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RASH PROMISES.

BY JACQUELINE.

(From the Morning Star.)

'Are you better now, Laura?' whispers a familiar voice.

She opens her eyes and meets those of Charles Hagan bending anxiously, lovingly over her. She lies on the ground, close to the river's brink, and her head, in all its disheveled loveliness, rests on his arm. For a moment she is bewildered; then, like a flash, recalls all the horror of her last waking drama—realizes the miraculous power of her merciful preservation, and crying out:

'You! you it was that saved me; oh, thank God!' burst into tears.

He left her undisturbed. The moment was to solemn words. He knew what a blessed channel of relief the resource of tears was at such a time, especially to the young. Quickly, however, she recovered her equanimity, and realizing, for the first time, her position, sprang to her feet.

'I must leave you now, Miss Laura, to save that poor man I see fast losing his strength over there.'

And before she could remonstrate against the risk to himself, he was out again, breasting the rolling tide. Soon, however, her intention was withdrawn from him, and riveted upon the scenes about her. Cries and moans issued from every side. The bank seemed covered with agonizing forms. Wives, ringing their hands, searching for missing husbands. Parents seeking their children; the living weeping over the dying or dead; tender women ministering to the wants of the wounded—all formed a scene that once witnessed, could never be forgotten. It was an experience that took Laura with a bound out of a dewy buoyancy of girlhood's era, into the serious, self-critical cycle of womanhood.

'Had't you better go on to one of the cabins, Miss, and get your clothes changed; you are looking sick and your skin is blue with the cold,' said a plain looking countryman, eyeing Laura with great interest.

'Oh, thank you; I am shivering, but I had quite forgotten myself. But where shall I go?'

'You will be obliged to walk a considerable distance; for all the nearest cabins are full of the wounded, and the clothing has about given out. But here comes an old woman, she can direct us, perhaps where to go.'

The colored woman at once offered to pilot Laura to her own cabin, where she soon had a big fire of pine knots, gave her a hot drink, and a complete suit of her Sunday's best unbleached cotton and calico.

'Oh, here she is!' exclaimed Mrs. Preston, who had been her room-mate, rushing in with Charles Hagan, dripping wet, following her.

'Oh, how glad I am, you dear, blessed little thing, to see you safe again! Only to think of you going off all by yourself, and fighting your own way through fire and water. I declare, the Maid of Saragossa and Joan of Arc, and all these fighting heroines put together, are nothing to you. As soon as I came to my senses I looked and asked everywhere for you, and all I got for my pains was—"she was drowned," said one, "I saw her in the river;" "no, she was burned," said another detestable old croaker, that I shall hate to my dying day; "I saw her banging by her skirts on the wheel-house." But here you are safe, without even a scratch.'

And the enthusiastic, impulsive woman caught Laura in her arms, and almost squeezed the breath out of her.

'But oh, I forgot my mission!' she continued. 'You must make haste; there is a boat rounding the point, and as it may be our last chance to-day, we must go on her. Oh, you needn't look so ruefully at your costume,' she said, laughing. 'We are all in fancy dress; and if the occasion was not so solemn, I really should enjoy our ridiculous appearance amazingly.'

Turning and seeing Mr. Hagan still in his wet clothes, she called: 'Here, old aunt, can't you give this gentleman a shirt and pair of pants?'

'Lors a marcy, missus, I've only got my old man's Sunday clothes, and you could put two like dat dar gemman inside dem.'

'Never mind the fit,' said Hagan; 'they'll be dry, and that is all I care about.'

The ladies started off, and were soon overtaken by Mr. Hagan, whose appearance elicited a hearty laugh, spite of their more serious feelings. These were deepened even unto tears, at the sight of the melancholy cortege that was wending its way slowly to the boat. Six dead bodies, borne on rudely constructed litters, were carried past, followed by heart-broken mourners, convulsed with grief.

