The Bloomfield Times.

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The Bloomfield Times.

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A YEAR AGO.

IN the pleasant summer weather,
When the sun was low,
Side by side we walked together,
Just a year ago.
In the West the crimson glory
Slowly died away,
As I told the old sweet story
At the close of day.

Joy, till then in life denied me,
Set my heart at rest,
As the fair young face beside me
Conscious love confessed.
All the hopes that hovered o'er us
Youth alone can know;
Life and love were all before us
Just a year ago.

Just a year—the sky is clouded,
And the shadows fall;
In a grave my hopes lie shrouded—
Death has won them all.
Loved and lost! The tie is broken;
Cold are lip and brow;
Words of love, though warmly spoken,
Cannot reach her now.

Joy has vanished, hope is perished,
Dreams of youth are vain;
E'en the love by Memory cherished
Thrills the heart with pain.
Gone for ever—sorrow only
Future life can know,
Since she died and left me lonely—
Just a year ago.

Uncle Jim's Christmas Day.

MR. and Mrs. Albert Morrisson at breakfast, formed a very pretty and interesting picture. The accessories, such as furniture, a blazing fire in an open grate, and choice engravings on the walls, were, to say the least, quite elegant, and suggestive of ample means. Mr. Morrisson was tall and muscular, but a little too stout for a hero. His wife was slight and graceful, and her large bright eyes and regular features had long since established her claims as a handsome woman.

There was something higher than mere physical beauty, however, in her sensitive, earnest face — something that foretold capabilities never yet brought into action, passions lying dormant, because their keynote had never been struck; possibilities unsuspected by their owner, whose life hitherto had been bright and cloudless as a perfect summer day.

"Albert, I want a whole lot of money," she remarked playfully, dropping lumps of sugar into her cup as she spoke.

Mr. Morrisson looked at her thoughtfully, and began to unfold the morning paper.

"What do you want the money for, Gerty? Anything very pressing?"

"I want to buy Christmas presents," and Mrs. Morrisson saw in imagination the fancy articles, toys, jewels, and laces that she contemplated giving to her childen and relatives.

"Could'nt you let them go this time, Gerty?" He avoided looking at her as he spoke. "The truth is, I cannot spare the money at present. I need every dollar I can raise 'in the business.'"

"Is there anything wrong?" and for a moment, noticing her husband's unusual gravity, Mrs. Morrisson entirely forgot the "Christmas presents."

"No, nothing as yet. But the times are hard, and a man has to be careful. About the dinner party, have you invited any persons yet?"

"No, but I thought of doing it to-morrow."

"I think we had better give it up, Gerty. It will involve so many additional expenses. And just now, we can not be too economical in the house."

Mrs. Morrisson sighed faintly, surprise at first keeping her mute.

"I promised Edith a locket and chain, and Bertie will expect a sleigh and gun," she said after a short silence.

"Suppose you buy the gun for Bertie and give Edith a trinket of your own. Tommy and Ray will be pleased with a few cheap toys. You know, Gerty, I would not speak so decidedly if there were not strong necessity to do so."

"I know that, Albert," and with a great effort Mrs. Morrisson conquered herself, and attempted to comfort her husband and win his confidence.

Mr. Morrisson was not inclined to be communicative. He had been rash, he said, in speculating in a kind of goods with which he was not familiar, and he could not tell how the venture would turn out.

After he had left the house, his wife went up to her room anxious and thoughtful. How to assist dear Albert, who was evidently greatly worried about money, was the all absorbing thought. Money: The word did not convey to Mrs. Morrisson's mind that important article in its tangible form, such as notes, coin, and checks, but rather the appliances and luxuries which its possession insured. With her money had always been an established fact. Where it came from, and how, was a question she had never asked herself.

Before her marriage she had had little use for it in her purse. She had always unlimited credit, and the bills were sent to her father and settled twice a year. After she became Mrs. Morrisson, her husband relieved her of all care on the subject. He generally went with her on her shopping expeditions, and made all the payments. The trades-people with whom they dealt sent their accounts to Mr. Morrisson, and received their money from him in checks. Considering the style in which they lived, a very small sum, comparatively speaking, passed through Mrs. Morrisson's hands in the course of a year.

