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No Question is ever Settled until it is Settled Right.

A LITTLE POEM BY ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

However the battle is ended, though proudly the victor comes With fluttering flags and prancing nags, and echoing roll of drums, Still truth proclaims this motto in letters of living light; No question is ever settled until it is settled right.

Though the heel of the strong oppressor may grind the weak in the dust, And the voice of Fame with one acclaim, may call him great and just, Let those who applaud take warning, and keep this motto in sight; No question is ever settled until it is settled right.

Let those who have failed take courage, tho' the enemy seems to have won, Tho' his ranks are strong, if he be in the wrong, the battle is not yet done, For, sure as the morning follows the darkest hour of the night, No question is ever settled until it is settled right.

O man bowed down with labor! O woman young, yet old! O heart oppressed in the toiler's breast, and crushed by the power of gold! Keep on with your weary battle against triumphant night; No question is ever settled until it is settled right.

Story Of Bertha Begg.

Mrs. Wainwright of Springtown, Massachusetts, was sitting in the overdecorated apartment which she denominated her boudoir, reading a volume of sermons, when the door opened and her step-daughter entered the room. She looked up from her book rather angrily. Perhaps the soured expression of her face was due to ill-digested theology, perhaps to antagonism to her visitor, probably to both. "So you have been flaunting about town?" she said. "If you had any sense, I should have thought you would go and bury yourself in your bedroom, or leave the place altogether."

"That's just what I'm going to do," replied the other, coolly, as she unfurled her bonnet. "I hope you won't languish much. I have just been married to Joe Begg."

At this unexpected announcement Mrs. Wainwright gasped. Her naturally sallow complexion turned to a sickly green. She rose slowly from her chair, and the pious volume fell from her lap.

"You—"

"Stop!" interrupted the girl. "I am not going to be called bad names. I am a married woman, and you have nothing to do with me and my actions. Yes, I suppose you are pretty mad, Mrs. Wainwright, but Joseph J. Begg is my husband and to-morrow I shake the dust off my feet on this slanderous city. That's so."

But Mrs. Wainwright did not accept the unwelcome news complacently. She gave Bertha a piece of her mind, and a very prejudiced, unkind morsel it was. By the terms of her late husband's will she had the control of Bertha's fortune until her marriage. The thought that the use of this more than comfortable sum of money had slipped from her grasp was wormwood. "I congratulate you on your choice," she said at last. "I reckon you were pretty hard up, and so must have been to content himself with other people's leavings."

Bertha's face flushed, and her eyes flashed dangerously. "You know that's a wicked lie. But I was hard up. The only way to get clear of all this slander, and of you, the head of it all was to marry. Checkmate, Mrs.

Wainwright; you thought that there would not be a man to marry a compromised girl, and that you would go on lining your nest with my feathers till the end of the chapter. I have bought a husband for twenty thousand dollars, and I have been to Lawyer Bostock to see about getting in my pile, and I'm off to Europe to-morrow. I think I have won this game."

"What about your husband?" asked the elder lady after the first sensation of bewilderment and defeat had subsided.

"Oh, he goes to New York," replied Bertha, cheerfully. "He wanted us to go together, but that was not my idea, I said to him, 'Mr. Begg, I want my freedom, and am willing to pay for it. You are not very well off. You are reporter to The Springtown Herald, and your salary is \$40 a month. You must have money. You once did me the honor of professing that you would go through fire and water. I want you to go through the ceremony of marriage, which will be much less painful. Then I give you twenty thousand dollars, and you go your way and I go mine.' And he said, 'Yes, and that's how things are.'"

"If you think Joseph J. Begg is the man to let matters stand like this, you mistake," replied Mrs. Wainwright, glad to find a shaft still left. "You haven't quite won yet, Bertha Begg!"

Bertha laughed lightly, and left her step-mother to her reflections.

Mrs. Begg carried out her intentions. She came to Europe and travelled whithersoever her fancy led her, flitting from place to place like a cosmopolitan butterfly. As for her husband, she neither knew nor cared what had become of him. In fact to save a world of futile explanation she killed him outright and passed herself off as a widow. She retained her married name, however. It was not beautiful, but it had cost a deal of money and so had a certain value in her eyes.

