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A Happy
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FRANK TOUSEY

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NOT ROMANTIC.

BY JOHN LAWRENCE.



OME years ago, when I was old enough to be a soldier and young enough to be insanely curious about everything, I enlisted in a veteran regiment of volunteer cavalry. Raw recruits are nuisances to veterans, as I learned when I myself became a veteran, but two or three of our older men endured me patiently, and to one of them, Burney, I attached myself closely because there seemed some mystery about him.

There was nothing unusual about Burney's manner. He was a plain, matter-of-fact fellow, about forty years of age, who seldom talked about himself or anything else. He never made trouble, nor got drunk, yet often he would be absent from roll-call for days at a time; when he returned he never was held to account for his absence, although other men were severely punished for being out of camp over night. When I asked other old members of the company how and why Burney got off so easily for his absences, I was told, in tones that discouraged further questioning :

“Shut up!”

Once I asked Burney himself, and the reply, given without any show of indignation or other emotion, was :

“None of your business.”

One day, while I was wondering aloud about Burney in the presence of a veteran to whom I had just given a large plug of captured tobacco (as I did not use the weed) the veteran said :

“If you'll keep still about it afterward, I'll tell you what you want to know about Burney. He's really a spy, although we call him a scout. There are several of our men in the same business.”

Now if there was any man more than another that I wanted to see and know all about, it was a spy. Had a known spy and a distinguished general called on me at one and the same time, the general would have had to cool his heels. I determined to corner Burney and pump a lot of romances from his memory. Fortune soon favored me, for one day our company did the cav-

alry picketing of a road, and while the relief to which Burney and I belonged was not on post, the veteran suggested that we should go outside the lines, find a farm-house, and trade some coffee or salt for onions or sweet potatoes to vary the monotony of camp fare. We started, and I was not astonished that we passed the outposts without being questioned, for of course a spy could go where he liked, even if a raw recruit chanced to be with him. Within five minutes I blurted out :

"Burney, I know your secret—that you're a spy—a scout, I mean. But don't fear; I won't betray you."

"Won't, eh?" Well, how in thunder could you? We're not in the Confederate army, are we?"

Evidently I had made a mistake, so I talked industriously to get out of it. Burney listened a little while, then he said :

"I s'pose you think there's something secret about my work? Something mysterious about my position in camp? But there isn't—not a bit of it. Once in a while I go out for some information, just as some others of our men do. That's all."

"But you must have lots of romantic adventures?"

"Bosh!"

This was not encouraging, yet I persisted with :

"Do tell me about one of your trips—only one. I'll promise never again to ask you for another story."

"That's letting me off easy," said Burney, after a moment of reflection, "and I'd take you at your word if there was anything to tell. But there isn't anything worth telling. Let—me—see; what on earth did I see and do on my last trip?"

"That's just what I want to know. Tell me all of it, from beginning to end, and I'll trust myself to find some romance in it. You're so used to adventures that you——"

"Adventures be hanged! I tell you that there aren't any in the business, except where you find them in books. About that last trip now: I started while the company was on picket, so there would be someone to lead my horse back to camp. It was night, and I went out on foot between two of our outposts, just as any man from the enemy's side might have slipped in between them."

"What disguise did you wear?"

"None at all. I had on a soft, shabby felt hat, such as thousands of men in both armies wear, a whitey-gray flannel shirt, such as you are wearing now, and our light blue uniform trousers, so stained with dust and mud that no one would have thought

they weren't gray. I wore a light blue army overcoat, but half of the Johnny rebs wear the same kind, bought, captured, stolen or found."

"Did you carry a rifle or revolvers?"

"Neither. I was going for information, not to fight. Besides, I had to be in condition to pretend that I was a deserter from the Union army, if I could gain anything by it, or save myself from trouble, and deserters don't make a show of weapons."

"But suppose you had been obliged to fight for your life?"

"Then I should have had to depend upon the sheath-knife that I carry in my boot, to cut bread and meat with, lop branches and small firewood with, and such work. It's long, sharp, never unloaded and always noiseless."

I shivered and begged him to go on.

"I went through fields and woods, keeping as close as possible to the road, so as to hear any body of troops that might be moving, but I walked carefully, so as not to be heard by any one who was not specially listening. I was making for the hut of a colored man who lives two or three miles this side of the river. I'd made friends with him, during one of our scouts, by giving him a little salt and promising more in a few days if he would get me some information that was worth anything. Salt is awfully scarce and high-priced in the Confederacy, so a nigger has a hard time in getting any for his meat. Well, my darky wasn't at home, so I went on."