True, any trifling article that took her fancy, she was at liberty to purchase, but she had to ask for the money first, just as she had done that morning. Hitherto, she had never been refused, and so, this method of spending at will and having no regular stated amount to draw upon, had appeared very convenient and agreeable. Now, some of its drawbacks and inconsistencies began to force themselves upon her mind.

How could she be economical when the burden of all household expenditures was taken off her hands? Ever since their marriage, Albert had endeavored to relieve her of all unnecessary care and responsibility; and so well had he succeeded in his efforts, that her ideas in regard to earning money, and spending it wisely, were confused and rather unpracticable.

Yet he had said that they could not be "too economical in the house." Her busy brain reviewed rapidly the home arrangements left under her control. Woman-like, self-sacrifice seemed her bounden duty, and a glimpse of her three servants collected in the court, watching a passing funeral, suggested one mode of economy to her mind. Ray was three years old. Why keep a nurse for her and Tommy? Surely, with a little exertion on her own part, she might attend to the children, and manage with two servants.

In theory it seemed very pleasant and practicable, and it happened that a friend was in need of an experienced nurse, so that Jane being provided with a good home, her conscience would not disturb her for parting with the girl.

While debating this question with herself, her eyes fell on a roll of paper lying at her feet. She examined it, saying to herself, "Something of Albert's I wonder if he will need it."

It was a short memorandum of money owed by Mr. Morrisson. There was an item of three hundred and fifty dollars for stabling his trotting horse; another of three hundred for two little dinner parties at Delmonico's and several charges for boxes of cigars, making a total of seven hundred dollars.

Mrs. Morrisson put down the paper and leaned her head on her hand. A dim perception of the truth began to dawn upon her mind, but as yet did not shape itself into forcible conviction. The first feeling that took possession of her was one of indignation.

She felt injured, and began to question his right to deny her a moderate sum of money with which to gratify her wishes, if he felt justified in contracting bills of such a character and to such an amount.

Then she wondered if the fact of having to pay this bill was the reason why he refused her request. Ignorant of the real condition of her husband's affairs, she only argued on the injustice and inconsistency of the one circumstance, unconscious of the causes that led to it, and therefore not reflecting upon their probable effects.

Her excited feelings found relief in tears, and a sharp, angry speech formed itself into sentences in her brain, as she put the paper into her husband's dressing-case. The unkind words, however, remained unspoken. Indignation and self-assertion gave place to sympathy, when she saw his pale, harrassed face, and felt the change in his manner once so cheerful, now depressed and constrained.

"If he only would confide in me," she thought, as she watched him during the dinner, trifling with his food, and making vain efforts to answer the children's merry questions.

"Papa, Christmas is just three weeks from to-morrow!" announced Master Albert triumphantly. "I'm going to have lots of things."

"So is I!" exclaimed Tommy. "Are you going to hang up your stocking, papa?"

Mr. Morrisson nodded, and smiled faintly.

"Me know what Santa Claus will bring me," said Ray nodding her head, and swinging her silver mug in the air.

"Your stockings are too little to hold anything," said Bertie. "You'll have to borrow a pair."

Ray surveyed her small foot ruefully. "Me det papa's," she exclaimed, a bright smile flashing like a sunbeam over her face, while a general laugh followed her speech.

How many bitter words and wicked quarrrels have been prevented by the presence of little children. Hard thoughts and unkind intentions die away and are forgotten before their fearless remarks and innocent glances.

Yet in contemplating his merry boys and girls, Mr. Morrisson's misery was increased a hundred fold. "Must I drag them down in my own ruin?" was his weary, unceasing thought.

After Edith and Bertie had gone to study their lessons, and Tommy and Ray had run up to their nurse, Mrs. Morrisson confided to her husband her plan of economy.

He agreed to it, kissing her and thanking her, but not volunteering a word in explanation of his difficulties.

"How useless I am to him," she thought bitterly. "A mere toy to be caressed and petted, but not worthy of trust or even of sharing his trouble." Then came the answering thought: "He knows how helpless I am, how powerless to aid him. He is bearing all his troubles alone, trying to shield me from suffering." Still, she felt, "this uncertainty is harder to endure than a complete knowledge of the worst that may happen."

Mrs. Morrisson's small schemes for domestic economy were not productive of any visible good effects. After the first week the children, who were in the beginning wild with delight at having mamma to dress them and put them to bed, pined for their old nurse. Jane sang for them, and repeated endless nursery rhymes and fairy stories with untiring patience night after night, until their sleepy lids gently closed in sound slumber.

