

Literature. &c.

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THE SOLDIER'S BRIDE.

BY G. W. BROWNE.

Far away in the sunny south, on the eastern bank of the Wachita river, and a few miles north of the town of Monroe, there stood, years ago—it is a ruin now—a large, elegant, but gloomy mansion, the residence of a distinguished officer in the American army. On the eastern side was a large park, which, with the quaint form of the house, and the high wall that surrounded it, gave it air of chivalry, and reminded you of one of the strongholds of the English Barons in olden time.

It was in the spring of 1813, that eventful year in the history of the world, when kings and emperors trembled on their thrones, as they heard that magic name, Napoleon, and watched in fear for his victorious eagles to glitter over their citadels. Then depended the fate of the world upon a single battle, and the great game for power was to be played two years after, on the field of Waterloo; and that day was to observe in its bloody mantle the star of him whose destiny it had been for years to sport with thrones, to set up and pull down kings! And then America, just free from her chains, and who had risen with the weight of shame, poverty and misfortune, that England had heaped upon her, and was struggling for respectability, for existence even, had again become indignant at the acts of oppression done by the English king, and was once more in arms against the most powerful nation upon the earth, and the banner of the stars waved proudly over land and sea.

Do I hear the reader ask for my story? It was evening in spring, calm, still, beautiful. How sweetly steals on the quiet stillness and freshness of spring! To me it is the brightest season of the year—so emblematic of the spring of the soul from a winter of darkness and oblivion to the summer of a glorious immortality. I have sat at my window while the shadows of night were deepening around me, and watched the stars as one by one they took their places in the orchestra of Nature, silent, yet eloquent with music: have listened to the deep voice of the river, as it glided darkly on—the gentle rustle of the leaves, as unseemly, almost unsoft, the breath of God had passed them by: have seen the night dew glisten on the faded flowers; and when the picture seemed complete—and when the soul was wrapt in a potent spell it dared not break, even if it could, 'I've seen the moon climb the mountain's brow,' and silencing with her pale light hill-top, stream, and wood, adding a greater charm to that dreamy hour.

It was evening in spring time. By the open window of the mansion fronting the river, sat a young woman—one of those passionate voluptuous beauties of the southern clime. The long hair fell partly over a broad white forehead, beneath which glistened the dark, soul-lit eyes; the form round, full, and graceful, perfect in every outline, from the small, slender foot, to the well turned neck and the white throbbing bosom. She was gazing out over the waves. Her eyes rested on the tall trees, with their waving tops bathed in silver, the waters sparkling as tho' their surface was a bed of gems. There was a footstep in the hall—the door was opened, and with a smile upon his handsome face, a young man entered the room, and threw his arms around the white neck of the young woman. She raised her eyes to his, and he felt to his inmost soul the power of her magic gaze.

'Isora, my wife—once more by thy side.'
'Welcome, my husband—welcome to these arms. Here, pillow thy head upon this breast, and let me feel thy kiss.'

The man imprinted a kiss on the lips of the fond being at his side, and then knelt down and laid his face upon the heaving bosom.

'Isora, I have news.'
'Sad?'

'Yes.'
'Tell it me—I did not start.'

'We must part!'
'Part! H—'

'Aye, and may be forever.'
'No, not forever. But stay, tell me more.'

The husband arose and moved towards the door, saying 'Shortly I will return and tell you all.'

She buried her face in her hands and leaned against the window sill. She did not raise her head till she felt a hand upon her shoulder; by her side, in full rich uniform stood her friend, her protector, her husband. He took her hand—she threw herself upon his breast.

'Isora, I go to share the lot of a soldier. I have this day received a commission requiring me to join the army. I must go. I would not stay when my country asks my aid—my blood—if need be, my life. And this sword shall never be stained by a traitor's blood, or shamed by hanging at a traitor's belt. Isora—farewell! If I live, my thou hast professed to love shall never return to thee dishonored. And if the thunder and smoke of battle are to be my dirge and shroud, the heart which you have so often felt beating against yours shall share with thee its dying sigh, and from thy dear eyes I ask one tear sacred to the memory of the world-forgotten soldier.'

There was a single bright drop upon her cheek—a stifled sob—a long fond embrace—she felt the impress of warm lips upon hers—a hurried step, and Isora was alone. She

heard the clatter of his sword as it struck the floor, and then the sound of a horse's hoofs, loud at first, and becoming gradually indistinct till she could hear them no more, and she knew that he was gone.

