

EBEN HOLDEN

By IRVING BACHELLER

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Continued from page 1.

were of the rain, but it seemed only to deepen the silence. I felt the wet grass under my feet and hands. Then I knew it was night and the battlefield where I had fallen. I was alive and might see another day, thank God! I felt something more under my feet. I heard a whisper at my shoulder.

"Thought you were dead long ago," it said.

"No, no," I answered; "I'm alive; I know I'm alive. This is the battlefield."

"Fraid I ain't goin' 't live," he said.

"Got a terrible wound. Wish it was mortal."

"Dark long?" I asked.

"For hours," he answered. "Dunno how many."

He began to groan and utter short prayers.

"Oh, my soul walleth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning!" I heard him cry in a loud, despairing voice.

Then there was a bit of silence, in which I could hear him whispering of his home and people.

Presently he began to sing:

"Guide me, O thou great Jehovah! Pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but thou art mighty—

His voice broke and trembled and sank into silence.

I had business of my own to look after, perhaps I had no time to lose—and I went about it calmly. I had no strength to move and began to feel the nearing of my time. The rain was falling faster. It chilled me to the marrow as I felt it trickling over my back. I called to the man who lay beside me—again and again I called to him—but no answer. Then I knew that he was dead and I alone. Long after that in the far distance I heard a voice calling. It rang like a trumpet in the still air. It grew plainer as I listened. My own name, William Brower? It was certainly calling to me, and I answered with a feeble cry. In a moment I could hear the tramp of some one coming. He was sitting beside me presently, whoever it might be. I could not see him for the dark. His tongue wet clucking as if he pitted me.

"Who are you?" I remember asking, but got no answer.

At first I was glad; then I began to feel a mighty horror of him. In a moment he had picked me up and was making off. The job of his step seemed to be breaking my arms at the shoulder. As I groaned he ran. I could see nothing in the darkness, but he went ahead, never stopping, save for a moment now and then to rest. I wondered where he was taking me and what it all meant. I called again, "Who are you?" but he seemed not to hear me. "My God!" I whispered to myself. "This is no man—this is Death severing the soul from the body. The voice was that of the good God." Then I heard a man hallooing near by.

"Help, help!" I shouted faintly.

"Where are you?" came the answer, now farther away. "Can't see you."

My mysterious bearer was now running. My heels were dragging upon the ground; my hands were brushing the grass tops. I groaned with pain.

"Halt! Who comes there?" a picket called.

It must be a giant, I thought, who can pick me up and carry me as if I were no bigger than a house cat. That was what I was thinking when I swooned.

From then till I came to myself in the little church at Centerville I remember nothing. Groaning men lay all about me; others stood between them with lanterns. A woman was bending over me. I felt the gentle touch of her hand upon my face and heard her speak to me so tenderly I cannot think of it even now without thanking God for good women. I clung to her hand, clung with the energy of one drowning, while I suffered the merciful torture of the probe, the knife and the needle. And when it was all over and the lantern lights grew pale in the dawn I fell asleep.

But enough of blood and horror. War is no holiday, my merry people, who know not the mighty blessing of peace. Counting the cost, let us have war if necessary, but peace, peace if possible.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUT now I have better things to write of, things that have some relish of good in them. I was very weak and low from loss of blood for days, and suddenly the tide turned. I had won recognition for distinguished gallantry, they told me. That day they took me to Washington. I lay three weeks there in the hospital. As soon as they heard of my misfortune at home Uncle Eb wrote he was coming to see me. I stopped him by a telegram, assuring him that I was nearly well and would be home shortly. My term of enlistment had expired when they let me out a fine day in mid-August. I was going home for a visit as soon as any man; but in the horse talk of Faraway, I had a little "blemish" on the left shoulder. Uncle Eb was to meet me at the Jersey City depot before going I, with others who had been complimented for bravery, went to see the president. There were some twenty of us summoned to meet him that day. It was warm, and the great Lincoln sat in his shirt sleeves at a desk in the middle of his big office. He wore a pair of brown carpet slippers, the rolling collar and black stock made me as familiar in print,

His hair was tumbled. He was writing hurriedly when we came in. He laid his pen away and turned to us without speaking. There was a careworn look upon his solemn face.

