

A COMPROMISE.

QUOTH HE:

O gentle Alice, tell me true,
When shall I find the quill
That's fit to write my love to you
With tender, fluent skill?

This stump won't do; profane with scrawls
On legers, bills, and cheques,
Whose many a strain too oft recalls
My dire financial wrecks.

A feather plucked from cherub-wings,
The liquid sunlight warm,
A table of rare pearls—these things
Methinks are fitter form!

QUOTH SHE:

Oh, never mind the pen: you see
It doesn't count, my dear:
Just write that you will marry me,
And put it strong and clear.

I like best indelible ink,
That naught of earth erases;
The others are no good, I think,
In breach-of-promise cases!

ELEANOR.

I was working in the mill that first day Miss Meredith passed through it—I, a lad of sixteen, in her father's employ; she, the wealthiest heiress in our State. Yet she stopped when she came to that part of the machinery I was directing, and watched me eagerly. I had seen the men turn, one by one, from their work in respectful admiration of her beauty. It was little wonder my fingers grew clumsy under her gaze. I had a taste for mechanism, a fatal inheritance, some called, from my father, whom we had found dead, one bright summer morning, bending over an unfinished model. But, young as I was, Mr Crane, our superintendent, had confidence in me, therefore he assigned me the work Miss Meredith had honoured me by pausing to watch. He was by her side now. Rumour said he was wooing the young heiress; but as regards that, we mill hands had little opportunity for judging; only, in the one brief glance I dared take of the pure lovely face smiling so brightly down upon us, I doubted whether he or any other man were worthy.

"Is not this work very difficult?" she questioned. "I should think a boy could hardly manage it."

"It requires more skill than any other," Mr. Crane answered. "But I have great faith in George, although one false turn would throw all the machinery out of order." Then he added something in a low tone which I could not hear. But before Miss Meredith left the mill she again approached me. "Come and see me this evening, George. I want particularly to speak with you."

I bowed assent, doubtless in an awkward way; but all the rest of the long summer day I moved as in a dream.

Eight o'clock found me promptly seeking admittance at the door of Miss Meredith's beautiful home. The footman looked at me enquiringly when I murmured the name of his mistress; but at that instant she came forward from one of the great rooms and welcomed me kindly. Her graciousness, the luxury everywhere surrounding me, the subtle atmosphere of fragrance served to intoxicate me as I followed her, catching sight with dismay, of my ungainly figure reflected in the numberless mirrors. But when she paused, we stood alone in a large room more plainly furnished than those we had passed through, but whose walls from floor to ceiling were lined with books.

"George," she began, and I fancied a slight embarrassment in her manner, "Mr. Crane has interested me so much in you, that I think it a pity you should not have other advantages than those you possess. I sent for you to say that you may have free access to our library, if you think it will be of service to you."

I could at that moment have fallen at her feet. The books for which I had hungered were to be mine at last. In her white dress, with no colour save the knot of violets in her breast, matching in hue her eyes, she seemed to my boyish fancy an angel opening the gates of heaven that I might enter in.

The next year flew swiftly by. Sometimes the sun, peeping in at my window, would find me bending over the book I had so eagerly opened the night before, and I would throw myself, dressed, on my bed to snatch an hour's sleep, to prepare me for the manual labour of the day. I grew pale and thin, but for that I cared nothing, until one morning, when it came time to rise, I found my body powerless to obey my will, and sank back on my pillows into unconsciousness.

For weeks I lay tossing in delirium and fever. A memory haunted me when once more I awakened to the realities of life, of a tender touch, and a face enshrined on my heart. Could it be Miss Meredith had been to see me?

With garrulous eagerness my nurse told me all. How she had come, not once but many times, even in the midst of her wedding preparations, how grand the wedding was, how lovely looked the bride, and how, as Mrs. Crane, she had left for me her good-bye, since they were to cross the seas, and might not be back for many a year.

"Married and gone!"

Like a knell the words fell on my ear as I silently turned my head away, and the bitter

tears rolled one by one down my cheek. Ah how little I was in her life, who had helped fill mine with such gladness! Yet she had not forgotten me. The house was in the care of servants (her father having joined them), but the library was left open to me, with the privilege of spending there as many hours as I would.

Ten years passed on. I held Mr. Crane's old position now, I had won it through a discovery I had made of great value to the owners, and which (like all else that I was, or might be) I owed to Miss Meredith. I could not think of her as Mrs. Crane, not even when I learned they were coming home again with the little girl, born the first year of their marriage in Florence, but without the father who had so worshipped her, whose body lay in a foreign grave; not even when going up after she arrived to offer my respectful welcomes she came forward, holding by the hand a little girl, whose sunny hair fell to her waist.