One month had passed, and yet it was Spring time. The sun was just sinking to rest, and his parting smiles lingered sweetly on the face of nature. Softly they faded out, and presently the queen of night ascended her starry throne. By the river side, upon the great road leading towards the town of Monroe, was a single horseman. As the moonbeams fell upon his face you will see that he is a singularly handsome man, with a noble head and massive forehead, about which clustered a mass of rich dark hair; a beautiful blue eye, with a kind of melting expression, a languishing, ardent glance; a slight form, yet with unrivalled grace and beauty of outline. He was mounted on a large, powerful steed, black as night, and fleet as the whispering wind.

'Nearer and nearer,' exclaimed the horseman, in his deep, manly voice, 'to the spot where she dwells. On, on, my good steed, bear me to her presence. But will she know me? Will she recognise in the full-grown, powerful man, the soft, boyish lover, of former years? Say, will she know me? It seemed addressed to his own heart, for there came no answer. 'The passion which I have kept burning in my heart for years, in the tented field, the crowded city, and in every walk of life, one hope has clung to my heart—the thought that I might see her again—the hope that I might be avenged. Years ago, in her splendid home in New York, she refused me—threw from her the heart, rich with generous love, I gave, as a worthless offering. I, the poor, almost friendless boy, became from that moment a passionate man. I resolved that if I loved, the haughty woman should at my feet one day sue for mercy—yes, for mercy, and at the feet of him she once had scorned! Ah, I am here! and his horse stopped at the wide gateway.'

He knocked at the door with the hilt of his sword. It was opened by the porter, and giving his horse in charge, he entered the mansion. How his heart throbbed in his broad breast as he crossed the threshold. He gave his name, and desired to be shown to the lady of that beautiful home. He was shown to a room, where he threw off his surcoat, and we see him in the splendid uniform of a British officer. The card is conveyed to Isora. Why does she start, and why that sudden paleness of her cheek? She has heard that name before. In the crowded streets of New York she had heard it speaking to her often, in a voice she had never forgotten—that of *Edgar Grantly*. Could she see him? Perhaps he loved her still, and had come, now that she was a wedded wife, to renew the vows he once had breathed long ago, when first she had been loved. Could she see him? May be he had come to violate the sanctity of her husband's roof, the temple of honor, and she started at the thought. Alone, at night, her husband and protector far away, toiling and suffering in the hard work of war—could he return and find his home desolate—his idol faithless—her honor blasted? The memory of a dear face, sadly beautiful, which had been hid from her for years—a voice, the music of which was still fresh in her heart, answered she would see him. The door opened—he was at her side; she trembled as she pressed the extended hand, and gazed into the handsome face. There was the same blue eye of the lover of her youth—the same lofty forehead and classic features—the same graceful form, only finer and more winning, ripened into faultless beauty with bright manhood.

'I am happy to see you once more, Isora—may I call you so? Can you say as much, and tell me from your heart that I am welcome?'

'Yes, Mr Grantly, you are welcome. Long years have fled since our parting—but you have not been forgotten; are you satisfied?'

'Yes, more than satisfied, Isora. It is indeed a satisfaction to be remembered by one like you. Perhaps I should apologise for my being here. Learning that H— had returned, I obtained leave of absence for the short space of a day, and came here to visit him.'

'H— at home! you have been misinformed. He but a month ago joined the army.'

She did not notice the satisfaction that gleamed forth from his eyes when he heard this.

'Indeed! Then I will return to night.'

No, Edgar, not to night. H— would never forgive me if you should not accept my hospitality until to-morrow; then, if duty calls you, go. I have much to say to you; we were lovers once, you know. Ha, ha, ha, but we were young then.'

He heard not the latter part of the sentence, nor the ringing laugh. *We were lovers once*—these words, and the tone in which they were uttered, burned like a withering fire in his soul. But it was for a moment. Edgar Grantly was too much a man of the world to betray, by look or word, what was passing in his heart.

'So we were—the love of a boy—the scorn of a girl—that was years ago.'

Yes, and the girl has grown a woman, the charming boy a man.'

'And his heart is his own.'

'I hope so.'

'Do you? Why, Isora?'

She made no reply.

'Do you think yet, as years ago, that it is a worthless thing?'

'Edgar, let us talk no more upon this theme. Let us change the subject. It may call up unpleasant feelings.'