"Mr. President," said the general, who had come with us, "here are some of the brave men of our army whom you wished to see."

He came and shook hands with each and thanked us in the name of the republic for the example of courage and patriotism we and many others had given to the army. He had a lean, tall, ungraceful figure, and he spoke his mind without any frill or flourish. He said only a few words of good plain talk and was done with us.

"Which is Brower?" he inquired presently.

I came forward more scared than ever I had been before.

"My son," he said, taking my hand in his, "why didn't you run?"

"Didn't dare," I answered. "I knew it was more dangerous to run away than to go forward."

"Reminds me of a story," said he, smiling. "Years ago there was a bully in Sangamon county, Ill., that had the reputation of running faster and fighting harder than any man there. Every body thought he was a terrible fighter. He'd always get a man on the run; then he'd catch up and give him a licking. One day he tackled a lame man. The lame man licked him in a minute.

"Why didn't you run?" somebody asked the victor.

"Didn't dare," said he. "Run once when he tackled me, an' I've been lame ever since."

"How did ye manage to lick him?" said the other.

"Waal," said he, "I hed to, an' I done it easy."

"That's the way it goes," said the immortal president; "ye do it easy if ye have to."

He reminded me in and out of Horace Greeley, although they looked no more alike than a hawk and a hand-saw. But they had a like habit of forgetting themselves and of saying neither more nor less than they meant. These holds had the strength of an ass and as little vanity. Mr. Greeley used to say that no man could amount to anything who worried much about the fit of his trousers. Neither of them ever encountered that obstacle.

Early next morning I took a train for home. I was in soldier clothes. I had with me no other—and all in my car came to talk with me about the now famous battle of Bull Run.

The big platform at Jersey City was crowded with many people as we got off the train. There were other returning soldiers, some with crutches, some with empty sleeves.

A hand at the farther end of the platform was playing and those near me were staging the familiar music:

"John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave."

Somebody shouted my name. Then there rose a cry of three cheers for Brower. It seemed the boys of the Tribune, I thought. I could see a number of them in the crowd. One brought me a basket of flowers. I thought they were trying to have fun with me.

"Thank you," said I. "But what is the joke?"

"No joke," he said; "it's to honor a hero."

"Oh, you wish me to give it to somebody?"

I was warming with embarrassment. "We wish you to keep it," he answered.

In accounts of the battle I had seen some notice of my leading a charge, but my fame had gone farther—much farther, indeed—than I knew. I stood a moment laughing—an odd sort of laugh it was that had in it the salt of tears—and waving my hand to the many who were now calling my name.

In the uproar of cheers and waving of handkerchiefs I could not find Uncle Eb for a moment. When I saw him in the breaking crowd he was cheering lustily and waving his hat above his head. His enthusiasm impressed when I stood before him. As I was greeting him I heard a lively rustle of skirts. Two dainty, gloved hands laid hold of mine; a sweet voice spoke my name. There, beside me, stood the tall, erect figure of Hope. Our eyes met, and before there was any thinking of propriety I had her in my arms and was kissing her and she was kissing me.

It thrilled me to see the splendor of her beauty that day, her eyes wet with feeling as they looked up at me; to feel again the rumbling touch of her lips. In a moment I turned to Uncle Eb.

"Boy," he said, "I thought you"—and then he stopped and began brushing his coat sleeve.

"Come on now," he added as he took my grip away from me. "We're goin' 't hev a gran' good time. I'll take ye to a splendid tavern somewheres. An' I ain't goin' 't count the cost nuther."

He was determined to carry my grip for me. Hope had a friend with her who was going north in the morning on our boat. We crossed the ferry and took a Broadway omnibus, while query followed query.

"Makes me feel like a fapjack 't ride 'n them things," said Uncle Eb as we got out.

He hired a parlor and two bedrooms for us all at the St. Nicholas.

"Purty middlin' steep," he said to me as we left the office, "it is, sartin, but I don't care—not a bit. When folks has 't hev a good time they've got 't hev 't."

We were soon seated in our little parlor. There was a great glow of health and beauty in Hope's face. It was a bit fuller, but had nobler outlines and a coloring as delicate as ever. She wore a plain gray gown admirably fitted to her plump figure. There was a new and splendid dignity in her carriage, her big blue eyes, her nose with its little upward slant. She was now

the wear groomed young woman of society in the full glory of her youth.

