



The dead-letter office sustained by our government is not the only one. Death runs a dead-letter office, to which are consigned thousands of intended letters that the would-be writers never wrote because of premature death, as a result of the carelessness and disregard of health. There are letters of love and hate, affection and fury, pleading and forgiveness and sorrow, and letters to sweethearts and rivals, husbands and wives and sons and daughters. They never reach their destination, for they were never written. Death stamps them "only intended"—and the world is full of tears.

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NOTHING BUT A SOUTHERN STORY OF ANTE BELLUM DAYS, BY JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH

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CHAPTER XII.

"Very well, then, that is off our minds until 6 o'clock this evening." "It may be off your mind, but mine is of too meager a capacity to hold anything else until the mystery is solved." Liza laughed and seated herself on the loom bench to release the imprisoned shuttle.

"Liza!" "Yes, dear." "Kiss me. You are a remarkable woman. A tower of strength to every one of us, from Mrs. Strong down to Dren." And the ceremony of osculation was audibly performed.

"But, Mamie," Liza drew back to ask impatiently, "why on earth didn't you try to find out who the hand belonged to?"

"Couldn't. When a woman is in a state of collapse from terror, she doesn't go into particulars." At which they both laughed a trifle hysterically.

CHAPTER XVII.

Trudging resolutely in Liza's wake over the uneven cotton furrows along the weed walled crossroads, with the gray twilight rapidly effacing the familiar landscape, the professor's daughter, consciously aiming to keep up her courage, took refuge in levity.

"Don't you think it would have been the part of prudence to have told your brother where to look for our bodies, Liza, if we are not back by 8 o'clock? But I forget. We are presumed to be virtuously reading French together in the privacy of our own room at this perilous moment."

"The peril is altogether in your imagination, Mamie. We had to tell them something to get away from them. Thou foolish virgin, thou puttest no oil in thy lamp, and—see!"

She swung the lantern in her right hand at arm's length. It flared, flickered and expired just as they were entering a small grove of thorns where the slaves' burying ground was located. They were left in total darkness.

"Mercy!" Mamie gave a smothered scream and violently embraced her intrepid leader.

"Let's go back, Liza. Please let's turn back."

"No, I am going forward. You may go back if you choose."

"Choose? I never expect to choose

anything on earth again. Life has resolved itself into one great, big, horrible mass."

"Poor little Mamie! But indeed we are in no more danger just because our lantern went out."

"Perhaps not, but I should like to get one glimpse of the man who is going to murder us—just one. I might be called on to identify him in the next world, you know."

"Listen. I hear voices now. We are almost there."

They stood still, quite close together, Mamie still maintaining her hold vigorously upon the skirt of Liza's basque.

"Singing."

"Yes, singing. That is encouraging. Do you suppose men can sing when they are meditating murder?"

"Do be serious, Mamie. Here, give me your hand. Now, step up—one, two, three. The weeds have about taken these steps. Now then—wait. We have a right to eavesdrop."

"Call it reconnoiter. These are war times. They've pitched their camp right by Gabriella's tomb. I see the fire, not much of one. They're just building it." Liza shifted her own position with noiseless restlessness.

"That big tree trunk is between me and everything." The song that had floated to them across the wasting fields of cotton had ceased abruptly, and the only audible sounds within the shrub choked inclosure was the snapping of dried sticks broken by an unseen hand to feed the new made fire. Presently a vigorous revealing flame sprang into existence, giving the entire scene to the two pair of eager eyes peering over the rusty spikes of the iron graveyard gate. With their lips close to each other's ears they exchanged items of excited comment.

"There are two of them."

"A black man and a white one."

"The white one certainly looks as if he belonged to a graveyard. What dreadfully hollow cheeks! And, oh, Liza, look! His poor knees. He is hugging them so close they are actually showing through his trousers."

"I wish he would push his hat back. If I could see his whole face, I might make out who he is. It can't be Adrien Strong."

"Adrien Strong! Heavens, no! Adrien Strong is a dandy. Oh, isn't that just too heart breaking?"

Without the movement of a muscle, with his head still drooping forward so that nothing was visible but the thin, hollow cheeks and the long uncurled beard that almost touched the frayed knees of his ragged, gray trousers, the man had begun a new song.

A plaintive, simple ballad, already grown hackneyed about the campfires where countless war weary heroes, resting beneath the sentinel stars, with no shelter other than the dark blue canopy of the midnight skies, let their homesick fancies wander back to the dear ones left behind with an exquisite anguish of longing that found utterance in song. But to those two listening, watching girls it was all new and fresh and thrilling.

"Who will care for mother now?" sang the wail faced wayfarer, resting there beneath the laurel tree that shed its blossoms over the silent sleepers in the little graveyard—sang it in the perfunctory fashion of one who performs a deed more from force of habit than from any conscious effort, but his voice was clear and sweet, and no false note jarred upon the music loving ears of his auditors.

Mamie, silently weeping, softly subsided among the weeds on the cemetery steps and buried her head in her lap. It was torture, but she would not lose one note of that sweet, weird melody for worlds.

Liza, bent upon identification, maintained her stand at the gate. When the song was ended, she would go in boldly and question that forlorn trespasser touching Adrien Strong, who was to come home in state some day, panoplied in his battle worn laurels, brighter and fresher laurels than those whose glossy leaves, stirred by the night wind, now waved their dark bannerets over that wandering minstrel in tatters.

There was a movement on the other side of the large beech tree that hid a section of the little camp from her. A third party had been introduced into the mystery, and the singer was interrupted by a slow, deep voiced protest.

"Come, old chap, that ditty is doleful enough when sung by a dozen fellows around a roaring campfire, but just now and just here it is too much even for my nerves."

The singer glanced up at the speaker with knitted brows, as if strenuously endeavoring to link words and meaning together, gave up the effort with a pathetic smile and resumed his crooning with renewed energy.

"Adrien! Stop that, old man, you'll soon be where your mother can care for

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- 36c for 19c yard
- 55c for 29c
- for 30c yard
- for 32c yard
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W. D. MACKAY

you. Do you know where you are, old chap?"

At this new surprise Mamie had sprung to her feet and stood by Liza, whose hands were rigidly locked about the iron spikes. She was trembling violently, and her smothered exclamation of horrified surprise was barely audible.

"My God! It cannot be! Adrien Strong come to that? It is too horrible!"

"But the other one, Liza?"

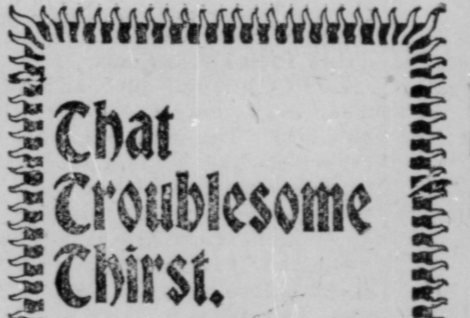
The darkness mercifully hid Liza's cheeks from view. They were aglow with the quickening of her pulses. Only her startled eyes told of her intense excitement as she tugged at the rusty fastenings of the gate.

"I know his voice. It is Mr. Chambliss. No harm will come to us, Mamie."

They were inside the inclosure now, and with swift directness Liza was threading the tangled, familiar maze. Mamie followed her with laborious uncertainty, now pushing aside an intrusive branch, now stumbling helplessly over an unsuspected root, never once losing consciousness of a tall form standing in soldierly erectness, silhouetted against the leaping flames of the campfire.

At sound of Liza's swift advance he turned his face from the tattered minstrel and made a step toward her in the gloom.

(To be Continued.)



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