'Willingly; are you as ardent a lover of nature as ever?'

'Yes, and I have longed for some kindred spirit with whom I could tell of the poetry of the stars—the music of the gliding river—the beauty of flowers—the garden and glory we see in every thing in nature.'

'You have a beautiful home, Isora. Do you not admire this scenery—the deep running river, the dark forest beyond, and the luxuriant green of the fields, dressed in all the beauty of May? Shakspeare must have been a lover of nature, and witnessed such a scene, or he never would have written these lines:—'

'How sweet the moonlit sleeps upon this bank.'

Here we will sit and let the sounds of music Creep in our ears! Soft stillness and the night

Before the touches of sweet harmony.'

But for me, I ask none but the music of nature, for the night bath been to me a more familiar face than that of man; and in her starry shade of dim and solitary loveliness, I learned the language of another world.'

She felt the gaze of those voluptuous eyes—the voice of the magician at her side seemed to enthrall her soul. He had with those few words instilled his own being into hers. She felt upon her own spirit the power of his inspiration.

'Isora, we were lovers once!'

The color fled from her cheek—her lip trembled as though she would reply, yet could not speak. She leaned her head upon her hand. At the same instant Edgar did so, and her cheek touched his. It thrilled every nerve and fibre of her being. In an instant his arm was around her form—her head was drooping on his breast.

'Isora!' he spoke, softly and low, lifting the head from its resting place, and gazing with his melting eyes into the beautiful face. 'Isora, may I love you still?'

She covered her face and wept.

'Bright summer is here. The earth is teeming with life and beauty, wrapt in the balmy fragrance of June, and still I am here. Isora, Isora, could you know of the struggles, the fears, the remorse that is agitating this heart, when I think of the dreadful gulf that yawns beneath you, and the dark purpose of the consummation of which I am here! Oh, can I go on? And what must be his feelings, the brave soldier, who, when the war eagle shall have folded her wings, returns to the home she had made a heaven to him, and when he saw Isora see death—aye, worse—life with dishonor! But why should my heart be wounded less than his? Her scorn yet rings in my ear! I now feel my young, warm, first love, flung back upon me as a thing too worthless to retain. I am resolved! And Edgar Grantly once more entered the peaceful home he had come to violate.'

For Isora, she knew not what was in her heart. The memory of the girlish boy who had loved her years ago in her maiden home, came often to her soul; and in that tall graceful form, the mournful and wildly beautiful face, she could trace the handsome, impulsive boy lover of other years; and he was by her side—she had touched his hand, his cheek. He had spoken softly in her ear, and the voice was the same she heard long, long ago. Did she not love him then? She had not examined her own heart. She refused him, not his love. He was poor, and her parents were among the proud and wealthy of the land. She met with the son of General T—. He, with all the deep passion of his chivalric soul, lavished upon her his first love; and, blinded by title and distinction, she believed she had returned that deep affection. They were married and for a short time the beggar boy was forgotten. Her husband bore her to his own home in the Southern clime. But the blast of war had called him from her side to take his place in the servied ranks, and enroll his name among those who held dear the honor of the banner of the stars. And Edgar had come—late had brought them once more together, and could they part? She shuddered as she asked herself the question. While he had remained with her he had kept his own station, honored here; he had been social, not intimate; frank, not familiar. Could it be that he loved her yet? And if he did, had she not pledged her faith to the toiling hero, far away upon the battle field? She would meet Edgar no more—she would shun the tempting smile, the fond look, and endearing words. Better had they not met.

'Isora, let us walk to night by the river's side; it is the last evening I can spend with you, for to-morrow I must away.'

There was no reply, and he felt the arm tremble as it was placed within his own.

'Moonlight in summer! Isora, is it no beautiful. How still and calm does nature sleep; and how glorious its awakening to life! Do you ever think of death, Isora?'

Not often; there is something so gloomy about the dying hour, the cheerlessness of the grave, I shrink from contemplating these scenes.'

'And why? The end of life is taught us in all things—the withered flower, the falling leaf, the blight and desolate Winter brings upon the blooming earth.'

But these will spring forth again, and the return of Spring will give 'beauty for ashes.'

'And will not the soul? Can the grave bind the spirit forever? No, Isora, we are destined for immortality. The life that now is, is only a school in which to prepare for that which is to come; and when death parts friends, it is only for a time—they will meet

again where temptations are known no more.'

