

## *Re-United*

By J. Walter Amerman

Love will interpose  
Its tiny touch, and cause the stern explosion  
To burst, when the deviser's least aware- Scorr

“LOOK!” Anson Kent pointed westward. “The shifting light resting upon those pine sentinels deep-rooted in the precipitous ledges of the neighboring hills resembles an arrowy gleam of sunshine quivering about the edges of a black thunder cloud. I am in a fair way to become an enthusiastic lover of nature if we recreate among the Catskills much longer.”

It was a romantic prospect—long extensive ranges environing in a small country village nestled at their feet, dark forests far beyond rising into the blue sky, a tapering church spire here and there through the valley, orchards and fields of rustling grain—so thought that motionless group of young men, some standing in the open doorway of the Elliott farm house, others knee-deep in the fragrant clover a few steps off. No thoughts went flitting back, then, to wearisome, brief and bulky ledger, or the working up of tedious cases in heated city courts; for the sweet scent of lilac, rose and new mown hay was the breath of freedom to those four who felt like languishing prisoners after long confinement, or sportive school children let out to play.

We had just returned from a piscatorial excursion through the Stoney Clove woods, bearing from the brawling trout streams where our lines had dropped that summer afternoon, a string of spotted beauties as prized trophies of our success, and now were silently watching the bright sunset's glow as it slowly crept up ridge after ridge of the shadowy mountains, then blazed on a far off steeple's mute bell, and vanished.

“I tell you, Anson, as I feel now it is impossible to electrify me with boyish rhapsodies over such execrable scenery as this, and expect a rapturous appreciation of the same,” and Harry Russell shrugged his broad shoulders disdainfully. “Nature! I am indifferent to everything but my aching bones caused by that unlucky tumble from a slippery log into the water when quietly fishing, and my hair-breadth escape afterward from a legion of bloodthirsty gnats commanded by a long-legged, striped fellow, who, with a clarion of victory led them *en masse* to my face.”

“Is that all?”

“All? Why hear the noisy whirl of that mill-wheel opposite, going round and round like a plunging water fowl; it almost distracts me! If not misinformed, you alleged recently that its scream far surpassed the grandest symphonies of Beethoven.”

“Pshaw,” replied Anson Kent, uneasily; “the minister has turned informer again. “Your judgment must have been operated upon adverse circumstances to credit such nonsense.”

“Very likely, as my supply of Havanas is exhausted, and one solitary clay pipe, no tobacco, with odious cheroots, are the only available substitutes to relieve my destitution. Besides, every good-looking girl in town is tacitly pledged to remain single until the rebellion ends, and the bronzed veterans march home—there, that big wheel is disrespectfully clattering again! Oblige me, Kent, by glancing some destructive missile against the object.”

“With great pleasure,” returned Anson, smiling; not stirring, however, from his comfortable position on the broad stone steps.

“There are no gossiping tea parties or quilting frolics at the parsonage, affording the clerical flagellant an opportunity to animadvert against such social sins as kissing and courting, so naturally I do not take as favorable a view of things as I otherwise should.”

“You do not, eh?” said Harry Russell. “Then you ought to be immured in a cloister where only visions of a sad, pensive face, and dark brown hair and eyes, would irradiate your rayless solitude. Suppose—”

“Suppose we arrange a trial of speed with these pertinacious mosquitoes; or propose to and marry, if she be willing, the first eligible woman that passes the gate? I am ready for the indicated sacrifice.”

“I expect so,” drily remarked Philip Marvine, who stood at my side. “It is no mystery that Elder Gilbert’s metheglin and humorous narrations of backwoods life when the mountains directly before us were the haunt of howling wolves and stealthy panthers, are not the most prominent attractions. And yet arrogant Ralph Watson is a formidable rival” – (a deep sigh as of irrepressible anguish stole out on the still air. We then observed for the first time the bowed figure in the sitting room near us, the gathering shadows preventing recognition. Philip cast a furtive glance of surprise and alarm about him, then continued)- “for he is determined to win, even if a resort to misrepresentation is necessary; and he is not over-righteous; that is my unprejudiced opinion of the man.”

“I have nothing to fear from that worthy gentleman,” returned Harry Russell carelessly. “He will not interfere with my plans- if I have any.”