My eyes glanced from the mother to the child. Was it in that moment I transferred my heart's homage? I know not. I only know that for the little creature I would willingly have laid down my life.

"We are so proud of you, George," Mrs. Crane said kindly.

But something in my throat choked my answer. I could only turn awkwardly away.

The mill grew and prospered in the years which rushed so swiftly by. I would have gone into the world to seek wider scope for my ambition but for something tugging at my heart which kept me chained. I was an honoured guest now at the old home. The poor, friendless boy no longer sought admittance to the library, but with consummate tact was made to feel himself a friend.

But how had I repaid the kindness offered? How recompensed my debt of gratitude? I had drifted idly down the current to the music of birds, 'mid the fragrance of flowers, until suddenly, like the roar of an avalanche at my very feet, though unheard, this truth forced itself upon me. I loved Eleanor Crane. She was as yet but a child on the boundary line between girlhood and womanhood, the age when first I had raised my eyes to look upon her mother's face. Yet I had loved her from that first moment she had stood, a child of eight, clinging to her mother's hand, regarding the stranger with wondering eyes.

"Eleanor will marry ere many years, and leave me. Oh, George, if I could but keep her always!"

This was the confidence uttered one day as we sat alone. This woman, to whom I owed all, everything, should I rob her of her one treasure? Someday, perhaps some man great and noble might sue and be thought worthy, but for me—I turned away with a groan I could not repress.

"Are you ill?" asked Mrs. Crane. "You have grown so white."

"Yes," I answered. "It is nothing I will soon recover. I—I will go home and lie down."

Lie down! Through the long night I paced up and down my floor; but with the morning the battle had been fought, the victory gained, my resolution formed. I would go away. I knew now what had kept my ambition dormant for so long. There was a questioning look in Mrs. Crane's eyes, a half pleading glance in Eleanor's when I went to make my hasty good byes, but I dared not seek to interpret them, and so went out into the world.

I was thirty-five when I mastered the problem which all these years had mastered me. Thirty-five when I knew my name was famous, and the discovery I had made had made my fortune. For three years I had devoted to it every moment of my lonely existence, and the end was gained at last. But what availed it? It could not fill the emptiness of my life or that life's needs. Some part of my great discovery, they wrote me, they wanted applied to the mills. Would I spare them a few days to give it my personal supervision? It was a summons, gratitude and honour compelled me to obey, so I told myself, with a sudden glad rush of my blood through every vein. I should see her; should learn if, as yet, any had gained the prize.

She welcomed me with a new, strange shyness, but my resolution had made me calm to coldness. No, she was yet heart free, her mother told me. What had I hoped that at her words a great weight rose from my heart? The improvements had been made. The next day I was to return to my work, when it was proposed we should go in a party through the mill to witness its working. Standing by Eleanor's side, we involuntarily paused before the one quiet worker who filled my place when years before her mother had paused and made the turning point in my life. All rushed over me with lightning speed, when as Eleanor bent closer to examine the intricate machinery, turning carelessly to me to ask some questions, a scream burst from my darling's pale lips, the light drapery she wore fluttered in the awful wheel, which in another moment would have caught and crushed her fragile form.

No time for thought, no hope of rescue if an instant's delay. How it happened no words could paint; but ere another thirty seconds had gone by, Eleanor stood pale and

trembling safe, while my right arm hung helpless by my side. "Oh, George, George, I have killed you!" I heard her say, in a tone which even in that moment thrilled me, but as I strove to answer, the agony sickened me, all grew dark, and in my strength and manhood I fell forward at her feet.

A choking sob somewhere near me was the sound I heard, as opening my eyes, I found I had been borne back to Mrs. Crane's house, and caught a glimpse of a girl's retreating figure. Mrs. Crane was sitting by my bedside, while my right arm was already bandaged. When I was strong they told me the truth. It must be amputated. I made no murmur. So would I have lain down my life. But now never must I speak my love. No gratitude must influence Eleanor's, at pity's call. But, oh, how barren stretched my life before me, as, the operation over, I lay one morning alone in my room, knowing how strong had been the unacknowledged hope, now crushed forever. Every ambition must die without that right arm's help. Yet it was best so.

"Are you awake?" a soft voice questioned. And I raised my eye to find Eleanor had stolen to my bedside. "Awake, and would not call us? Rebellious boy! Will you never learn to obey? Then—oh, did my eyes betray my hunger love, which could not speak—one little hand came creeping into mine. A great sob rose in my darling's throat, as, in a choking voice, she whispered, "George, why will you be sad? You will never go away from us, again, never. I will be your right hand, dear George," this in low, solemn tones. "I should rather you had let me die than again to leave us. Tell me, do you hate me, that even now you turn from me? What have I done. What have I done?"