"What did you want to find out?"

"Oh, anything that was going on. In some places horses and forage is being collected; in others wagon-loads of smoked meats are on their way to the Confederate army. In some other place recruiting or conscripting is going on; perhaps, too, an officer or two of the Southern army may be home on leave of absence. Information about any such things may start our regiment out to gobble something, and to weaken the enemy to the extent of what is gobbled. Well, finally I reached a little town, and lounged about, asking questions."

"But how did you know the Union men from the others?"

"I didn't know them apart. I wasn't looking for Union men anyway; I was looking for information. I wasn't fool enough to talk politics. I pretended to be a reb, and on my way to Richmond to collect a note due to old Knighton—you remember him?—he has a farm near our camp. I had the note with me, too, to prove my yarn; it's a note the old man gave me to collect, for a

commission, if we chance to get into Richmond during one of our raids."

"But what did you do when the enemy's soldiers questioned you?"

"There weren't any of them to question me; the South has no soldiers to spare for little, out-of-the-way places. Well, an hour or two of chat with the man I put up with that night, got me all the information worth having, from that part of the country. In return, I gave him such crooked stories about things down this way, that the enemy will have hard work to straighten them out, when they get them."

"Then you had to lie?"

"'Twasn't lying," Burney retorted. "'Twas war."

"Ah! Go on."

"I learned that there was a grist mill a mile or two away, full of wheat and corn, to be ground for the enemy's commissary department. I also found out where there were about a dozen good horses, to go to the Johnnies' artillery. It did make my heart ache, not to be able to sneak those horses away and bring them into our camp."

"That would have been stealing."

"Not a bit of it! It would have been war. Still, I got some consolation in slipping out of the house that night, finding the grist mill, and setting it a-fire. I made a thorough job of it, too."

"Incendiarism!"

"Bosh! 'Twas war. When you shoot an enemy in battle do you call it murder?"

"No; but setting a building a-fire is—well, it's more cold-blooded than shooting a man during an action."

"Oh! It is, eh? What a savage you're going to be, if you believe heat of blood makes any act more decent."

I made haste to change the subject, saying:

"Of course you made yourself scarce after firing the mill?"

"Of course I did nothing of the kind. That would have fastened suspicion upon me, so that I could never have gone into that neighborhood again. No, sir; I was back in the house and fast asleep again before daylight, and of course I hadn't been missed. Next day I got the job of driving one of several carts that were loaded with bacon for the Johnny rebs at Petersburg, and I didn't have to make any explanations along the road, for the bacon-cart was sufficient passport."

"And at Petersburg you made drawings of the forts and counted

the enemy's soldiers, and took important papers from the Southern commander's headquarters."

"Oh, say! What sort of war stories have you been reading? How do you suppose a farmer soldier, as I pretended to be, could get at a commanding officer's papers? As to the forts, I got into only one of them, and couldn't have got there if I hadn't made an excuse to see old Knighton's son, whose regiment I knew the number of. I was going to give him a bogus message from his family, and pump some information out of him."

"How did you have the heart to play so mean a trick upon a man?"

"I didn't have it, for Knighton wasn't in the fort; his company was somewhere else that day, and I didn't want to get into trouble by having to ask my way about the lines. Still, I picked up some information that may be useful if ever we get close to Petersburg. Two or three days later I reached camp and reported. You can't see much adventure and romance in that story, can you?"

"No, but you must have left out part of it. How about the Union men who were glad to see you? Besides, you must have met some beautiful Southern women, and——"

"Hang women!" growled Burney. "If it wasn't for a woman I might be a good deal more useful on such trips than I am."

"Oh, oh, oh! And you said there was no romance in the business!"

"There wasn't, either, in the case I'm thinking of."

"Tell me about her, please, and let me see if you're not mistaken."

Burney frowned; then he said he wished we could find a plantation and get the vegetables we had come out for; he hadn't meant to venture so far outside the lines, he said. It was evident, however, that his mind was busy with the incident to which he had alluded. Finally he said:

"'Twas this way—don't you ever dare to breathe a word of this to any of the boys, if you don't want your throat cut. One night when I was outside the lines I stopped at a house to beg for something to eat; I was almost starved. The only people in the house were a woman and her little boy; the youngster was down with a hard fever, so, of course, his mother was half crazy. She had no near neighbors; her husband had been killed in one of the early battles of the war, there wasn't a doctor within ten miles, nor was there any place to get medicines. The woman,

who was a clever creature, though not what you could call handsome, was almost dead of exhaustion, for she had been watching the little fellow night and day for a week.

