THE LEGEND OF LOVERS OAK

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As is often the case with a romantic spot, there is a legend connected with this tree that would be interesting if told in print - a legend that for many, many years was never told save under the shade of the tree, where the listener was solemnly pledged not to repeat the story lest he bring the audience with him to the tree and exact the same pledge in return.

The story was perpetuated from generation to generation among the young people. I tell it today, as near as I can remember it was told me once by a beautiful dark-eyed girl, who perched beside me one lovely afternoon of a June day long since gone, and she lent the music of charming voice to help impress on memory one of the beautiful tales for which this country is famous.

She told me of how, years ago, when the white man was unknown, and this fine land was the haunt of the deer and the habitation of only the Native Americans. There lived in Middle Georgia a tribe that were celebrated for brave warriors, and whose chief was the father of a beautiful daughter.

The bell of the forest was sought far and wide by the braves, who were all captivated by her charms. One of them was the favored of the old chief, who, probably, very much as fathers in this day and generation, looked at such things with a business eye.

However, the girl, womanlike, chose to follow her own heart and fell in love with a slender youth who cared more for the camp than he did for the chase, and would rather chase the nimble deer than engage in bloody fight. This put him in disfavor with the braves, and when the old chieftain discovered that his favorite child had twined her young heart around this youth he naturally grew wroth and banished the young upstart from the camp.

But a maiden’s heart, is but a maiden’s heart. So as was ever the way since the world was made. The young people managed to meet quite often just outside the camp, notwithstanding watchful eyes, and they pledged eternal love, as young folks do sometimes even now, but they probably were more sincere. The wary old chief became uneasy, and when, that fall, with a chosen band of warriors with their wives he set off to the sea coast to obtain a winter supply of salt, which they did by boiling sea water. The young daughter of the chief was forced to go with the party. But woman’s wit is always keen and she gave her lover to understand he was to follow, always keeping on the side next to the setting sun, and at evening when the party pitched their camp for the night, she would steal away for a walk and would always meet her lover coming from that direction.

Thus they journeyed day by day, until one evening they reached the coast just as the glorious autumn’s sun was tinging with gold the tops of the great live oaks, and lingered before saying goodnight.

The camp was pitched on what we now call the south side of Brunswick, and, as usual, “Minnie Wassie”, for this was her name, slipped away for her evening stroll.
A few moments after she turned her face toward the setting sun. She saw, standing under this tree, “Netowah”, the idol of her heart. He pressed her to his bosom, and when the lingering good-bye was said it was with the understanding that the “oak” should be the daily trysting place until the camp should move. There they met in the Autumn twilight regularly, until one day Minnie Wassie acted rather coldly and the impetuous lover, stung by her manner, upbraided her with being untrue, and they parted in a miff. The next day, Netowah, still feeling sore and miserable, ventured near the camp to catch a glimpse of his dear one.

There he saw what kindled the fiercest flame of passion and jealous rage. Minnie Wassie was sitting on a fallen tree, and his bated rival was stretched lazily at her feet.

Netowah did not pause to look again. He did not know that the old chief had a hand in the scene he had just witnessed, and that Minnie Wassie while talking to the hated rival was at that moment thinking of him and longing for the evening shadows to lengthen, that she might steal back to his bosom and tell how sorry she had been; that she was penitent for the misery that both had suffered.

She thought of none of the things, but crept back to nurse his jealous rage and conjure up bitter, bitter thoughts of her who had promised to be his bride. That evening Minnie Wassie came earlier than usual. A sorry smile wreathed her face when her glance fell on the frowning countenance of her lover—she was ready to make up and be happy.

But he, foolish boy, would not see the devotion that beamed from those dark and liquid eyes.

His first words were harsh and upbraiding. They cut and stung her very soul, and the warm words were checked and frozen by womanly pride. She spoke coldly and turned to go.

For a second Netowah stood with a scowl—in that second he lived an age. In blind, sheer madness she saw the bright blossoms of hope that had filled his heart, all wither and die in an instant. She who had been so dear and whose life was now part and parcel of his very being, was going—going to be the bride of another—to leave him an outcast. He was foolish to have such thoughts and be so unreasoning.

It would be hard to tell; we can only imagine what Netowah thought, but this we know, before Minnie Wassie was clear of the shade of the tree his mind was made up. With a sudden bound he was at her side; he fiercely grasped her shoulder with his left hand and faced her round to the setting sun. In his right hand gleamed a long, keen hunting knife that glittered as a dying sunbeam struggled through the trees and for an instant kissed the brow of the beautiful girl, who never realized what was meant.

The blow came too swift and sudden—the blade pierced through her heart, and she sank without a moan at his feet.

For an instant he stood, perhaps his heart still in a rage; perhaps in a second he had realized the awful crime and was crazed with grief. But we know he raised the dripping blade and plunged it into his own miserable heart and fell.

A child discovered them and carried the news to the camp. The old chief came out and found those two lovers side by side, cold in death.
They dug a grave, buried them right under the tree, and from that day until now it has been known as “Lovers Oak”.

The story was first told to the child of an early settler by an old Indian woman, who was the little maiden that witnessed the tragedy.

***. content is exact transcription except for potential offensive language editing