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OLD MAN GILBERT

A Beautiful War-Time Story

ELIZABETH W. BELLAMY.

Adapted from "Four Oaks" Little Joanna Etc.

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Herry had just come into the room to say that the doctors were downhearted, but the colonel signed to her not to speak.

"You said it once before," continued Herry, "you don't stick up to your word." "I hear such a charge brought against me, even by a child, was an indignity which could not brook. I am at a loss to understand," he began swiftly; Missy's interruption made him understand.

"I don't want anything but just Brother Thorne's," she asserted, defiantly. "And you to find him because Daddy Gilbert said Miss Roxy White brought word that Nicholas was 'most a-starvin' and what you told him to do. And it's a bit sorry for anything I've done." The colonel covered his face with his hands and stifled a groan. In his judgment, it was Nicholas alone who was responsible for Missy's hurt; but he was loath to make any concession Missy might demand.

"Do you know where Nicholas is?" he asked, desperately, of Mrs. Herry, to the astonishment of that lady and of Missy. It was the first time he had named his son since the night he had repudiated her.

Mrs. Herry shook her head. "Unhappy I don't know," she answered, sadly. The colonel was wholly unprepared for an answer. Knowing that Mrs. Herry had always taken Nicholas's part, he felt sure that she was in correspondence with him; and angry as he had been in this belief, he was even more angry now to find himself mistaken.

"I never received a reply to any of my letters," Mrs. Herry explained, "and last I wrote to the postmaster at Milbank from him I learned that Nicholas had gone, no one knew where."

She forgot Missy, and Missy forgot herself. "If you don't find him, I shall find the child," in her vehemence she had raised herself in the bed, but suddenly fell back with a scream.

begin to find a sort of pleasure in making plans for such a life. It seemed now to Missy that, since she could no longer run about at will, and climb trees, and wade in the "branch," she might as well take kindly to quiet, young lady ways, and submit to be educated. Therefore, when at last she was allowed to return to Thorne Hill, she astonished her father and her aunt Elvira by the announcement that she would like to have a governess "right away."

The colonel, anxious to gratify her every whim, and greatly rejoiced that her desires had taken so commendable a direction, wrote to his agent in New York, begging her good offices in the selection of a governess, much as he would have written for any sale of merchandise.

The colonel's aunt, Mrs. Lorrimer, was as fixed in her opinions as the colonel was in his, and she positively declined the responsibility of selecting a governess for Winifred Thorne. The colonel, she argued, was not yet past the prime of life—wherefore should she send a woman to Thorne Hill at the risk of bringing about a matrimonial crisis? But, as she felt an interest in the child that bore her name, she earnestly entreated her nephew to let her have charge of Winifred in New York, where she could have the benefit of treatment by specialists and at the same time receive the best instruction.

The colonel acknowledged the wisdom of this plan, but he was loath to send Winifred away from him, just yet; and while he was still pondering this necessary step Christmas came round again.

To Missy this Christmas was a grievous disappointment. She had cherished the hope that Nicholas would return at this season, and when the day came and passed without him she was in a state of almost frenzied distress.

"Father! Father! Where is Brother Nicholas?" she cried, pushing away the gifts that had been laid out upon her.

It was a question the colonel could not answer.

"Don't you ever think of him?" pleaded the little sister, with her slender hands pressed against her aching heart. "I think of him all the time. I don't ever forget him. Oh, father, suppose he is hungry this Christmas day!"

Her father turned upon her a face stern in its despair. "We must forget him," he said, hoarsely. "He is not to be found for any search of mine. To forget is all that is left us."

"Oh, what does this mean?" cried Missy, wringing her hands.

"It means that he has hidden himself out of our reach," answered the colonel, gloomily.

"If I were a man," cried Missy, clenching her small fists fiercely, "I'd search the big world over."

The colonel was hurt that Missy should doubt he had done his best, but his pride disdained to explain what unavailing efforts he had made to discover, for her sake, his son's retreat; and Missy, ignorant of this, felt her heart waxing ever more and more bitter against her father. She did not know that she was miserable because of this bitterness; she thought she was miserable only because she missed her brother.

Missy, however, had by no means abandoned the hope of her brother's return. Some day he would surely come home, and in this confident expectation her energies took the form of a feverish ambition to improve her mind. Brother Nicholas must not find her ignorant child he had left crying to him in the rain; she must strive for the commendation of the beloved absent brother; for him she studied—as her strength permitted; for him she labored at the detested piano, in a pathetic anxiety that her mind should atone for the defects of the poor little body, lamed in the futile effort to reach him.

