

The Broken Butterfly.

By James Noel Johnson.

Old Ben Madden was one of the richest men on Bowie creek. He had not always been wealthy however. Twenty years ago he was quite poor. He was a big, fine-looking young mountaineer then always rode a good horse, and in spite of his poverty he was considered a great catch even among the well-to-do girls. He was sober, industrious and thrifty.

One day he stopped at the house of old George Latimer to look at a yoke of steers the latter wished to sell. When he entered the door he was greeted by a young girl of about 16 who stood in the middle of the room and blushing softly bade him take a seat.

Pap is not in jest now, said the young girl but he'll come soon he's out to the new ground field "fixin'" some gaps in the fence.

Ben didn't care whether the old man came or not. The beauty of the young girl astonished him so that his mission was forgotten. It was strange he had never before known old George had a pretty daughter. He lived within three miles of him. In passing he had often seen a beautiful child sitting on the fence or playing in the yard. But that was only a few days ago, seemingly. Now here was the bud in full, luscious, odoriferous blossom!

He was always before instantly ready to start conversations with girls, whether acquainted with them or not, when chance threw them in his way. But now for the first time, he felt a flush of embarrassment. The girl sat down and occasionally timidly glanced at him, but ducked her head like a bird when her eyes met his.

It was a case of love at first sight. The young people had few words to exchange. Their hearts were too busy with the first delicious sensation of love.

Time went on and Ben became a weekly visitor at old George's log house.

One day the lovers were sitting on a rude bench out in the orchard. Birds sang love songs up among the waving foliage. Bees hummed in the clover, and butterflies dappled in the air with many fast changing hues. Soft breezes wheeled softly about them, half swooning with delicious odors. Like a rose overborne with dew, the head of the young girl rested on a leaning shoulder. A small hand like a little brown bird nestled in a big strong palm. All the joys known before all the blisses the future promised, seemed to gather and commingle in that sweet hour. The couple were speechless, awed into silence by what they heard felt and saw.

Ere long a golden butterfly, on wabbling wing, zigzagged to their harbor. It flashed about their heads for a second or two then hesitatingly rested on the twined hands of the lovers. Not knowing what he did Ben let fall his free hand and crushed the butterfly. Its frail wings fell in Flora's lap.

Oh poor thing! she exclaimed, looking at Ben with eyes of soft rebuke.

I didn't aim to do that said Ben remorsefully.

The next day Ben Madden received an order from a Cincinnati factory for a half million staves. The price offered convinced him instantly that could he raise the requisite capital, to begin filling the order, a small fortune awaited him in a few months. The money making spirit seized him and drove love into the rear. He rode here and there and there trying to borrow the money but failed.

But he wouldn't let that fortune go by after knocking so loudly at his door. The widow of the late John Armstrong had \$2,000. He instantly wooed and won and wedded the widow. Flora while yet a young girl, closed her empty heart against love forever. In the hot blighting heat of everyday life her dawn dream melted away. Handsome young men came wooing, but she laughed at their pleadings and sent them away.

Here is my heart my love she said one day to a young man who was

tearful in his pleadings and she showed him the wings of the dead butterfly.

At last Albert Osborne, a bachelor thought to be wealthy came to woo. Certainly I'll marry you said Flora almost before the question was finished.

I had feared you didn't love me said the happy man seizing her cool hand.

Did I say I loved you? she asked with a queer smile.

They married. After the birth of a daughter Osborne died, and then the widow learned that the estate of her late husband was in such a wreck that only a bitful sum could be rescued. Her father soon died and left her the old home place where she lived alone with her little daughter there after. The child grew and as she neared the time of womanhood she turned into the exact image of her mother at her age.

Ben Madden had long been a rich old widower. Passing the house of his erstwhile sweetheart one day he was startled at beholding a girl in the yard that was the living picture of one he had loved just 20 years before. The sight of her stirred the damp ashes in his old greedy heart and lo! Some living coals were found.

The old man thought of a mortgage he held on the widow's farm, and he fairly hugged himself with joy.

The next day he called on the Widow Osborne.

Flora he said as he seated himself and pushed back a layer of sweaty iron-gray hair from his forehead, I passed here yesterday and saw what looked like little Flora of 20 years I had to give you up on account of poverty twas better for both we afterwards learned and now that I'm rich I think I'll experiment with love again. I felt my old heart leap again as it did when I first saw you I thought it dead twas only sleeping. Now you are getting up in years and are poor and I've come to tell you that if you will give me your daughter in marriage your now lean board shall creak with plenteude the balance of your days. I'll take away the mortgage and put a new house in its place. The old lady shall have fair adornments so that all the old widowers from afar will hear to her and hasten to place their vows and kneel at her feet eh? Flora? He-he-he!

The widow's face caught flame but he took it for the rose-hue of joy. At first she was tempted to order him from the house but prudence engendered by thought of the mortgage he held restrained her righteous impulse.

You should be ashamed! she cried almost choking with anger and humiliation.

I see nothing to be ashamed of in the offer of a rich man to divide all with the needy.

Ben strangely spoke the widow after a long pause, let me show you something. And she went into the room and returned to the porch and showed below Ben's eyes the wings of a dead butterfly.

The old fellow at first smiled in a silly way then he understood and his face turned pale.

Now come out and walk with me to the rear of the house.

The old fellow wonderingly followed. Look she said what do you see sitting on that bench yonder?

Ben's eyes almost started from his head. On a bench on the same spot at the same season where he and another had sat just 20 years ago he beheld a tall handsome young fellow and beside him a beautiful girl. In their love's sweet dream they were blissfully unconscious of the hard practical world that beat on the highways near them. Soft breezes flowed about their bowed happy heads drenching them with nectarine odors. Birds above flashed in the sweet lush foliage and chatted about love. Butterflies befreckled the air with swift changes. One great fan-winged butterfly wobbled zigzagged about them for a moment then slowly dropped and rested on the warm clasped hands of the dreaming pair. It was not killed.

Ben said the woman, softly, would you be cruel enough to crush that

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little paradise yonder? Behold my daughter behold your son!

The old fellow turned to the widow. He tried to laugh but tears broke through his forced expression.

Not for anything, Flora, would I interrupt that scene, I never knew before my son was coming here. I've kept my eye to much on the dollar to notice such things. Thank the Lord he's got no poverty as I had to destroy at the beginning all that's best and sweetest in life.

He looked down at Flora and was startled at the expression on her face. A young face seemed to push through 20 years and shine beautiful again.

Flora he spoke taking her hand, we are not so old yet. Come I see another bench out yonder under another apple tree.

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