Mamma was abstracted and quiet, singing by snatches in sad tones her favorite hymns, and often unconsciously breaking off in the middle of a sentence, to think of the husband sitting in the room below; his depressed, altered countenance, and the change in his once cheerful bearing.

The cloud on his face grew darker each day, and yet he kept his own counsel.

One evening he came in late, looking so utterly miserable and overwhelmed, as it were, by his troubles, that his wife put her arms around his neck and kissed him, unable to speak a word of welcome or comfort. He sat down, and then, strong man as he was, he put his hand over his face and sobbed aloud.

"Albert, my darling! What is it. What is coming?"

"Failure and ruin, Gerty. My last hope is gone. I have just seen my uncle. He won't do a thing to help me. The business I built up, Gerty, to see it break and go to pieces! I have worked hard; you know it, ever since I was eighteen years of age. I have given the best twenty years of my life to it, and now it will be destroyed—all my labor goes for nothing. Thank God you have this house. They cannot take it from you and the children."

"Who are 'they?'"

"My creditors. They can not touch this, because your father gave it to you. I never owned it."

"Why not sell it, and pay your debts with the money?" Mr. Morrisson smiled drearily.

"It would be but a drop in the ocean, Gerty. It would be simply throwing away what is yours. I tell you it maddens me to think of uncle James. He has half a million if he has one thousand dollars. No one to inheirit it but nephews and nieces, and they are just waiting for him to die so as to grasp it. He will not part with a cent of it. One would suppose that he could find pleasure in doing good with it now. He might help me out of all my troubles without risking much of his gold. But no, there he sits in that mean little house of his, calculating interest, looking over his balance sheets, and finding fault with his housekeeper. I almost cursed him this afternoon!"

"No, no, Albert. Don't speak like that!"

"I must. I cannot help it." And springing to his feet, Mr. Morrisson paced the floor, frenzied with the visions of his uncle's unused gold, the utter ruin staring him in the face, and his inability to touch one dollar of the coveted treasure.

"I went to him, Gerty, believing that he would assist me—hoping that some feeling for his brother's son would stir his heart. I laid my accounts before him. I showed him where I had made mistakes, and how, with some aid, I might rectify them. He, miserable, mean old man that he is! he listened with a sneer on his face, questioned me closely, wormed out of me every folly of which I had been guilty, and then told me coldly that he could do nothing for me. When I appealed to him for my childrens sake, he ordered me out of his house, and locked and bolted the door after me, as if I were a thief ready to rob him of his wretched money." Too frightened and too horror stricken to speak, Mrs. Morrisson sat watching her husband until at length, his passion spent and his strength exhausted, he threw himself on the sofa utterly prostrated in body and mind.

Then she brought a pillow for his tired head, and sat by him, trying to kiss the anxious, haggard look from his features. He had fallen asleep, and she was still near him crying silently for him, his broken pride and blasted hopes, when the door opened to admit her brother, Mr. Archibald Wilson.

The gentleman, with a glance at his brother-in-law, took in the position, and quietly beckoned to his sister to follow him into the dining-room.

"Gerty," he said, taking a seat near her, something must be done. Do you know that Albert is on the verge of a failure?"

"I have just heard it," with a nervous glance into the adjoining room.

"What, not until this evening?"

"No, not until this evening," her voice sank to a whisper.

"My poor girl!" And Mr. Wilson who was tall and very stout, looked sympathetically at his sister's pale face and trembling hands.

"I came up to talk with you, Gerty. It will never do to let Albert go to pieces now. At his age and with his temperament, a man never recovers lost ground. Something must be done this week. Come, brighten up, Gerty. You should always understand things when explained clearly. Hasn't Albert a rich relative, an uncle or cousin?"

"Yes, but he will do nothing. Albert has just been to see him."

Mr. Wilson's face fell at the news.

"That is bad. What Albert needs is for two or three parties to come forward and advance equal amounts. One man could not undertake such a responsibility. You know, Gerty, I would do all in my power but for my own large family. I cannot afford to lose money now. This house is not mortgaged."

Mrs. Morrisson shook her head.