Naturally she made many friends. A wealthy, pretty American woman, with a taste for epigram and a distinct inclination towards virtue, does not find it difficult to obtain a footing in good society. If her foot slips she is lost. But Bertha determined to stand secure. No girl should ever pretend to be absorbed in the contemplation of a cigar-shop window when she passed by, as they had done in Massachusetts. There was not a man living who was worth it. Had not one vile miscreant traduced her innocent name, and had she not bought that of another for a miserable sum of money? She had a contempt for the whole sex, a fact which made her exceedingly popular among both men and women.

For five years she led a free, happy life. And then Mr. Augustus Fremeine "dawned upon her horizon." The quotation is from her own diary, whence this sketch of her life is gathered. She said afterwards that he had risen like a miasma but then she was prejudiced. This phenomenon—an expression which does not bind us to either metaphor—was a well-known man about town, of good family, handsome, wellversed in the ways of men and better in those of women.

What his income was and how he came by it no one could rightly tell, he himself never took the trouble to enlighten his friends on the subject. However, he was well received everywhere, ate and drank of the best, and in spite of one or two strange stories that were whispered in club smoking-rooms and in young ladies' sancta sanctorum. "Just one puff of a cigarette, my dear, and do tell us what you heard old So-and-So telling your aunt about Gus Fremeine," was a universal favorite. But none of these slanderous reports had reached Bertha's ears.

When she first met him, at the beginning of the London season, she found she was strangely attracted towards him. A half-cynical, half-sentimental flirtation sprang up, and the cynicism waned and the sentiment waxed, much to Bertha's rebellious disgust, as the season advanced. Then a kind friend hinted, even so delicately but still with subtle sureness, that Gus Fremeine had an eye upon her fortune. She knew that he never could have a hand upon it, since she was a married woman, but the idea made her miserable. She met him shortly afterwards and treated him in the most distant manner. He was evidently puzzled and hurt.

"What is the matter, Bertha?" he asked, at last, "you are not yourself to-night."

"No, I'm not. I'm worried. I have lost a lot of money."

"Speculation?"

"Yes, and if I marry I shall lose everything else. That's the beauty of having had a husband."

"But you are not thinking of marrying?" he asked, in a tone of alarm.

"No, decidedly not!" she replied,

tartly. "That's a comfort. I thought for a moment I was going to lose you. But should such an awful calamity happen, to whom would your money revert?"

"Lunatic asylums, jails, hospitals. How do I know? If I had the dealing of it I should apply it to running a fire-and-brimstone apparatus for the benefit of Springtown, Massachusetts."

"What a little spitfire you are! I shouldn't like to come under the ban of your displeasure."

"No, don't," she said, laughing at her irreverent outburst. And there the conversation ended.

Fremeine stood the test very well. Whatever may have been his disappointment on learning that the young and wealthy widow would lose her fortune if she married again, he allowed no signs to appear, but devoted himself to her as much as ever. For her part, Bertha could not bring herself to understand the relations that existed between them.

She could not marry him, she certainly was not going to compromise herself for his sake, and yet the new sensation of fondness for a man was very delightful. There were rocks ahead she knew, but she did not feel, strong enough to alter her course; so, trusting to Providence to guide her safely past them, she shut her eyes and drifted deliciously down the stream.

Towards the latter part of October Bertha and Fremeine found themselves staying at a country house in Kent. There was the usual kind of party assembled, some men down for the shooting, two or three literary and artistic celebrities and a fair sprinkling of pretty women. She was courted and admired by every one and was in love with all the world, and especially with Mr. Gus Fremeine. She was no longer drifting. The current was carrying her rather fast. Suddenly she came upon what her countrymen call a "snag."

The party was assembled one evening in the drawing room awaiting the signal for dinner. The room was in cosy obscurity, always preferable in these anticlimactic minutes to brilliant illumination, and Bertha, who was sitting in a low chair by the fire shading her face with a large fan and conversing pleasantly with Fremeine did not notice the presence of a new arrival among the guests. She was only aware of it when her hostess accompanied by the stranger, was standing beside her.

"Mrs. Begg, I want to introduce you to Mr. Hoveden, a distinguished compatriot of yours."

Bertha smiled, dropped her fan and was about to acknowledge his formal bow when a sudden blaze in the fire lit up their faces. Then came the electric shock of recognition.