Uncle Eb, who sat between us, pinched her cheek playfully. A little spot of white showed a moment where his fingers had been; then the pink flooded over it.

"Never see a girl git such a smack as you did," he said, laughing.

"Well," said she, smiling, "I guess I gave as good as I got."

"Served him right," he said. "You kissed back an' hard, Gran' sport!" he added, turning to me.

"Best I ever had," was my humble acknowledgment.

"Belong ever see a girl kissed so powerful," he said as he took Hope's

close to my cheek I could feel the beat of their long lashes.

"That God made you for me," she added.

"Love is God's helper," I said. "He made us for each other."

"I thank him for it. I do love you so," she whispered.

The rest is the old, old story. They that have not lived it are to be pitted.

When we sat down at length she told me what I had long suspected—that Mrs. Fuller wished her to marry young Livingston.

"But for Uncle Eb," she added, "I think I should have done so, for I had given up all hope of you."

"Good old Uncle Eb!" I said. "Let's go and tell him."

He was sound asleep when we entered his room, but woke as I lit the gas.

"What's the matter?" he whispered, lifting his head.

"Congratulate us," I said. "We're engaged."

"Hev ye conquered her?" he inquired, smiling.

"Love has conquered us both," I said.

"Waal, I swan! Is that so?" he answered. "Guess I won't fool away any more time here 'n bed. If you children 'll go in 't'other room 'll slip into my trousers, an' then ye'll hear me talk some conversation."

"Reacts the world!" he continued, coming in presently, buttoning his suspenders. "I thought mos' likely ye'd hitch up 't'gether some time. 'Tain't often ye can find a pair 't well matched—the same style an' gatted jest about alike. When ye goin' 't git married?"

"She hasn't named the day," I said.

"Sooner the better," said Uncle Eb as he drew on his coat and sat down.

"Used 't be so 't when a young couple hed set up an' held each other's hands a few nights they were ready for the minister. Wish ye could fix it for 'bout Crisimus time, by jings! They's other things goin' 't happen then. S'pose ye s' happy now ye can stan' a little bad news. I've got 't tell ye. David's been losin' money. Hain't never wrote ye 'bout it—not a word—'cause I didn't know how 'twas comin' out."

"How did he lose it?" I inquired.

"Waal, ye know that Orv Barker—runs a hardware store in Migleyville—he sold him a patent right. Figgered an' argued night an' day for more'n three weeks. It was a newfangled wash 'biler. David he thought he see a chance 't put out agents an' make a great deal of money. It did look jest as easy as slidin' down hill, but when we come 't slide—waa! we found out we was at the bottom o' the hill 'stid o' the top, an' it wasn't reel good slidin'."

He paid five thousand dollars for the right o' ten counties. Then bime by Barker he wanted him 't go security for fifteen hundred 'bilers that he was hev'n made. I tol' David he hedn't better go in no deeper, but Barker he promised big things an' seemed 't be sech a nice man 't 'fin'ly David he up an' done it. Waal, he's hed 'em 't pay fer, an' the fact is it costs s' much 't sell 'em it out as all the profits."

"Looks like a swindle," I said indignantly.

"No," said Uncle Eb, "taint no swindle. Barker thought he hed a gran' good thing. He got fooled, an' the fool complaint is very ketchin'. Got it myself years ago, an' I've been doctorin' fer it ever since."

The story of David's undoing hurt us sorely. He had gone the way of most men who left the farm late in life with unsatisfied ambition.

"They shall never want for anything so long as I have my health," I said.

"I have \$400 in the bank," said Hope, "and shall give them every cent of it."

"Tain't nuthin' 't worry over," said Uncle Eb. "If I don't never lose more'n a little money I shan't feel terrible bad. We're all young yet. Got more'n a million dollars worth o' good health right here in this room. So well I'm 'shamed up it. Man's more decent if he's a little bit sickly. An' 't'her there girl, Bill, 's agreed 't marry ye! Why, 't'ruther hev her 'n this bull city o' New York."

"So had I," was my answer.

"Waal, you ain't no luckier 'n she is—day to a bit," he added. "A good man's better 'n a gol' mine—ev'ry time."

"Who knows," said Hope. "He may be president some day."

