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JOHN

I stand behind his elbow chair,
My hand rests softly on his hair—
Hair whose silver is dearer to me
Than all the gold of earth could be;
And my eyes of brown
Look tenderly down
On John, my John!

The firelight leaps, and laughs, and warms,
Wraps up both in its ruddy arms—
John, as he sits in his hearth-glow red,
Me with my arms on his dear old head—
Encircling us both,
Like a ring of truth,
Me and my John!

His form has lost its early grace,
Wrinkles rest on his kindly face;
His brow no longer is smooth and fair,
For Time has left his autograph there;
But a noble prize,
In my loving eyes,
Is John, my John!

"My love," he says, and lifts his hands,
Browned by the suns of many lands,
In tender clasp on mine to lay,
"How long ago was our wedding day?"
I smile through my tears,
And: "Years and years,
My John, dear Joan!"

We say no more, the firelight glows;
Both of us muse—on what? Who knows?
My hands drop down in a mute caress—
Each throb of my heart is a wish to bless
With my life's best worth
The heart and the hearth
Of John, my John!

Joseph's Brother.

BY BRET HARTE.

They didn't call him Tom, or Jack, or Harry, but always spoke of him as "Joseph's Brother." And it was just as singular that they didn't call him "Joe" instead of Joseph when speaking of the man.

The two had a wagon in the band, dragging itself toward the Black Hills day by day and mile by mile. They messed by themselves, scarcely spoke to each other, and their lives and their actions were a sort of mystery to the rest, who were a jolly set, drinking, carousing, fighting and playing cards, and wishing for a brush with the Indians. Some said that Joseph was a fugitive from justice, and that he wouldn't fraternize with them for fear of betraying himself when interrogated. Others thought he felt too proud to mix with society, and between the two theories he had nearly all the men thinking ill of him before the wagon train was four days travel from Cheyenne.

"He keeps his brother hidden away in the wagon as if a little sunshine would kill the boy," growled one of a dozen gold hunters sitting around their camp fire in the twilight.

"Perhaps he thinks our language isn't high-toned enough—blast his eyes!" exclaimed another.

"Ain't we all bound to to the same place, all sharing the same dangers, one as good as another?" demanded a broad-shouldered fellow from San Antonio.

"Yes! yes!" they shouted.

"Then don't it look low-down mean for this 'ere man Joseph to edge away from us as if we were pizen! If he's so mighty refined and high-toned why didn't he come out here in a balloon?"

There was a laugh from the circle and the Texan went on,

"I don't purtend to be an angel, but I know manners as well as the next. I believe that man Joseph is a regular starch, ready to wilt down as soon as I pint my finger at him, and I'm goin' over to his wagon and pull his nose!"

"That's the game, Jack! Go in, old fellow! Rah for the man from Texas!" yelled the gold hunters as they sprang to their feet.

"Come right along and see the fun!" continued the Texan, as he led the way to Joseph's wagon.

The vehicle formed one in the circle and at a small fire a few feet from the hind wheels sat Joseph and his brother, eating their frugal supper. As the crowd came near, the boy sprang up and climbed into the covered wagon, while Joseph rose up and looked at them anxiously and inquiringly.

"See here, Mr. Joseph, what's your other name?" began the Texan, as he halted before the lone man. "We have come to the conclusion that you and that booby brother of yours don't like our style. Are we kerect?"

"I have nothing against any of you," quietly replied Joseph. "The journey thus far has been very pleasant and agreeable to us."

"But you hang off—you don't speak to us," persisted Jack.

"I am sorry if I have incurred any man's displeasure, I feel friendly towards you all."

"Oh, you do, eh?" sneered the Texan, feeling that he was losing ground. "Well, it's my opinion you're a sneak."

Joseph's face turned white, and the man saw a dangerous gleam in his eyes. He seemed about to speak or make some movement, when a soft voice from the wagon called out:

"Joseph, Joseph!"

A soft light came into the man's face. The Texan noticed it, and slapping Joseph's face, he blurted out:

"If ye ain't a coward, ye'll resent that, sure!"