"Bertha!"

"You here?"

"What! you are old friends?" cried the hostess. "How very nice!"

Mrs. Begg could not reply. Her brain was on a whirl. What fatality had brought this terrible man here? But Mr. Hoveden was quite self-possessed. He smiled pleasantly and shook her nervous fingers in a friendly fashion.

"Very old friends, I assure you. I have the honor of being Mrs. Begg's cousin."

She looked up almost gratefully in his face. She had thought the end had come. This at least was a reprieve.

"We have not met for a good many years," she remarked, for the sake of saying something.

"That's true," he replied. "We'll have a lot to talk about. Old times."

"Then you must discuss them during dinner, which is just announced," said the hostess. "Come, Mr. Fremeine, you must give up Mrs. Begg to her cousin to-night and I'll find you someone to take in."

There was no help for it; husband and wife had to go arm-in-arm, and to sit next one another during the long meal. Mr. Hoveden, however, was quite at his ease. He had a clean-shaven, imperturbable face with large, blue eyes, whose innocence was only belied by certain boldly-marked wrinkles at the corners and by a slightly contemptuous curl of the lip. The faint New York drawl that was distinguishable in his speech increased his air of self-possession.

"I suppose you are having a good time," he said; "you look like it. You have not altered much since I saw you last. Do you think I have?"

"Yes, considerably," she said, glancing at his correct evening dress and fine linen.

"I'm glad you think so," he said, complacently. "You see I'm a distinguished compatriot. I guess that makes a difference."

"And how did you achieve distinction?"

"If you want to keep up this little comedy of cousinship," he said, "you had

better know something about your cousin. I am invited to join this circle on the strength of my reputation. Like our friend Snug in the tragedy, I play lion."

"Wouldn't the part of Moonshine be more like it?"

"That's clever, but it doesn't fit. Have you ever heard of Luke Hoveden?"

"Why, you don't write—?"

"Yes, that's me. Luke Hoveden, proprietor of New York Monitor and manufacturer of popular stories. I don't like bragging. It's not my forte. But now you know why I'm here."

The remainder of their conversation during dinner was not confidential. It drifted on to ordinary topics, and was shared by others who were sitting near. Mr. Hoveden talked well and humorously, and Bertha found herself listening to him with interest. She saw her husband in an entirely new light—that of a man of fame and influence. Perhaps, after all, she had done wrong in casting him aside. But had she not bought him for twenty thousand dollars? The reflection caused her a little shiver of disgust, and she looked over at Gus Fremeine, who was sitting at the other side of the table. No, in spite of her husband's brilliant position, he was not the equal of this man, a thoroughbred, gallant gentleman, the soul of honor and tenderness—and she gave him a glance expressive of her opinion.

The next day Hoveden found his wife waiting for him in the morning room. She had passed a restless night, and felt very irritable and nervous. "So, Joseph Begg, we have been fated to meet at last," she said.

"I'm glad you say 'fated,'" he answered. "You may think it queer for a New York newspaper man to talk about destiny; but I believe in it. I believed in mine five years ago. Something more than chance has brought us together now, Bertha. Is there no hope for me?"

"I don't know what you mean!" she replied, coldly.

"It won't take long to explain. Five years ago, when I was struggling with a poverty you never dreamed of, I loved you, and, though it seemed hopeless, something told me I should win you. I married you. We both of us know the conditions. For five years I have loved you, and I have worked on and bided my time. I knew it would come sooner or later, so I never sought to communicate with you. When you married me I was a poor devil, with those dear to me in want. Now I have a position and as much money as is good for a man to have, and a love that a woman will not find every day. All this is yours by right. Will you think about accepting it?"

"I don't think you had better say any more," she said, contemptuously. "I might be tempted to turn nasty. If that's what you wanted to tell me about, I reckon you had better have gone out shooting. You've missed your bird this time, Mr. Begg."

He showed no signs of discomfiture at her rebuff. In fact he looked more cheerful than before.

"You'll think better of it some day," he said. "I'll wait. There's a lot of good in patience. I have a long score to settle with you first, and then to show you that I am not the mean-spirited rogue you think me. I played a high stake, my honor and self-respect; and I take it I have not lost yet. I am simply waiting for the hand."