“You fear;” said Marvine, slowly and deliberately, and his teeth closed tightly together; “perhaps not, still it would not be advisable to incur the enmity or hatred of Ralph Watson. A vague suspicion lurks in my mind of his being nothing more or less than a specious, disguised deceiver, should his true character be known. So look out for the fellow. By the way,” turning to the circle surrounding him, “where is Willard Cameron? He came back with us from the Clove, and then complaining of fatigue disappeared. It is strange, but Aunt Judy assures me he was once engaged to the same girl Watson is—”

“What! Are you jesting? The name of Ralph Watson’s intended? Is it Carrie Gilbert?” sternly demanded Willard Cameron of the amazed Marvine, as he suddenly strode out from the hall doorway, and seized hold of his arm.

“Are you, also, particularly interested in the future prospects of Watson, or the admirable choice he has made in selecting a wife?” inquired Philip Marvine, in a seemingly indifferent manner, but directly a swift searching look towards his excited interrogator.

“I ought to be,” sententiously replied Willard Cameron, his voice hoarse with suppressed feeling. “Can I see you alone, Philip, a moment, respecting this matter?”

Philip bowed in assent.

Conversing earnestly together they walked leisurely down the winding lane that reached from the sloping pastures to the roadside, just as bustling Aunt Judy summoned us to the west room to tea by the emphatic injunction to “stop our talking if possible long enough to do justice to her nice, light biscuits, warm from the oven.” The hunger of our pent-up curiosity was not so easily appeased!

“I purpose going over to Elder Gilbert’s for an hour or so, it is awful lonesome here somehow or other,” announced Harry Russell, as we met on the front piazza after tea. “If Cameron seeks an interview with Ralph Watson he will probably go there, for Ralph is frequent visitor lately.”

Of course I acquiesced. To beguile the lonely walk to the elder’s farmhouse through the interjacent woods that entirely excluded the pleasant twilight by reason of the dense growth of hemlock and spruce that lined the rough foot-path, I amused myself with framing a suggestive picture that vividly separated itself from the past. It glowed in the throbbing atmosphere of the great metropolis.

One morning I had entered, unobserved by its occupant, the neat law office of Willard Cameron, to secure his consent to accompany a merry party of intimate friends for a brief respite from business to the beautiful Catskills. I found him seated at his desk, intently perusing a blotted letter, the contents of which had evidently touched all the responsive chords of extreme suffering in his nature. Feeling a natural delicacy as to broaching what might be an intrusive subject at such a time, I was about to withdraw without speaking, when hearing a slight noise he turned his head towards the door and spied me; as he did so impulsively starting up and extending his hand with a rather confused greeting. His face wore a whiteness that was almost deathly, and marked with perceptible lines of mental anguish, his eyes supernaturally bright, with compressed, bloodless lips; it startled me, for I could only compare him to the fabled spectre of Glenmore’s forest. When I explained my object in calling, he abstractedly considered the proposal, and then with extraordinary enthusiasm said:

“Yes, I will go. During our lifetime duty sometimes peremptorily insists upon our redressing real wrongs and grievances. I have an urgent affair that calls for immediate attention up that way, and I might advantageously combine it with a pleasure trip. I was formerly acquainted with several families in that picturesque region. When do you start?” crumpling the letter in his hand as he spoke.

Had that delicate missive transformed him into a resolute, merciless avenger, faithful and loving as ever to friend, but a personification of swift justice to one had blighted his life and parted him, as by a rounded grave, from his first, early love? Was it connected with that “affair” he alluded to as requiring a settlement?

It was quite dark when we emerged from the woods. Now and then we had caught a flitting gleam of white garments as we passed along the circuitous road—fluttering to and fro—vanished and re-appeared further on again as if by magic, but proceeding in the same direction with ourselves, while rippling peals of low laughter floated back to us with Ralph Watson’s firmer, deeper tones.

“It is not difficult to conjecture who are enjoying a sentimental evening walk,” observed Russell, quickening his steps as I half audibly expressed the belief that spirits were certainly assembling in the vicinity—somewhere. “they are having a very interesting chat, judging by the mirth Ralph’s witticisms occasion; probably rehearsing the ‘old, old story,’ caring little for Cameron, who impatiently awaits their return at the house, and can with difficulty repress occasional twinges of vexation at their protracted absence. Gracious—see there!”

It was a scene never to be forgotten. A slender little creature gracefully occupied a rustic seat by the placid lake formed by the wild torrents leaping down from the adjacent gorges, watching, perhaps, the soft reflection on the waters from the western sky, but more likely the speaker standing near her. Suddenly a tall form had swiftly detached itself from a thick clump of bushes, and a heavy hand was laid upon Watson’s shoulder- his broken exclamation and Carrie Gilbert’s shriek of alarm silenced by a quick, imperious gesture.