A boyish figure sprang from the wagon and stood beside the lone man. A small hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice whispered in his ear:

"Bear it for my sake."

There was a full minute, in which no one moved. Joseph's face looked ghostly white in the gloom, and they could see him tremble.

"He is a coward, just as I thought," said the Texan as he turned away. The others followed him, some feeling ashamed, and others surprised or gratified, and by and by the word reached every wagon that Joseph and Joseph's brother were cowards.

Next morning, when the wagon train was ready to move, the captain passed near Joseph's wagon on purpose to say:

"If there are any cowards in this train, needn't travel with us any further."

It was a cruel thrust. Joseph was harnessing his horses, and his brother was stowing away the cooking utensils. The strange man's face grew white again, and his hand went down for the revolver, but just then a voice called out:

"Don't mind it, Joseph, we'll go on alone!"

The train moved off without them; some of the gold hunters taunting and joking, and others fearful that the two would be butchered by the Indians before the day was over. When the white topped wagons got so far away that they seemed no larger than his hand, Joseph moved along up the trail, his face stern and so busy with his thoughts that he did not hear the consoling words:

"Never mind, Joseph, we are trying to do right."

That night when the wagon train of the gold hunters went into camp, they could not see the lone wagon, though many of the men ashamed of their conduct, looked long and earnestly for it. They had seen Indians afar off, and knew that the red devils would pounce down upon a single team as they sighted it.

Darkness came, midnight came, and the sentinels heard nothing but the stamping of the horses, and the howls of coyotes. At two o'clock the reports of rifles and the fierce yell of Indians, floated up through the little valley, and the camp was roused in a moment.

"The devils have jumped in on Joseph and his brother," whispered one of the men, as he stood on a knoll and bent his head to listen.

"Good 'nuff! Cowards have no business out here," growled the Texan.

The first speaker wheeled, struck the ruffian a sledge hammer blow in the face and then running for the horses cried:

"Come on! come on! A dozen of us can be spared for the rescue."

Sixteen men swept down the valley like the wind. The firing and yelling continued, showing that the man who had been called coward was making a heroic fight. In ten minutes they came down upon the lone camp, made light as day by the burning wagon. Fifty feet from the bon-fire and hemmed in by a circle of dancing, leaping, howling savages, was Joseph's dead body. The gold hunters heard the pop—pop—pop of the boys revolver as they burst into view, and the next moment they were charging down upon the demons, using rifle and revolver with terrible effect. In two minutes not a living Indian was in sight. Joseph's brother stood over the dead body, turning him over with his hand. The men cheered wildly as they looked around, but the boy looked up in their faces without exultation, surprise or gladness.

"Is Joseph badly hurt?" asked one of the men, as he halted his horse beside the boy.

"He is dead?" whispered the white faced defender.

"Is he? God forgive me for the part I took last night!"

"You called him a coward!" cried Joseph's brother, "and you are to blame for this! Was he a coward? Look here! and there! and there! We drove them back from the wagon—drove them off out here! Joseph is dead! You are his murderers!"

Every man was near enough to hear his voice and to note his action, as he picked up the rifle of an Indian and sent a bullet through his own head. With exclamations of grief and alarm trembling on their lips, the men sprang from their saddles. The boy was dead—dead as Joseph—and both corpses were bleeding from a dozen wounds.

"We'll carry them up to the train and have a burial in the morning," said one of the men; and the bodies were taken up behind two of the horsemen. They did have a funeral, and the men looked into the grave with tears in their eyes, for they had discovered that Joseph's brother was a woman—yes, a woman with the whitest throat and the softest hands. It might have been Joseph's wife, or sister, or a sweetheart. No one could tell that; but they could tell how they had wronged her, and they said, as they stood around the grave: "We hope the Lord won't lay it up against us."

The Blonde Broncho

"Did you ever see them buckskin bronchos of mine that I used to drive, named Yeller and Yallar?" asked Buck Brammel, the other day of Gen. Worth, as he looked across the green billowy divide toward the eternal whiteness of the snowy range.