"Well, I've done a lot of nursing among our folks at home, and I know pretty well what to do in cases of fever, and I'm never without some medicine about my clothes in this swampy country, where a man never knows what day and hour the ague may strike him. I told the little woman that if she wouldn't let any one know of my presence, then or afterward, I'd help her pull the youngster through. I explained that I was a private scout—really a spy from Richmond; that it would go very hard with me if I were found neglecting my duty, even for the sake of a sick child, and if the Yankees were to find me there, in one of their uniforms, they would make haste to shoot me.

"She promised, and she got a good long sleep, while I looked after the youngster for two days and nights. In her waking moments I learned all she knew about Southern soldiers and stores in all the country round. Then I departed, promising to hurry back with some more medicine from Richmond; the child's symptoms bothered me. I kept my word about the medicines, although I got them in our own camp; at the same time I gave our Colonel the information that put him on the track of those fifty Johnnies and horses he scooped—you remember?

"Our regimental surgeon said that the symptoms I described meant typhoid fever, so you may be sure it took a lot of work to keep the little chap alive. It took a lot of medicine, too, which frequently took me back to camp. The woman was so grateful for what I was doing, and she believed my story so thoroughly, that she took long trips on foot to find out what was going on that might interest me; she would have tramped day and night, I believe, to keep me near the child.

"Little by little the boy—a chap barely big enough to talk a few words, began to get well, and he and I got very fond of each other. I taught the mother more about cooking for sick folks than she'd ever known before, and our surgeon gave me tonics for her, for she had got awfully run down in her anxiety over her youngster. Well, that woman's gratitude got too big for her to put into words, so she put it into her face, and just let me tell you, my boy, that a woman never looks better than when her heart is full of thankfulness about something."

"Yet all this time you were playing double with her."

"Bosh! Don't you suppose I've ordinary human feelings? I

was awfully, honestly sorry for her, and I meant what I said when I promised to save her boy for her—as I did. Where was I?—confound you, you've nearly made me miss the point of the story, but here it is. By something I had said, without any purpose, she knew that I wasn't a married man. One day she mistook for earnest a bit of banter such as men are always giving to women, and she let me know—very modestly and prettily too, that her heart and hand and little farm were mine whenever I chose to claim them."

"Oh, Burney. And you said there was no romance in spying. Go on. What next?"

"What next? Why, I found my best source of information completely ruined—yes, sir—completely ruined. I couldn't accept her offer—I couldn't pretend to, for all the information in the world. I was ready to do almost anything for the Union, but I drew the line at make-believe love—playing with a woman's heart. I told her it never would do—that she was worthy of the love of the best man alive; I meant it, too, for I'm a pretty fair judge of human nature, even if I am a homely old bachelor. I told her that it would be criminal for a fellow whose chances of being killed were specially good to even let himself fall in love, and tell a woman of it, until the war ended. She promised to wait for me, but I protested; I said I'd surely be killed, as my work was extra hazardous. The upshot of it is that I daren't go near that house again; I've set up a yarn, through the colored man I spoke of, to make her believe me dead, and I know it won't make her happy. Hang the luck."

Burney looked so unhappy that I was almost sorry that I had begged for the story. I was glad when I saw a house a little way ahead, and Burney had something new to talk about.

"An old minister lives there," said he, "so I guess we're not likely to be shot at. It's always best to be on the safe side, though, so hold up your haversack—that's the flag-of-truce sign for soldiers who want to do any trading."

We rode slowly up to the house, Burney cautioning me against dismounting. "It's Southern style," he said, "for a visitor on horseback to keep his saddle until somebody comes out of the house and says something. I wish somebody would come quick, for we've been away from the reserve an awful long time, and I'll bet——"

What Burney had intended to bet was never learned, for as he

spoke the front door of the house flew open and a plainly dressed woman with a radiant face dashed down the steps, shouting :

“You’re alive! You’re not dead!”

Burney looked more dead than alive as the woman leaned against the horse and him, kissed his hand again and again, and looked up at him with happy eyes, which nevertheless were full of tears.

“How pale you look!” she continued. “It’s easy to see that you’ve been very sick. You ought not to be out of your bed. Oh, if Georgie and I could have known where you were after all you have done for us!”

Burney answered not a word, but continued to look as if about to drop from his saddle and die.

“You shan’t go away from me again,” the woman continued, “until I have the right to care for you. You saved the life of my child; you saved mine! ’Tis my right and my duty to save yours! Don’t shake your head at me in that way and make such strange faces and nods toward your companion. I’m not ashamed of what I am saying. I’d be glad to have the whole world know that I love you and worship you, and won’t be separated from you again!”