As yet my misery had wrung from me no tears; but now they blot from my vision the sweet look of shame on my darling's face. With a mighty effort I conquered myself and the hope it is torture to crush.

"Hush, dear!" I said at last. "Do not be so pitiful. I could not stay, Eleanor. You must not ask it!"

"Not with me?" she questioned. And looking into her azure eyes I read her secret even as she had read mine.

"It is not pity, darling? You are sure, sure? I could not quite bear that, though I would be strong for anything else. And if I stay, Eleanor, you will be my—"

I pause, but lower and lower sinks the bright sunny head until it rests upon my heart. In my helpless weakness I am not strong enough to refuse the precious gift she yields as a free will offering, and so—I win my wife.

A Story of a Shipwreck.

"It was in 1879," said Mr. Hunks, "a party of six of us was shipwrecked in the Pacific, and after drifting about in an open boat until all our provisions were exhausted we at last landed upon a rock. Our sufferings from hunger in a short time became so unendurable that we finally resolved that one of our number would have to be used for food to keep the rest alive."

"We drew lots, and it fell to me to become the victim. I didn't care very much, because I was so desperate; but my companions were dreadfully sorry, and in order to show how kindly the felt toward me they left it to me to decide how I should be cooked. It was generous of them and it touched me."

"I rather had a preference for being used as soup stock, but Barnes said that as the water was salt, and as they had no potatoes and onions to stew up with me, it struck him that some other form of preparation would be better if it would suit me."

"And I said that I had always had an idea that I would work up into a very nice mince, because I would be more apt to be nutritious when done through and through and with the gristle left out."

"But Barnes said they were almost too weak to cut me up fine enough. He said a good comfortable roast, a little underdone, was always a favorite dish of his, and I expressed a willingness to be served up in that form; but Wormley urged that no roast meat, in his opinion, was fit to eat without horse-radish, and there wasn't a bit on the rock; and, besides, unless I was skewered I'd be certain to fall apart, and it wouldn't be safe to cut up those pins for skewers, for fear they might want to row away."

"Barnes said he was willing to utilise me as sausage, and he thought they might make a hearty meal to begin with, and then smoke the rest over the fire and carry it off as two weeks' rations, while they hunted for a better place to stop at. But I said that the idea of being stuffed away in skins was an unpleasant one to me. The very thought of it made me feel as if I were suffocating; and then it distressed me to think of my old friends holding me in their hands and eating me at the end as they would a banana."

"Barnes said perhaps they would remember me better that way, but he was perfectly willing to give up the plan and to try making me into hash. I said that I was afraid I was too lean for hash, but if they were willing to take the risk it made no difference to me. We took a vote upon it, and we stood three for hash and three against it. I had the

casting vote, and I gave it for hash. "When that was settled, Barnes called me aside and said that a little music might serve to make their life seem less sad, and he wanted to know if I had any objection, after I was gone, to his using one of my leg bones to make a rude kind of flute."

"I told him that the proposition had my approval, and he said that as I was long-legged man he thought he could easily get out six finger-holes and a mouth-hole on the bone, and although he only knew one tune—"Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming"—he felt that even that would soothe and comfort the survivors."

"I said it would be a good idea for Wormley to take the bone of the other leg, and by inserting a watch-glass in either end, made a sort of spy-glass out of it; but Barnes said he was afraid they would have to use it for a new handle to the hatchet; but he thought perhaps Wormley or Dickson could fit up a couple of ribs as bones with which to rattle out a chorus, and to give variety to the music."

"Accordingly I asked Dickson as a personal favor to me to accept any two ribs that he took a fancy to and to rattle them whenever he felt like it. He said he would never forget my kindness, and I really think the man felt as if he had behaved in a very gentlemanly manner towards him."

"But Wormley said he wished we could get things settled somehow, for he was getting hungry. Then I said good-bye to all but Wormley, who grumbled that he didn't want to shake my hand, but to eat it; and then Barnes lifted the axe to knock me on the head."

"He was just saying that he would make it as pleasant for me as he could, when Perkins exclaimed that he saw a sail. So we waited, and after an hour or two, a vessel came up and took us off. So I had a narrow escape; but I often used to see Barnes on the homeward voyage look wistfully at my legs, and then go off somewhere by himself, and softly whistle, 'Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming.' I am glad, though, that Wormley was disappointed. I really believe that man felt unhappy because he didn't have a chance to lunch on me."

This is Mr. Hunk's story. It is probably exactly true, excepting in those places where he lied.

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