Uncovering his head in reverence to this

august mystery, Charles Hagan murmured audibly: 'De profundis ad te clamavi Domine,' and placing the hand of Laura within his arm, followed in silence the melancholy band.

CHAPTER IV.—THE PROMISE BROKEN.

'Will you take a walk on the guards? The evening is lovely, and the scene will divert your mind from the depressing effects of the groans of those poor sufferers.'

Laura assented. She knew that the turning point of her life had come. Fate had been too big with events already that day for her to resist now either its culminating joy or sorrow. They walked in silence for some time—the silence of deep and solemn feelings. At length Hagan broke it:

'Do you know, Miss Laura, why I spent two months in that detestable town of G—?'

'For business, I suppose.'

'Exactly—the business of keeping near the person of one I had determined to make the guardian and comfort of my life. There is an old, old story, of love at first sight, dating from the time that Adam opened his eyes and saw the queen and rival of all the flowers of Paradise lying by his side. This old tale is ever repeating itself, and, like the fabled phoenix, is ever, ever new. I used to laugh at it, and hence I have been punished for my skepticism in this, God's best and truest gift. I went on the Swan, determined to end my wild dream one way or another. Fate or Providence settled the matter for both of us, and through a mutual affliction cemented a bond, at least, of perpetual remembrance between us.'

'And,' broke in Laura, with trembling voice, 'one of eternal gratitude for me.'

'Be it so. I want now to change or combine that sentiment with one a little warmer. Do you remember your conversation with Mr. Banks on the Erin?'

'Why again allude to that detestable subject? Will it never rest?'

'Because I am interested.'

'You! Why, how can my likes or dislikes of that nation affect you?'

'I will tell you that later. Now, I must be egotistical, to reach my point. You have known me, Miss Laura, as a stranger, without credentials, name or country. But I think you have had opportunity to know and see me as myself. With this knowledge, then; with the assurance that I can satisfy those who love you on all important points—satisfy them as to my antecedents, my present and future—with this assurance, can you, will you, love me Laura? Love me well enough to be my wife?'

He felt her tremble, but she pressed closer to him, as if in dread of losing the protection of that arm, but she had no power to speak.

'I have my answer, dear one,' he said, looking lovingly down into her face, 'and am content.'

'No! oh, no!' interrupted Laura, 'I must not deceive you. I do love you, and to be your wife would be the crowning glory of my life. But I am not free to seek my own happiness. I have duties to others—to those who have given and done all for me, made me all that I am, and now they need my help.'

'Your feelings are right; but if I can settle all that to the satisfaction of your parents, will you then, with their consent, yield to my wishes?'

'I suppose so; but I don't see how that can be, except by waiting a few years; then everything may be brighter for all of us.'

'Is your love strong enough to stand the test of time?'

'Aye!' warmly responded Laura, 'of eternity!'

'Bless you, my darling, for those words. But Laura, what if, after all, I am not what you thought me? What if I have deceived you, not by word, but by implication?'

She looked steadily up into his face. 'You are joking. I know, I feel, that you could never stoop to that.'

'Not even,' he said, laughing, 'if my blood were tinged with the emerald hue?'

'Tormenter!'

'Then you are content to accept me for what I seem; what you believe me to be; even though I am what I am, what I am proud to be—an Irishman?'

Laura dropped her arms, and stood transfixed, but in a moment the whole absurdity of her former stubborn prejudices dawned upon her, and not knowing whether to laugh or cry at this unexpected 'quid pro quo,' she said: 'As discretion is the better part of valor, I surrender, and own myself completely vanquished, but, oh! you cheat, not converted even yet; and when I am, it will be owing more to the fidelity and virtue of the poor woman I left at home, whose praises occupy a part of all my mother's letters, than to such a grand signeur as yourself.'

'Well, we'll not quarrel as to the means, so the cure is complete. Enough for me to know

that you take me as a poor man and an Irishman. I ask no greater victory.'