"Why, no, never heard of 'em."

"Well," said Buck, as a tender light came into his blue eyes, and three cornered nugget of tin tobacco was stowed away in his cheek, "both of them same cayuse plugs could scout over more mountain road between sun and sun than anything in the line of hoss I ever see. Yeller was pretty midlin' rapid, but Yallar was an imported terror. You ought to see him gather up his limbs in a wad and vanish. One day I was on board of Yallar trying to round up an American cow that had strayed away from the corral, and over West of the divide I waked up a long-legged antelope.

"I made a little shassay over toward the antelope to see him light out, but he first pranced along kind of careless like, as much as to say, I guess I wont give you no 2:13 gait this morning; life is too brief. I can't run that way just to amaze every snoozer that comes this way on a blonde plug like that."

"I touched upon Yallar with the quirt, and sailed over toward the antelope, thinking I'd stir him up a little."

The antelope trotted along a few rods and then looked back over his shoulder and smiled a sardonic smile that made Yallar as mad as a wet hen. Then he got up and got. Jewhillicans, how he paved the gravel! Occasionally the antelope would look around and snort and jump stiff legged and laugh. Then old Yallar would consume some more space.

The antelope would turn himself loose and for awhile all I could see was a little cloud of dust and the white spot that is always behind this interesting little animal.

After awhile, however, I could see that the white patch got bigger. Yallar was gainin'. I jabbed the Mexican spurs into him to encourage him. In less than an hour I was alongside of him. His tongue hung out so that he stepped on it every little while.

He didn't laugh any more. It was a terrible reality. He seemed to think that we had imposed on him somehow. Every little while he'd look at old Yallar kind of reproachful, as if we'd taken advantage of him.

By and by I reached over and took him by the ears and laid him across the saddle ahead of me and took him home. I kept him for years, but he never rallied.

He seemed to lose all hope, and would walk around the corral like a billy goat that had been betrayed sometime. Life for him seemed to be nothing but a wide shoreless waste of bitter disappointment and regret.

I tell you General, it takes hope, and joy and pride all out of an antelope to be scooped by a $15 buckskin broncho.

"Yes," said the General, "I should think it would. If I was a broken legged antelope with a foot done in a gum overshoe, and couldn't out run any buckskin hoss I ever saw, I'd go away to some lonely spot and stick my head into a prairie dog's hole and die of remorse."

Strive to Excel—A Moral Story.

Many years ago, when the State of New York was in a wild and unsettled condition, and infested by the wolf, the bear and the army worm, there lived on the banks of the Hudson a little boy with soft blue eyes and a sore toe. He early learned that what was worth doing at all was worth doing well, and so, whatever he did, he did the best he knew how. No matter whether he was called upon to hoe the waving corn, or to put a split stick on a dog's tail, little William always did his level best. Thus he grew to manhood, always striving toward perfection in everything. When he was sent out into the world, he cast about in his mind to know what he should do for a livelihood. It soon occurred to him that robbing the mountain stage of Wyoming and Colorado would be a middling remunerative calling, and as it required no special outlay of capital, he adopted it as his profession. Though at times unfortunate, he was always careful. When he robbed a stage coach containing only one passenger, and he was an editor, with nothing in his pocket but a buckskin string and a pass, he never murmured or complained. He would ask the editor, in that merry, frolicksome way of his, to give him a puff, and then he would let him go. Years went slowly by, the Summer succeeding the balmy Spring, and Autumn following on the heels of Summer, according to a time-honored custom, when one day William stopped a down coach from the mines, and in the mellow moonlight jabbed his revolver into the window, coupled with a request for seads. There seemed to be a reluctance on the part of the passengers to contribute any wealth, but they lavished about a bushel of buckshot on William and his gang. It seems that they didn't have any money, but such as they had they cheerfully turned over to the outlaws. When the smoke had cleared away, William was found with some buckshot under his shoulder blade, and his nose shot off. All his men were extremely deceased. Then they took William to a hospital, and tenderly watched over him till he got well. After that these good Samaritans clubbed together and hung him. But it was a grand success. William was hung with more *eclat* than any one else had ever been. People who witnessed the exercise said that they never knew a man to straighten out a rope with more unstudied grace and earnest zeal than William did. He seemed to throw the whole vim and concentrated energy of a lifetime into this emphatic gesture. As he hung there limp and exhausted at the end of the rope, the chairman of the vigilance committee, said, while he took a cigar from William's vest pocket, and lit it, that he had never known a man to jump into the bosom of the great uncertain with more *chic*, or with more sprightly grace and precision, than William did. This should teach us the importance of doing everything thoroughly and well. Whatever we undertake, aim to do it better than any one else. It is better to be hung, and know that we have brought out all there was in the part, and to know that we expiated our crimes in a way calculated to win the respect of all, than ever to run for the Senate and get scooped.—[*Bill Nye.*