"Well, my idea is this. I will advance twenty thousand, and take a mortgage on this house, providing other parties can be found willing to assist. Not otherwise. Unless the failure can be prevented, there is no reason why you should part with the house. Is this old relative perfectly unmanageable? You had better persuade Albert to see him again, and mention my proposition."

"He will not, I am sure. His uncle was so insulting in his manner of refusing. I do not think he would give Albert an opportunity to speak to him."

"Gerty, I have been riding about the city all day on this business. I know several men who would help Albert if he were just backed up for a few months by a solid man. It would give them confidence in him. It seems hard that they are not willing to assist him anyhow, but money is very difficult to make, and we cannot blame them for wishing to keep it, after they have earned it. You must urge upon Albert the necessity of bringing his uncle to terms. And now, I shall leave you. Let Albert sleep as long as he can. He is worn out now, and to-morrow he must work hard. It will be the turning point in his life. Everything depends upon what he can do to-morrow."

So saying, Mr. Wilson went away quietly, leaving his sister in a condition bordering on distraction. What to do? how to think? where to go? There were the questions presented to her throbbing brain. For a few moments she stood in the lighted hall, trying to control the helpless, nervous sensations stealing over her she. Then went softly into the parlor, and listened to her husbands heavy, irregular breathing. "To-morrow, only to-morrow, she thought, "and he will never recover from such a blow."

She bent over him, pressing her lips to the masses of tangled curls falling on his forehead, and then as if seized by a sudden inspiration, left the room and hurried up stairs.

Edith was sitting in the dressing-room, looking over lessons.

"Edith will you take your books to the dining-room, and be very quiet? Papa is asleep in the parlor, and I can not have him awakened. You will watch by him for a little while."

Edith did as she was told, secretly wondering why papa should be asleep in the parlor.

When she had left the room, Mrs. Morrisson took her cloak and bonnet from the wardrobe, and began to dress hastily for the street. She was tying her bonnet on, when Ray's voice came, clear and curious, from her little crib in the corner.

"Where are you going, mamma?"

Mrs. Morrisson turned, rather startled at the question. Ray was sitting up, her bright eyes fixed on her mother's figure.

"I thought you were asleep, Ray."

"No, me not seepy."

"Mrs. Morrisson thought for a moment, then looked at the clock. It was just nine. The distance to Mr. Morrisson's house was short, easily traversed in ten minutes, and the night, although cold, was clear and dry.

"Will you come with mamma, Ray?" Ray sprang to her feet with a cry of delight, and Mrs. Morrisson, having locked the door, dressed the little creature in her warmest clothes, and, taking her in her arms, went noiselessly down the broad staircase. Bertie's voice singing for Tommy was audible from the upper story, and in the dining-room mirror the mother caught a glimpse of Edith's delicate profile bending over her book.

Pressing Ray's little face to her breast, less the child should call out, Mrs. Morrisson gently opened and closed the hall door, hastened down the stoop, and with a sigh of relief put Ray on her feet on the sidewalk.

"Me know where we are doing!" exclaimed the child, putting her hand in her mother's, and glancing down the broad street.

"Where, Ray?" and Mrs. Morrisson's heart gave a sudden bound. She was growing nervous over the step she was about to take, fearful for its results, half dreading that her impulsiveness might injure her husband's cause. And yet something within impelled her forward. The moonlight seemed to clothe Ray in robes of silver, and the childish face was glowing with delight as she replied, "To see Santa Claus."

"Do you feel cold, Ray?" Ray shook her head, clasped her little white muff closer to her form, and pattered along the almost deserted pavement, smiles chasing each other over her happy face.

A walk of three blocks across town brought Mrs. Morrisson to an avenue, which, like a great gulf fixed, divided the aristocratic quarter in which her house was situated, from the unpretentious neighborhood in which Mr. Morrisson dwelt. Several times in the course of her married life, she and her husband had visited uncle James. Not very often, for the old man once insinuated that they came to gain favor with him, in a view of a prospective legacy. Mr. Albert Morrisson's pride was hurt at this speech, for hitherto he had been equal to supporting himself; had assisted others generously, and had seldom given even a passing thought to "Uncle Jim's money," as it was called in the family.

"Uncle Jim" was by no means a popular personage among his many nephews and nieces. He was purse-proud, avaricious, and cold-hearted. A disappointed

[CONCLUDED ON SECOND PAGE.]