'And I,' said Laura, 'crave no greater prize. But tell me how is it that you are so free from those nationalities which make one's country so apparent? I am not the only one that has been deceived and taken you for English.'

'It may be owing partly to my education at Eton, to my short residence at home, and my general cosmopolitan tastes and habits. But the air is getting chilly, and you, poor child, have lost all your wraps.'

'True, I had quite forgotten it. Lost the vain trappings of the body, but gained the true riches of the heart. I like the exchange.'

'And I in the future can take care of both,' and, stooping, he kissed her white, upturned brow.

As they entered the cabin, Mrs. Preston called them to take a seat by her side.

'You have not yet,' she said to Mr. Hagan, 'given us an account of your experience of the accident, or where you were during the time that elapsed until you saw this young lady in the water.'

'I don't like to recall the scene, Mrs. Preston, it is such a horrible remembrance. But ladies must be obeyed, so you shall have my story. After leaving the guards, I had gone to my stateroom, taken off my boots, and laid down. I think I must have fallen into a doze, for I was so suddenly startled and stupefied by a crash, and the weight of some heavy substance falling upon me, and at the same time a sensation of intense suffocating heat oppressed me. I grasped the situation in a moment, however, and recovered my composure. But knowing the danger of inhaling the steam, I kept my head covered for a time. Then putting forth all my strength, I extricated myself from the debris of framework that almost buried me, and feeling for my boots, found them, and managed to get them on with some difficulty, as I could not stand erect for the rubbish. My one idea was to reach the ladies' cabin.'

'Intent, of course, on my rescue,' laughed Mrs. Preston.

'For,' he continued, with a bow and smile, 'I had discovered the boat to be on fire. As I was on the way, I heard one of the men lying on the floor, whom I supposed to be dead, utter a groan. I stopped, bent over him, and saw that he was still alive. To leave him there, to be burned, was not to be thought of, so, lifting him in my arms, I had carried him half way down the cabin, when I met a large negro man who had known and fancied me in G—, and whom I knew to be perfectly trustworthy. Transferring my burden to him, with the promise of a stimulating reward if he saved him, I again retraced my steps. But now the flames impeded my progress, coming up through the middle part of the floor. I then went round on the guards, and just as I had assured myself that the cabin was empty, I saw a woman rushing frantically toward the flaming pool of fire. I called, but she seemed deaf, and still rushed on. There was nothing to do but to follow her. This I did, still shouting the danger she was in, but without effect. Finally, I reached her side, and at a glance saw that she had lost her senses—saw that I had grappled with a maniac. But I succeeded in carrying her back again by force; again I lost her, again I caught her, until finally she gave me a blow that struck me nearly blind, and with one fearful shriek rushed headlong into the gaping, hissing flood of fire.'

'Horrible!' cried both the ladies in a breath, and Hagan, overcome by the remembrance, walked to the end of the saloon. Coming back, he resumed:

'I must confine myself, ladies, to facts, and leave feeling to your imagination. Of course all this lost me time, and yet it was but moments in passing—yet what life-time events were crowded into them. Well, I next went on deck, saw the last of the crowd lowered into the boats, and trusting, believing that Miss Lambert was among those who had been safely landed, I let myself down, the last man, and followed. A rapid glance proved my mistake, and I made at once for the river brink, strained my eyes in the direction of the burning boat, and at last caught a glimpse of a woman's dress. It was enough. Who it was I could not know—she was to be saved, and I struck out for her rescue. She went down twice before I could reach her, for I had lost some strength in my contest with that unfortunate lunatic. As she came up, I saw what I foreboded—recognized who it was. But enough now, for you know all.'

'And a regular modern Leander you proved yourself to be, for I am sure the Hellespont is a mere circumstance to the Mississippi. And I hope,' turning a quizzical look on Laura, 'that this young lady will show her gratitude according to the usual rules on such occasions.' Saying which, Mrs. Preston rose and left them.