Brother Gardner on Amusements.

"Several letters have come to me doorin' de pas' week axin' me to define my posishun on dis queshun of Amusements," said the old man as the lamps were turned up. "Ebery once in awhile dar am a yell fur reform, an' sartin men an' women weep an' wail ober de gineral wickedness of de world. De church pitches into de theatre, de prayer-meetin' whacks away at dancin' an' de Sunday school teachers tells de little boys dat de circus am nex' doah to perdishun. It has been my opinyun for de las' fifty y'ars dat dis was a wicked world. It was created fur a wicked world. De Lawd wanted it dat way, and he made it to please hisself. The Scriptures state dat wickedness shall abound in ebery co'ner of de land; dat men shall murder an' rob an women go astray; dat chil'en shall deny deir parents, an' brudder turn agin brudder. All such tings am predicted an' to be 'spected an' looked fur, an' nobody has any grounds to howl an' weep. If dis war a good world we should have no need of preachers, deacons an' Sunday school teachers. Preachers will tell you dat de Lawd am imperfect, an' dat de Lawd made him go astray, an' yet dey will turn aroun' an' wonder dat he am not goodness biled down. Deed, gem'lem, but de only better world dan dis am heaben itself. You have got to hunt fur wickedness to fin' it. You have got to prejudge de case if you can make wickedness out ob de jokes ob a circus clown or de plot of de ordinary drama. If I had to praise God by findin' fault wid de world He made, an' de people he put yere, I'm afraid it would be faint praise. De preacher who can't go to de theatre widout feelin' wicked had better stay away. If he wasn't on de hunt to fin' wickedness he wouldn't see it any moa dan de rest of us. Me an' de ole woman can go out an' dance Virginny reel fur fo' hours, and come home wid cl'ar consciences fur family prayers. We kin sot down to keerds an' not forgit to be honest an' charitable and forgivin'. We can go to a circus an' come home an' fank God dat our lives hab ben spared ano her day, an' dat we am still left to comfort de sick an' forgive de errin'. If gwine to sich places makes a preacher feel dat Satan has got a mort gage on him, den he'd better stay home. No man airnest in de good cause wants to fight agin human natur'. Man am a social bein'. He likes to be pleased and amoused. Make a tombstone of him an' he'll soon hate hisself. When I see a man dat claims to be too good to watch a circus proseshun pass long the street, I neber work for him widout de cash in advance. When I fin' a man who am down on amoosments, I doan't work fur him a'tall. A y'ar ago, when me an' de ole woman was joggin' ober to de circus, we met a man who said we war gwine straight to Texas. He said he would rader see his son in his coffin dan in a circus, an' he scart de ole lady most to death. I kep track ob dat tombstone, an' in less dan six months he left town widout payin' his gass bill, water tax, butcher or grocer, an' he am no exceptshun in his class. Look out for solumfaced men. Bewar' ob men who weep ober de wickedness ob a world made so by Lawd fur reasons of His own. Have no truck wid men who neber laff. A man widout faults am a man widout reason. A man widout wickedness am a man widout argyment.—[*Detroit Free Press.*

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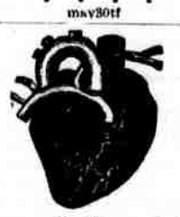

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