“Good evening Mr. Watson,” Willard imperturbably raised his hat with mock deference. “I see you have no difficulty in recognizing your dear friend Cameron. Our friendship is of a warm, enduring nature, is it not, sir?”

“Indeed! I was not aware of it, as worthless advocates always were beneath my notice,” Ralph answered, sneeringly. “Please explain your motives for this unwarrantable intrusion, occurring as it does at such an objectionable place and hour.”

“Motives! Dare you ask that Ralph Watson?” cried Cameron, vehemently, a dangerous expression in his dark gray eye.

“I dare do anything. If you are satisfied with existing circumstances I certainly ought to be. I would considerably advise you to be, however, if you entertain the slightest regard for your personal safety.”

“I am *not* satisfied,” was the calm, composed reply. “You have strong, I hope satisfactory reasons for hating me, but rest assured that I cannot be intimidated by fierce threats or virulent invective. The lady beside you only one year ago was my affianced wife, now the troth plight is broken and she whispers her vows to another. I have rigidly respected the assurance conveyed to me in that cold note that accompanied a package of letters returned to me a few months since by mail—that we were to be strangers from that time, as such to regard each other should we meet again; that I was free as air. I do not accept the release.”

“But—”

“You know what caused the imaginary estrangement. I have convincing proof that you came to this village after successfully eluding the keen detectives, representing yourself as a retired merchant of means, and introducing yourself to Mr. Gilbert and his unsuspecting family, by assuring them I was your classmate in college and most confidential friend in the city, and that it was my earnest request you should call upon them and make their acquaintance. Your first exploit, then, was to adroitly intercept the letters I sent to Miss Gilbert, and those entrusted to your care to be left in the post-office for me, but never were! And afterwards securing the correspondence already referred to, forwarded it to me with that forged note, purporting to be the true sentiments of one dearer to me than life itself. You could press your suit and not excite suspicion then. You were deliberately plotting for revenge against one who as associate counsel in proving you guilty of a terrible crime, closed the prison doors upon you.”

“It is false!” retorted Ralph Watson. “I am innocent of the senseless charges you have fabricated to subserve private interests of your own. Come, Carrie, let us be going.”

“Stop!” thundered Willard Cameron, assuming such a meaning attitude that I thought he mediated violence to his traducer. “God knows, and I speak it not irreverently, it was cowardly in you to secretly strike in my absence at my happiness through a tender, trusting woman.”

“O, this is cruel, cruel; how could you do it—how could you do it?” moaned Carrie, each word wrung out with bitter sobs as a realization of Ralph’s villainy came breaking through her memory. “He” —appealing to Willard Cameron with a convulsive shudder— “he positively assured me you were engaged to the only daughter of a wealthy banker, and that he often heard your laughing comments at the club upon the credulous girl who imagined you loved her and intended to make her your wife. No word came from you; my worst fears were confirmed.”

Harry and myself darted from our place of concealment, for like a flash of lightning Watson had aimed a furious blow at Willard with his clenched fist as he attempted by a swift movement to spring past him, but Cameron anticipated it. In another instant he grasped Watson by the throat,

irresistibly forcing him backward upon the ground. As we reached the spot, Ralph succeeded in disengaging his right hand, and tearing his coat open, a bright weapon flashed before us, followed by a sharp report that awoke all the slumbering echoes in that mountain solitude, and Harry Russell sent the pistol crashing through the underwood, while the bullet only grazing Willard's forehead, dropped harmlessly into the lake.

“It is nothing, merely a scratch. Fasten those handcuffs so there will be no repetition of his last act,” said Cameron to the strong, zealous constable whom Philip Marvine had stationed close by to give assistance if needed. “My work is nearly done.”

“Well, it's all over with me. Triumph now in my shame and degradation,” muttered Ralph Watson, doggedly. “I will yet be even with you—should I escape again,” glaring like a chained maniac upon Willard and Carrie.

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I was present at a joyous wedding before the “four” returned to New York, when their marriage was quietly celebrated, and metheglin sparkled while light hearts kept up the merriment until the stars were giving place to day. In the gloomy cell of a frowning prison tossed Watson, cursing the disastrous failure of his schemes- a murderer alone with his consuming desire to wreak vengeance upon the two who had placed immortelles upon the grave of their estrangement, and now were united, no more to be separated below.

The picture is complete!

*Flag of Our Union*, March 25, 1865