There was no sleep for Laura that night—too many contending feelings were warring for the mastery. All the circumstances of her merciful and miraculous preservation now stood out

undivested of the mere selfish gratitude that had at first only confused her senses. This retrospect was now intensified by the low moaning sound of the surviving sufferers, who were lying on the floor of the outer cabin, receiving at the hands of tender nurses all that could be done to mitigate their anguish. Then she took up the golden thread that had woven itself so marvelously in this dark web of her life, lending a richness and charm that turned even the sorrow into a blessing—the blessing of love given and love returned—the greatest of all treasures that can be laid in offering at the feet of woman, intrenching her in a citadel, against which all the minor casualties that gather round and hem in a life may batter against in vain. Love, nobly won, honorably given; love to cleave to when all else fails; love, to support when ruin and wreck strew the shore; the one great, purifying, elevating love of a life; the one golden link which makes two but one; on which God and his angels look down with a smile, and bless it as the earthly similitude of the more perfect and less perishable bliss of heaven.

True, she had known this man, into whose hands she had laid her fate, a very little while. But the magic bands that had drawn them so strangely together, had lent a light, through which she saw a Providence and not a chance at the helm of this turning point in her life. Without reasoning, she was content to take him. Him, who had been sent, not in the bright sunshine of her life, when every object wore the tints of her own joy, but sent at the moment of its blindest despair. Perhaps she idealized him a little. What man or woman ever passes through the gates of love without that glamour. But even so, she was content. Believing him to be the one who could satisfy her heart, her conscience, her intellect—knowing her motives to be biased only by the purest feelings—ever asking who or what he was in the world's eyes—she placed her hand reliantly in his, owning her master, and God ratified the bond. This, perhaps, was not the safest rule to follow according to the worldly wisdom and the practical, mercenary views that regulate the marriages of the present day. But the heart that is swayed by principle and directed by religion rarely deceives. It may happen, and often does, that the miracle of Paradise repeats itself. That men and women walk sad and solitary through life, until the one divided heart finds its other half, and becomes again one flesh.

CHAPTER V.—LAUDAMUS.

On the arrival of the boat at New Orleans, Laura was warmly met by Mr. and Mrs. Morton, who had both been anxiously awaiting the first arrival since the accident to be fully assured of her safety. They felt a particular interest in her, based upon the glowing account of her many attractions, related by her friends, and the independent, brave spirit she had evinced in striving so heroically against so much discouragement.

Introducing Mr. Hagan as her preserver, he was at once cordially invited to visit them frequently.

Mrs. Morton, with a woman's forethought, had anticipated Laura's possible want of proper covering, so had brought with her a cloak and bonnet, which were sufficient to prevent her appearance causing undue curiosity, which it undoubtedly would have done without them.

Laura had observed for some time a familiar face peering with a look of questioning anxiety into the cabin, and finally recognized it as belonging to the man who had been so attentive to Mr. Hagan on the Erin. Touching his arm, she called his attention, and no sooner had he turned than the man showered a thousand expressions of gratitude and congratulations upon him.

'I saw your name, sir, in the list of passengers, and sure it's a heavy heart I've carried ever since.'

'This is my faithful servant, Thomas Lynch,' he said, turning to Laura. 'He is one of a third generation that has served our family with a fidelity that only an Irish heart knows how to give.'

'I trust,' said Laura, with a little dash of the old spirit, 'that our free American air will not vitiate so rare a virtue. Certainly it seems to thrive best on your own soil, nor am I disposed to deny that it furnishes examples of noble and disinterested devotion rarely met with in other parts.'

'Thank you for that admission. I see that the remedy is working admirably already.'