"To continue the metaphor, I have heard of such a thing as 'bluffing.'"

"Certainly. But you may stake your bottom dollar on four aces, and when we show hands I may have a royal flush. Stranger things have happened."

"Well, be that as it may, you haven't shown much this time. In the meanwhile when are you leaving Nosbury?"

"When the term of my visit is over; not before," he replied, with an aggravating smile. "So it seems that unless you have urgent business calling you elsewhere we may be together under this roof for about a week."

"Oh, I have not the least intention of running away from you," she said, defiantly. "Why should I, indeed?"

She was on the point of continuing her speech, taunting him for inflicting his unwelcome presence upon her, but she caught his eye, and something in his glance checked her.

She was very angry with herself. She had intended to "hound him back to America," but somehow she had not succeeded. She certainly had not anticipated the prospect of passing a whole week in his company. "Perhaps, after all, it is best," she thought, "I can show him pretty clearly that I mean to be boss."

With this praiseworthy aim in view she treated his presence in the house with supreme indifference, spoke to him with well-assumed easy familiarity before others, and continued, more openly than

she had yet done, her flirtation with Gus Fremeine. But at heart she was very uneasy, often she would be aware of her husband's bland glance fixed upon herself and her companion, and although she would toss her head defiantly, she felt a burning glow of shame and indignation rise in her cheek. If only she could rid herself of the man. She grew more wretched day by day. Fremeine was her only refuge. She loved him; she would go to the end of the world with him. To complete her bitterness, she found the man whose name she had bought was a strong, earnest character, whom she could not despise. By a strange coincidence—destiny, according to Mr. Hoveden—a letter came to her through her bankers, from her stepmother, Mrs. Wainwright, the first she had received from her old home. The old lady was very ill, confined to her room for life. She wanted to make peace with Bertha and to ask forgiveness for helping to spread the calumny that Joseph Begg, years after her departure had proved to the satisfaction of all Springtown to be false. He had sought out her traducer, whom he had first horsewhipped and then forced to confess his slanderous villainy. "There is grit in that man," added Mrs. Wainwright.

Her first impulse was to show him the letter and thank him, but she hardened her heart, and let him go away from Nosbury ignorant that she was aware of what he had done.

When she returned to London, accompanied by Fremeine, she thought that she would hear no more of her husband, but she was mistaken. He paid her a formal call, and as she had other visitors at the time, one of whom had been staying at Nosbury, she was bound to receive him with civility. He seemed to pursue her life like fate. If she went to the theatre he was in a stall some way behind her. If she went out shopping he passed her in the street. In friends' houses she met him, an honored guest. He never alluded to the hopes that he still entertained. He was always courteous and self-possessed.

All this time Mr. Augustus Fremeine was aware that he was not looked upon kindly by Mrs. Begg's cousin.

That gentleman always treated him with his usual imperturbable good humor but something in his remarks had a satirical flavor which Fremeine did not relish. If he had known that the quiet, blue-eyed American hated him and despised him, and knew every secret of his miserable soul, he would have been less at his ease. As it was, he felt that there was danger in the wind, and that it behooved him to act promptly.

It was a small off-season dance. The lovers were alone in a convenient sitting-place, and Fremeine was speaking passionately.

"I cannot live without you, Bertha. Heaven knows I would live in a hovel if you bid me, with your glad eyes to brighten it. But you will not marry me, so what else is to be done? This state of things is driving me mad. I must have you all to myself, be with you always, love you always. Say one little word, and let us both be happy."

He had often hinted at it before; the idea was not new to her. It was a terrible step to take, but, at the same time, a solution of her difficulties. Besides, she thought she loved him. He was so handsome as he pleaded.

They would go far away, he said, wherever she liked, and over the world, in sunny lands where nothing should trouble her, nothing meet her but love everywhere. The words were commonplace, the argument hackneyed, but the voice that uttered them was full of passion. A thrill of wild resolve passed through her. She rose impulsively from the sofa, where she had been sitting by his side, and holding out her hands to him, she cried:

"Yes, I will go with you, I have no one else in the world," and then, as the music struck up in the dancing-room, "Come, this is one of our waltzes! I must dance to our happiness."