'And do you think those who have loved fondly in life can love with a deeper zeal in heaven?'

'I do, Isora; and when I think I have none to love through this troubled earth, no heart to beat for mine, I could not be so happy were I admitted to that bright land.'

Alas, for Edgar! the love of his youth had returned—his revenge was forgotten, and the passionate heart of man within his breast forgot itself and clung to hers. Upon the green bank they sat; his arm encircled the trembling form, and her head sank upon his breast. And there, with the stars for watchers, and their wildly beating hearts for listeners, he told his love. She heard the whispered words, and felt upon her own the warm kisses of the lips that uttered them. The passion nursed in their breasts for years, in the deep silence of that summer night by the moonlight river, 'each to the other told.'—'Twas night! and still upon the grassy shore they sat, the young man holding to his breast the beautiful form, and covering with his kisses cheek and brow. Her beautiful white arms were twined about his neck, and the dark tresses of her luxuriant hair clustered upon his brow. Closer did she nestle to his side. Her cheeks burned as the blood rushed to them. The dreams of passion was upon her soul.

'Isora,' a soft voice breathed close to her ear.

'The lips parted, and whispered a name.

'Wilt thou be mine?'

'I will.'

'Mine only?'

'Thine only.'

He felt against his breast the beating heart—the burning breath upon his cheek. The fiend once more took possession of his soul—it whispered revenge! There was a strange light in his eye, and a strange feeling at his heart.

'Where am I?' exclaimed Isora, awakened to consciousness. By the river's side alone! What was it at her feet?—a paper. By the moonlight she read:

'Isora, farewell. We must meet no more. I seek not to palliate my crime, for it is great; but the tempter has triumphed. I am undone. Seek never more to know me. Henceforth life will be to me a curse, and I care not how soon it ends.'

The consciousness of her guilt rushed like a torrent upon her soul—the paper dropped—the hand that held it was like marble. She turned from the spot, tottered to the house, her brain whirling with its intensity of maddening thought, and the current of her blood as frozen as the ice bound streamlet.

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A year had passed. The thunders of war had sounded over the land and the sea, and the stars and stripes waved in triumph over the conquered foe. It was the morning of the 5th of July, 1814. General Brown is at Chippewa. Both armies are drawn up in order of battle on a plain about a mile west of the town. See, the battle has commenced. In all the power of that tremendous charge the British advance in their close columns. Under that impetuous charge the brigade under Porter break and fly in every direction. But the light flank is commanded by a man who knows no fear, and calm and collected, amid the dead and dying, and strong by his own brave daring, and placing his commanding figure in the front of battle, to inspire his men with his own dauntless spirit, is Winfield Scott. In vain dash the British infantry and horse against that line of fire, that wall of steel—they remain firm, and the day is gained, and Townson is answering the fire of the British batteries with terrible effect. At this crisis of the battle, Townson is ordered to advance his cannon upon the enemy's infantry. It is done; they are routed in full retreat, leaving five hundred men dead upon the field; and covered with blood and dust, with another flower in the garland of victory on his brow, stands Winfield Scott, the hero of Chippewa.

In the American camp lies a wounded officer. In the bloody strife of the day, and the year that has passed, he has earned a spotless fame. But he has received a violent wound, and he wishes to be bore to his beautiful home on the banks of the Wachita, far away in his native south.

In that home, which he so longs to reach on the same July night, while the soldier is stretched on his couch of pain, sits a young woman. Her hand is resting against her colorless cheek; her arm upon the window sill, and she is gazing out upon the river. It is moonlight. She thinks of the scene enacted upon its bank one year ago. She looks strangely there in the moonlight, a wild light in her eye, her long dark hair hanging in disorder upon her neck and bosom.

It is October, and the soldier has reached his home. He is thinking of the wife who will spring to meet him; he enters the house; all is still; he enters the chamber of his wife, she sits by the window, and he calls her by name—'Isora!'

She glances for a moment at the well-known form—her rests upon his pale face—then, with a dreadful cry, that young heart, crushed by grief and sin, sank upon the floor at her husband's feet a corpse. She had burst a blood vessel. The honor, the fame, the glory of the soldier was forgotten, and he who had passed through the blood, and din, and danger of battle, knelt by that clay and wept. Something glittered in the ivory bosom. He drew it forth—it was a diamond pin. The husband read, engraved upon the jewel, a name—*Edgar Grantly*.—The youthful lover's