And now a great dread possessed Col. Thorne, a dread lest Missy should become morbid through the indulgence of this insistent desire to recover her brother, and he suddenly determined to take her at once to New York, and put her under the care of a physician, as his aunt had repeatedly urged him to do.

This was in the summer of 1860. Col. Thorne was one of those who felt sure there would be no war; therefore, when he found, after a few weeks in New York, that Winifred was in a fair way to improve, and that she could be content to remain with her aunt, he did not hesitate to leave her when he returned home in October. His child, he thought, could travel homeward with friends at any time, or he could go to her.

When the fighting began the colonel, like many others, declared that "wonder" all be over in less than sixty days; but as the war went on—on ever deepening horror—he rejoiced, even while his heart ached for the sight of her, that his little lame daughter had been left in New York. He did not see Missy again until the fall of 1865.

NEWS OF NICHOLAS.

Five years had added some inches to Winifred Thorne's stature, but she was a tiny creature still, and she still went lame, leaning on a quaint little crutch with a handle of carved ivory, by help of which she moved with a grace and facility that mocked at pity. The hue of her health was on her cheeks, whence the obnoxious freckles had vanished; her mouth no longer looked too large for her face; her great gray eyes had taken a deeper coloring, a warmer light; the amberwood streaks in her brown hair had disappeared; Winifred Thorne had bloomed into a piquant, unusual beauty, and her very lameness gave her a romantic charm. Her father's heart, even in the midst of the misfortunes following the war, throbbled with a proud joy when he looked at her. She surpassed his fondest hopes—this dainty creature, all spirit, and fire, and grace.



Why didn't you follow him?

Col. Thorne had grown to love this little lame daughter of his with a jealous and exacting devotion, but Missy's regard for her father did not exceed the limit of a dutiful respect, and yet the marked changes that she found in him appealed strongly to her tenderness. He had been gray ever since she could remember him, but his hair was white now, and there were deep lines in his face and he had contracted a stoop that gave him an air of feebleness, but he retained the same stern reticence, and his daughter, albeit she was no more afraid of him now than of old, shrank from him still with a feeling that was half respect and half impatience. It was impossible for the colonel not to see this, but it was his way to suffer in silence.

And not only were the colonel and his daughter changed in the past years, but his daughter had changed in the past years. She was no longer the same. Missy found, indeed, the same home, the same grounds, but half the house was built up, and many of the familiar faces of the negroes were missing.

"What has become of them all?" she asked her aunt.

"Freedom," Miss Elvira responded, with plaintive brevity, glancing up from the pages of Bishop Ken.

Miss Elvira was much less changed than Col. Thorne. She still wore the same gentle, helpless look that had tempted the childish tyranny of her niece, and she still read Bishop Ken to the neglect of other duties. However, she did now lay aside the cherished volume long enough to give Missy some account of the Thorne Hill slaves.

"They didn't all go," she said; "the old ones who can't do much stayed, and some of the most sensible signed contracts to work on shares. But we are better off than many others. I'm sure I don't know how your Aunt Pauline, with Flora and two little children, is to manage. Aleck was killed at Chickamauga, you know." And Miss Elvira wiped her eyes.

Missy, who had seen only the pomp of war, was just beginning to realize its misery. "We must live for one another," she cried, with generous sympathy.

"I don't know as to that," Miss Elvira objected, with a prudent hesitation. "You know your Aunt Pauline likes her own way, and we wouldn't wish to give up Thorne Hill to her sway. Then those children with no regular nurse—it wouldn't be comfortable, Winifred. I suppose they'll get on somehow, with your father to assist. Cousin Myrtilla manages very well with one of the twins to look after what is left of her plantation. Paul has a situation in a law office in Savannah and Judge Chadwick has taken the other one of the twins in his office. It's lucky that Lottie is engaged to be married to the judge's son. I hope Bess may make as good a match for it's little enough Cousin Myrtilla can do for them now."

Winifred listened to all this in sad silence, she felt as if she had come, not to the old home she used to know, but to a strange new world of sorrow.