"Love's one thing I hate," Uncle Eb continued. "That's the idee o' hev'n the woodshed an' barn an' garret full o' them infernal wash 'bilers. Ye can't take no decent care up a boss there 'n the stable—they're so piled up. One uv 'em tumbled down top o' me 't'other day. 't'ruther 't'would 'a' been a panther. Made me s' mad I took a club an' knocked that 'biler into a cocked hat. 'Taint right! I'm sick o' the sight uv 'em."

"They'll make a good bonfire some day," said Hope.

"Don't believe they'd burn," he answered sorrowfully. "They're tin."

"Couldn't we bury 'em?" I suggested.

"Be a purty costly funeral," he answered thoughtfully. "Ye'd hev 't dig a hole deeper 'n Tupper's dingle."

"Couldn't you give them away?" I inquired.

"Waal," said he, helping himself to a chew of tobacco, "we've tried that. Gin 'em 't everybody we know, but there ain't folks enough—there's such a slew o' them 'bilers. We could give one 't ev'ry man, woman an' child in Faraway an' hev enough left 't fill an acre lot. Dan Perry druv in 't'other day with a double buggy. We gin him one fer his own family. It was heavy 't carry, an' he didn't seem 't like the looks uv it some way. Then I asked him if he wouldn't like one for his girl. 'She ain't married,' says he. 'She will be some time,' says I. 'Take it along.' So he put in another. 'You've got a sister over on the turnpike, hain't ye?' says I. 'Yes,' says he. 'Waal,' I says, 'don't want a hev her feel slighted.' 'She won't know 'bout my hev'n 'em,' says he, lookin' 's if he'd hed enough. 'Tis, she will,' I says. 'She'll hear uv it an' maybe make a fuss.' Then we piled in another. 'Look here,' I says after that, 'there's yer brother Bill up there 'bove you. Take one along fer him.' 'No,' says he, 'I don't tell everybody, but Bill an' I ain't on good terms. We ain't spoke for more'n a year.'

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"It longs for you," I said. "It keeps me thinking of you always. Once it was so easy to be happy; since you have been away it has seemed as if there were no longer any light in the world or any pleasure. It has made me a slave. I did not know that love was such a mighty thing."

"Love is no Cupid; he is a giant," she said, her voice trembling with emotion as mine had trembled. "I tried to forget, and he punished me under his feet as if to punish me."

She was near to crying now, but she shut her lips firmly and kept back the tears. God grant me I may never forget the look in her eyes that moment. She came closer to me. Our lips touched; my arms held her tightly.

"I have waited long for this," I said, "the happiest moment of my life! I thought I had lost you."

"What a foolish man," she whispered. "I have loved you for years and years, and you—your could not see it. I believe now!"

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"I had her in my arms."

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"Let's have a good talk," I said.

"There was an awkward bit of silence."

"Waal," said she, heaving up upon her lips, "let's start with the war."

"Tired of war," I answered. "Love is a better subject."

She rose and walked up and down the room, a troubled look in her face. I thought I had never seen a woman who could carry her head so proudly.

"I don't think you are very familiar with it," she said presently.

"I ought to be," I answered, "having loved you all these years."

"But you told me that—that you loved another girl," she said, her elbow leaning on the mantel, her eyes looking down soberly.

"When? Where?" I asked.

"In Mr. Fuller's parlor."

"Hope," I said, "you misunderstood me. I meant you."

She came toward me then, looking up into my eyes. I started to embrace her, but she caught my hands and held them apart and came close to me.

"Did you say that you meant me?" she asked in a whisper.

"I did."

"Why did you not tell me that night?"

"Because you would not listen to me and we were interrupted."

"Well, if I loved a girl," she said, "I'd make her listen."

"I would have done that, but Mrs. Fuller saved you."

"You might have written," she suggested in a tone of injury.

"I did."

"And the letter never came—just as I feared."

She looked very sober and thoughtful then.

"You know our understanding that day in the garden," she added. "If you did not ask me again I was to know you—you did not love me any longer. That was long ago."

"I never loved any girl but you," I said.

"I love you now, Hope, and is nothing is enough. I love you so there is nothing else for me. You are dearer than my life. It was the thought of you that made me brave in battle. I wish I could be as brave here. But I demand your surrender. I shall give you no quarter now."

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