“Listen to me—carefully,” said Burney, in a hoarse whisper. “You can see that I am on duty. I’ve no time for anything or any one—not even for you, who are the best woman I ever knew—God bless you!”

“Then I shall follow you—Georgie and I! We will take our chances.”

“A camp is no place for a woman and a child,” Burney answered. “Besides, you really don’t know anything about me. I can tell you something that will make you hate me at once and forever—I shall have to do it, too. All I ever did for you and your sick boy I was fully in earnest about; I’ve got a heart, like any other human being. But, I’ve been the worst liar you ever heard of. I never told you the truth about anything except yourself and your child. I never was a Confederate scout, nor a Confederate of any kind; I’m a Union spy, and I glory in it. There!”

The woman did not start; neither did she faint. She looked calmly up, and replied :

“No matter what you are or have been, if you will be my husband.”

“You shall have your way,” said Burney, rapidly; “I call my friend here to witness that I say it—you shall have your way the

very first day that I can get the time to find you and take you to a minister, but——”

“The time is now,” the woman interrupted, “for this very house belongs to a minister. I am here only by accident, or brought here by a special Providence, for I wanted to consult the good old man about some matters that he understands. Georgie? O—o—oh, Georgie!”

A small boy came to the door, stared an instant at the spectacle before him, shouted “Papa man!” and hurried to his mother, who still leaned against Burney’s saddle.

“Tell Elder Gray to come out here—at once,” said his mother. Burney looked at me desperately yet sheepishly; then he looked earnestly down at the woman, who returned his gaze with a happy, modest smile. She was so unlike any woman I had ever read about in a book, that I couldn’t be sure as to what to think of her ways and doings. In a moment or two the child returned with an old and very deliberate man, who looked searchingly at Burney and me.

“Elder,” said the woman, “this is the good man I told you about. He isn’t dead, although he looks as if he had been not far from the grave. We want to be married—at once, for he must go back to his duty.”

“Misguided sister,” exclaimed the minister, severely, “would you marry an enemy of your country?”

“I’ll marry the man who saved my child’s life, and saved mine at the same time.”

“I cannot prevent you,” sighed the minister. “Join your right hands.”

Burney slipped from his horse; I, feeling that I was his “best man,” dismounted and removed my hat, which I afterward learned was bad form at a military wedding out of doors. The simple ceremony was soon ended; Burney kissed his bride, who threw her arms around his neck; then suddenly the pallor departed from Burney’s face, and the plain, matter-of-fact, middle-aged chap actually looked handsome. But suddenly his manner changed again; looking sharply at me he said:

“Hurry back to the station; go right on to the regiment, and tell the Colonel—nobody else, what you’ve seen.”

“But——”

“Go—quick!”

“Burney, I won’t stir until you give me your word and oath, before your wife and this minister, that you are not going to de-

sert to the enemy." (Other men—good men, too, of our command, had married Southern women and afterward deserted.)

Burney snatched his pistol from his belt, pointed it at me, and said, very slowly and distinctly :

"Do as I said ! Don't put your hand to your revolver ! Mount ! Go !"

I went. The Colonel looked greatly troubled when I made my report. Three days later I was doing picket duty on another road, when I heard, about dusk, a movement in some bushes near me. I challenged ; there seemed something familiar in the voice that answered :

"Friends, but without the countersign."

"Advance—one, and be identified."

An unarmed figure came slowly toward me. When it was within several paces, I again shouted :

"Halt !"

"Don't you know me, you stupid fellow?" was the reply. "I'm Burney ; the others are my wife and little boy. I've been prowling the outposts all day, to find which one you were on, and when I would have to strike it to get in under the darkness."

"I should think you'd have come by daylight when nobody'd have made you any trouble. The whole regiment knows you by sight and name."

"Yes, but they don't know—*them*," drawled Burney. "I think the older a man is when he marries, the more afraid he is of being laughed at by his friends. You're going to pass us in, though?"

"Certainly, and you'll have no trouble to make your way through the camp from here. Where are the other two?"

"About a quarter of a mile back the road, on my horse. I'll hurry back and lead them up. Say ! How did the Colonel take the news?"

"He looked doubtful and troubled. But see here, Burney—what made you look and act so strangely the other day, right after you were married?"

Burney hung his head and was silent a moment. Then he said :

"Why, the truth is, I was a little afraid of myself, I felt so unusual. The fact is, it was the first time in my life that a woman's arms had been around my neck, and I didn't know what might come of it."