"Why they all wanted to quit, I'm sure I don't know—the nearest I mean," Miss Elvira continued plaintively. "Your father offered them every inducement, but they'd rather starve on freedom, I suppose. Pauline was one of the first to go. She is in town taking in washing, and working harder than ever she did in her life. I saw her last week, and she looks as if she hadn't enough to eat. Tom Quash—he married Amity, you know—is a waiter at the hotel, and Griffin Jim is a barber. I believe he earns a good deal by odd jobs; yet he declines to take old Dicky, his mother, to live with him. Dicky is helpless now; she can't walk, and she can't even feed herself; so Griffin Jim thinks she is better off with us. I'm sure we don't want

"Winifred? What do you mean?" exclaimed Miss Elvira, startled into an energy of emphasis most unusual.

"It was me sent him away," Winifred declared exultingly, reckless of grammar. "It was me wrote him a pass. And I gave him my gold chain and bracelets for Brer Nicholas to turn into money. What did I care for trinkets, and my brother, my dear, dear brother, in need?"

"Winifred, you surely never did do that!" cried Miss Elvira, aghast. "Your father's gifts?"

"I did more than that," Winifred returned, with a proud, sad smile. "I tried to go to him myself."

"I trust you have grown wiser, child," said Miss Elvira, primly. "One rarely regrets any return for such sacrifices."

"Oh, aunt Elvira! Don't you know that love pays itself in loving? If I did wrong to try to run away, I bear my punishment—a life long punishment; but I can't, I can't be sorry for the effort I made to find my brother."

"This is rebellious," said Miss Elvira, reaching out her slim hand for Bishop Ken, as for a talisman. "You ought to resign yourself to his loss."

"If he were dead, yes," said Winifred, "but until I know that he is dead"—she faltered, with blanching lips—"Oh, aunt Elvira, did you never know the might of a love that is stronger than life, stronger than death? It seems to me that my brother must live until I see him again, or he must send me a message, even from the grave."

"Winifred, you shock me!" said Miss Elvira; and immediately she took refuge in Bishop Ken, holding the little worn book close to her eyes as was her habit, and pretending to read, while she glanced furtively over its top at her irascible niece.

"Winifred," sighed she to herself, "is going to be no easier to manage now than when she was a child."

A few days later Glory-Ann visited Thorne Hill in great state. She arrived in a hack, the recently acquired property of Griffin Jim, who expected to make a fortune out of the traveling public.

Mom Bee had grown older, and she looked more stately than ever in her Sunday attire of black alpaca; but she forgot her age and her dignity, and took her nursing on her hip, and shed tears over her.

"My poor little honey been gone all these years, and I ain't seed her no mo' and she was plum gravely up. You ain't forget ye' old mammy, is you, honey?"

"No, I've forgotten nothing," Winifred declared, between tears and laughter. "You know how you used to tell me that I should show you after this old plantation; and it all came true. I dreamed about the blackberry patch, and the spring, and the snapping arbor, and nothing ever tasted half so good as your corn do-b-s and butter-milk."

Griffin Jim to take her away; we've been used to her so long." And Miss Elvira began to weep afresh.

"And Mom Bee?" Missy queried, anxiously. Missy had been at home some hours when this conversation took place, and her heart was burning to know why Mom Bee did not come to welcome her.

Miss Elvira wiped her eyes and stiffened herself. "Glory-Ann is with her family in town," she said, with strong indignation. "Your father tried his best to have her stay here. He built her a house and he offered her a cow and some pigs; but Grinthy, that daughter of hers, wouldn't agree to it. She made Glory-Ann believe that we had designs upon her."

Missy burst into tears. "Mom Bee might have waited for me," she sobbed.

"Oh, Winifred, don't cry!" Miss Elvira entreated, weeping herself. "It doesn't do one bit of good. I do believe old Gilbert himself would have left us if he hadn't gone long ago."

"I don't!" cried Missy. "And one of these days he is coming back; he is sure to come back; he promised me."

(Continued next week.)

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CHAPTER XXII. A NEW PLAN.



It seems that what you say is bound always to come true, Mom Bee," she sighed.

"Don't you remember the night my father drove Brer Nicholas away, and I ran out in the rain, you said then I could never be all crippled up, so I was never lame?"

Mom Bee's heart smote her. "Dallaw, now, honey, hukkum you 'members all sich ez dat? Don't you know yo' ole mammy jes' sasso ter mek you obey? Doctors is got a heap mo' ezse den nos' on us; eu' you jes' 'fin' what de say, you gwain be' offen dat bed spy ez a cricket, come botanbye."

But in this prophecy Missy put no faith. Lying weary and helpless upon her bed, she pondered many things in her small brain with a seriousness beyond her years. Striving to picture to herself what life would be on crutches, she had