Laura sought the earliest opportunity, before retiring that night, to write a long letter to her mother. The very recital of all the recent events brought them so vividly to mind, that her feelings gave force to her pen, and the graphic picture she drew of her own peril placed the scene, with all its horrors, a living reality before her mother's eyes. In former letters she had alluded to Mr. Hagan, and her mother, with a woman's intuition, had anticipated the possible consequences of such propinquity: She could

not regret so happy a termination as this promised, to the wearisome and thankless life that otherwise must be her child's portion. If he was really all that the Misses Brandon and Laura had described him to be, she knew that in good time he would speak for himself, and that Laura was too prudent and too dutiful to commit herself without the approval of her parents.—The health of her husband was now improving, and hopes of his ultimate recovery began to dawn in her heart.

With this beneficial change, Mr Lambert began to take more interest in his complicated affairs, striving to gather out of the ruin something that would enable him to make another start in life. This prospect presented itself in a piece of mill property which had been left undisturbed by his creditors, and which, with a small outlay, might be again set in motion with great profit. A few advertisements brought him several offers, and with the new incentive for action he grew rapidly better—not able for out-door work, but for a general direction and settlement of all his old affairs.

When Laura's letter, then, arrived, containing such startling and unlooked for intelligence, they were both better able to digest and bear the purport of its contents.

A good night's rest made Laura fresh for a walk early the next morning. To offer a Mass and communion of thanksgiving was her first impulse, and just as she was about to ask her way to the nearest church, she saw Mr. Hagan advancing towards her, and knew that in this, as in all else, their thoughts had been as one.

After breakfast, preparations were at once made to get together a change of clothing, though she had scarcely realized her destitution in this particular. 'For what,' she said, 'was the loss of all her accumulated treasures, compared with the great boon of life and love?'

A few days placed her on a footing of warm friendship with the Morton family, and during their sewing circle, she freely communicated to them all the circumstances that had crowded so much experience into her life, from the time she left home until her arrival there.

Mr. Hagan, she knew, had written to her parents to urge their consent to an early consummation of his suit, giving, at the same time, such credentials as would, he knew, prove perfectly satisfactory. To Mr. Morton he also made revelations that caused that gentleman to congratulate Laura upon the success of her Southern trip. He advocated very warmly Mr. Hagan's cause, and insisted upon giving them the 'eclat' of so distinguished a wedding.

'You are laughing at me, Mr. Morton,' said Laura. 'We are both too poor for such haste, and like each other too well to repent at leisure.'

'Did Mr. Hagan ever tell you that he was poor, Laura?'

'No, I can't say that he did; but I have received the impression somewhere, that he was dependent upon his own resources.'

'Exactly, so he is; but those resources, my dear, are quite sufficient to enable you to carry out all our wishes. Your parents unite with us (here is my letter, and one for you, too), in agreeing with us, that you might as well accept this unexpected situation, and play the 'bride' instead of the teacher.'

Letters of congratulation reached Laura from all of her friends. Her uncle, in Philadelphia, sent her a handsome check, and in addition to this good fortune, she learned that a number of trunks had floated to shore from the wreck, and among them her own was found.

Laura left Mr. Morton to peruse alone her letter from home. After dwelling upon the danger so recently escaped, Mrs. Lambert touched next upon the subject involving such serious considerations for all of them.

'Setting aside entirely,' she wrote, 'your "couleur de rose" opinion of Mr. Hagan, I must admit that his own presentation, and the high credentials he has submitted to us, together with the laudatory opinion of the Mortons, have all combined to make us feel that he is worthy of the trust reposed in him. It is a great trial, and contrary to my ideas of strict propriety, for you to be married anywhere but in the house of your parents. So solemn a step in life should be made from the threshold that has ever been the sanctuary of your own home, and under the eyes of those who received the trust of your heart and soul from God. But since leaving us, your life seems to have been so independently ordered, and your affairs have run so completely wide of the current of ordinary events; and now that you are so totally among strangers, your father and I have concluded to waive our own theories and predilections, and consent to the earnestly expressed wish of Mr. Hagan and the Mortons, of turning your trip of labor into one of love.'

Much more she wrote, that only a mother, under such circumstances, could say—words that sank deep into Laura's heart and held their place long, long after that dear voice was hushed forever.