When it was over they went to the supper-room. She was flushed with excitement, and her dark eyes sparkled.

"You have never been so lovely as you are to-night," he whispered.

But she did not heed him. She had caught sight of her husband, who had been talking to the host.

"Look!" she said.

"Our incubus again," said Fremeine. "Thank heaven we will be clear of him soon."

Something in his tone jarred upon her. By an inexplicable feminine impulse she went up to Hoveden and greeted him cordially. He seemed surprised and pleased, while Fremeine stood by frowning and pulling his moustache. To add to his annoyance his host took him aside to speak to him, and husband and wife were alone.

"I want to thank you for thrashing Fred Warrender in Springtown," she said.

"I am ready to thrash anybody who trifles with your good name," he said, grimly, and for a second his face looked pretty fierce. Bertha saw the rapid flash, and felt frightened.

"I also want to say good-bye," she said, timidly. "I am going abroad soon, and you will be off to New York, and we shall not be meeting again. I hope we part good friends."

"Why should we part at all, Bertha?" he said in a low voice. "You cannot be happy, living like this, alone. Come and help me lead a man's life."

"You are doing that without my help," And then, aware that she had admitted more than she intended, she said, hurriedly, "No, all that is impossible; you must not spoil your life with foolish hopes. We must each go our own way. Here is my partner coming. If you hear anything bad of me, remember old times, Good-bye, cousin."

Bertha did not dance any more. She left almost immediately. Fremeine saw her into her carriage.

"You quite understand," he whispered, as she closed the door. "The eleven o'clock train at Charnig Cross. This time to-morrow we shall be in Paris."

It was all settled. She had made up her mind. It was too late to draw back now. Besides, why should she draw back? Did she not love Gus Fremeine? Life would be a terrible blank without him. The great hotel where she was living seemed bare and comfortless; she could not pass the remainder of her days in this wretched, homeless way. She was so lonely, too, at times—glad to have her maid to bring her work and sit with her for company's sake. And the other? She would not think of him. No, she would take a little chloral and go to sleep.

In the morning her maid woke her early, and brought her a note from Fremeine. It was only a lover's note reminding her of her journey—as if she needed reminding! They were not to be seen on the platform together. His man would go early and get tickets and engage a carriage and see to her comfort. He himself would come rather late.

It was a dull, wet December morning. A thin, damp mist filled the railway station, and Bertha shivered with cold in spite of her furs. Her spirits were below zero.

As she glanced at the refreshment-room, she wished she was a man, and could go in there and have some brandy to put warmth into her heart. She envied the smart servant who came out wiping his lips, and, after looking about, hurried up to her with many apologies for keeping her waiting. He had not expected her so soon. Here was her ticket. Would she allow him to see her into the carriage he had reserved? She followed him mechanically. On the platform there was the usual bustle and confusion. Knots of friends were standing about laughing and talking. Everyone seemed to be light-hearted, so glad to get out of London fogs and away to southern sunshine.

She sat in the corner of the railway carriage and waited. Why had she come so early? People passed by and glanced in at the window. She imagined she was already an object of scorn. She looked out in search of Fremeine. He had not yet arrived. He was cutting it rather fine; only two minutes more and the train would start. Suddenly the wish flashed through her—if only he could arrive too late! Then the thought followed that she was not yet compromised, that she still would have time to get out of the train and drive back home. She stood up and began hastily to take down her light luggage from the rack. But the two minutes had elapsed. The train had begun to move. She heard a porter's voice shouting, "Engaged carriage, sir! Here it is; look sharp, sir!" The door opened, a portmanteau was thrown in; but instead of it being followed by the man she expected, Mr. Hoveden sprang into the compartment.

"That was a close shave," he remarked, as the train steamed out of the station.

Bertha stared aghast and recoiled to the further corner of the car. She could say nothing; her usual assurance failed her.

Hoveden allowed her time to recover herself, and set about arranging his things and taking some articles out of the pocket of his ulster. At last he handed her a bulky package. "I believe this is yours!" he said.

She took it and mechanically undid the string. The parcel contained her letters to Gus Fremeine.

"What does it mean—I don't understand?" she asked, bewildered.

"It means that I have rescued my wife's reputation from the hands of an infernal scamp," he repeated calmly. "Real this."

(Continued on page 4.)