival, and busied myself with retiresment for the inner man.

When they came down to the library Harry looked something like himself except for the beard to which I could not get accustomed.

Estelle had got him one of his old suits of 'citizen clothes,' so his rags had disappeared. He was sunburnt and very thin.

Shall I, or can I tell how happy we were that night as we sat out under the starlight and told all that was to be told and heard of Harry's story? By that time too, we knew Mrs. Percival had received my telegram, and she too shared our joy. We knew as fast as steam could bring her she would be with us. Harry had held the baby H. in his arms all the evening and at last the little fellow dropped asleep and had to be put to bed. When Mrs. Percival came our happy circle was complete.

The weeks flew rapidly by in our new found happiness, but at length Harry said he must report for duty.

I have not given the story of Harry's prison life; it was the same as many others. He made his escape into East Tennessee, and led a wandering life among the mountains; at last making his way across Kentucky, and, once over the Ohio, he felt safe. But he only stopped at Steubenville to get a pair of shoes, then hastened to us as fast as possible. His money was exhausted by the purchase of the shoes, so he had to trust to chance charity for any assistance which would expedite his journey; and to the patriotic hearts he met on his way his story was not told in vain. He was in too great a hurry to get home to think much of his personal appearance; indeed everything was merged into the one desire, to see his wife.

He reported by letter to the War Department, and in consideration of his imprisonment was assigned to duty in Cincinnati, and was allowed the rest he so much needed.

The next winter was a happy one to Estelle, and I had the satisfaction of seeing my darling recover her health and spirits.

But a soldier's life is one of constant change, and after a few months of peace, rest and happiness Harry was again ordered to the field.— This time it was to the 'Army of the Tennessee,' and he continued in the field until the sad battle of Chickamauga, where he was wounded and sent home. During his absence Estelle still remained with me.

When he came up from Chickamauga he found his wound did not heal so quickly, and yielding to Estelle's entreaties, and feeling he could do so with honor he sent in his resignation. It was not accepted, but a year's leave of absence was granted him.

It was but right that Mrs. Percival should claim him during this respite; and they went to Philadelphia.

The old house was sadly lonely. It missed the baby noise and glee. Little Harry had grown to be a smart boy; and baby Ellen won all our hearts by her sweetness and beauty.

They left me in January after exacting a promise that I would join them the next summer, which I did, and we went up to Saratoga and the lake country of New York, for the hot months.

At Saratoga I could not but be reminded of my encounter with Estelle's father, and I wondered what became of him. If Estelle remembered the 'man in the chair' she did not say so; nor had she ever mentioned her father's name to me.

CHAPTER XI.

Before Harry's leave of absence expired he was quite well again and, feeling that just then the country needed her sons more than ever, for the last struggle, he reported himself for duty, and was assigned once more to the army before Richmond.

Naturally we were anxious about him; but no further trouble befell us, and that spring Richmond fell and the war was mutually at an end.

Never shall I forget the splendid scene we witnessed in Washington the 22nd and 23rd of May of that year. We were there for the grand review of the two armies, and how magnificent it was.

As soon as Harry could get free he returned to Philadelphia and commenced the practice of the law, which had been his profession before the war. In the fall I returned to my own home; leaving them at last after so many changes settled down to a life that promised every happiness.

Three years and more have passed and those promises have been fulfilled.

I have not seen them in all that time, and it seems very long. They write me that Harry is

a most interesting child; that my namesake Ellen is as lovely and interesting as her boyhood promised. Baby Estelle I have not seen, but, of course, have been told over and over again her many perfections.

Meanwhile I am growing old and grey, and though 'time has laid his hand upon my head gently, not smiting it, but as a harper lays his open palm upon his harp to deaden its vibration.' And I thank God for the green old age with which he has blessed me.

The last three years have been a period of calm and quiet, and during which I have seen many who began the race of life with me drop away to rest. Father O'Brien has gone to meet his reward in heaven, and his place on earth is filled by a young man; a priest as devoted and good as his predecessor, I know, but I can not have the same feeling toward him.

But I spoke in the beginning of two letters the mail had just brought me. They were from Estelle and Harry, accompanying the Christmas box that has always reached me on this night every year since I parted from them.

Estelle's letter is full of her home happiness, and breathes a spirit of joyful content and thanksgiving in every line. She tells me how Harry is improving, how lovely Ellen is, and what a darling I will find Estelle to be when I see her.

Then she writes of her husband, of his love and devotion, and what a true friend and counsellor he is; so steadfast and strong; a firm support upon which she never leaned in vain.

'You will read this, auntie, I know, on Christmas eve. Do you remember the Christmas eve he came back to me from the clouds I may say, where the evil that would have ruined our two lives was exercised? And I need not remind you of the Christmas Eve so many years ago when a little girl and her mother dropped upon you, as if they too had come from the clouds.— Dear, dear auntie, how can I ever thank you enough for all your devotion to me?'

And Harry thanks me for the sweet companionship I have made him, and says he can never be too grateful to Providence that induced him to urge his mother to that trip down the St. Lawrence.

He tells me how loving and devoted, how kind and attentive Estelle is in every relation of wife and mother; what a haven of rest and happiness his home is. And then the children.— Never before was there such a specimen of manliness and nobility as in their six year old boy. Ellen attracts the attention of every one by her peculiar style of beauty, and baby Estelle is the life and coming glory of the house.

So the tears ran down my withered cheek for very joy as I read these letters, and I longed to clasp them all to my heart.

Harry says they are coming out to spend next summer with me, and then he is going to find a good tenant for the farm and carry me off, *valens volens*, to make my home for the future with them.

Perhaps he is right, I am getting too old to be here all alone.

Margaret, my faithful old servant of many years, died several years ago, and Joe is getting very infirm. I have had to replace Margaret, but I cannot get used to strange faces about me. Joe's daughter, who is married in the neighborhood, wants him to come and hire with her, so he is well provided for.

Although I know my life will be a happy one with my darlings, a change at my years will be a great breaking up of old habits and ties. For that reason I feel sad about it, and go over the house deprecatingly as though begging its pardon for deserting it in its old age. I was born within these old walls fifty-three years ago, and it seems, having lived here all my life, that I ought to die within them. Perhaps I may; who knows the end?

But the Christmas log is all in a blaze; my lamp is flickering low, for I have burned it longer than usual to-night, writing these pages; and the clock on the mantle points to the 'wee sma' hours.' It is about the time when the great event took place eighteen hundred and sixty-eight years ago, that replaced the broken link between man and heaven, and caused the angels to sing 'Glory to God on high and peace on earth to men of good will.'

With peace and good will to all the world I must bring this to a close; for, now my love story's told, no one will care to hear any more from me; and people in general will feel no interest as to how my small candle flickers and goes out. Perhaps I ought to apologize for having said so much about myself, only I said in the beginning I must tell my story my own way.

I never saw or heard of Estelle's father after the meeting at Saratoga. I know not whether he be living or dead; or whether his home was saved amid the wreck of so many Southern fortunes; whether Sam fell heir to, or whether he had to wait till the war was over to come North and 'play the gentleman.' At any rate, no