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[From the Hearth and Home.]
Bought with a Price.

CHAPTER I.

The clock over the parlor mantel shelf struck six sharp and clear. The fire blazed up with a cheerful glow on brightly tinted carpet and curtains, on old-fashioned handsome furniture, on the little tea-table laid for one, with a big bowl of flowers in the middle—rare delicate blossoms most of them—and, pushed into a corner, a shabby little bunch of monthly roses. A pretty, bright, womanly room; books were scattered about and bits of needle-work. A piano stood open opposite the window, with a canterbury overflowing with music by the side. A tiny black dog, all ears and hair, lay on the rug, and over all the firelight flashed warmly.

"Miss Hugo is not in, sir. It's past her time though; would you like to wait, sir?" asked the servant. "Yes, I am leaving Waltham. Thank you," Mr. Briton answered, as the woman showed him into the fire-lit parlor.

She bustled away to get candles. The visitor, hardly answering Rollo's joyous greeting leaned against the chimney-piece pushing back his thick brown hair with one hand. The fire blazed and crackled, shining over the straight dark figures, the grave, manly face, the steadfast eyes. "Tick, tick, tick," went the clock, steadily, slowly, like the pulse of fate. The candles were brought and put on the table, one each side of the big round bowl of flowers.

"Chime, chime," rang the quarter from the church tower across the road. Mr. Briton started and went to the window, pushing back the thick crimson curtains. Very still and quiet was it out of doors. The rowans over the garden gate hardly moved one graceful branch in the night air, the old church opposite, with its graveyard round it, rose gray and beautiful in the young moonlight.

Over the moor beyond the white road wound away to Waltham. Slowly along this road came two dark figures loitering in the autumn night. Mr. Briton dropped the curtain and came back to the fireside.

"Tick, tick," went the clock; it seemed to whisper to him, "False, false, false," as the garden gate swung back under the dark boughs. "Well, good-by; I shall see you to-morrow. How long it will seem!" "Nonsense!" answered Miss Hugo's gay full voice. "Don't talk to me like that! Good-by."

She waved her hand playfully and went swiftly up the little path. Her old servant met her at the door.

"Mr. Briton is in there, Miss Mildred."

The young lady raised her straight, dark brows in calm surprise. She threw her shawl and hat off hastily, smoothing back her curly hair with both hands and went softly into the little parlor.

"I hope Rollo has entertained you," she said, with a bewitching smile; "this is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Briton."

"I am come to say 'good-by,' Miss Hugo," he answered gravely.

"What a disagreeable word. You really won't return after the holidays, then?"

"That depends upon circumstances. I have had an offer from Mrs. Harold. She wishes me to travel with her son during the next twelve months."

"And then?" she said, looking up at him.

"I haven't decided. I have my fellowship and I think I shall take orders."

"Poor fellow!"

"I don't know why you should pity me. As a fellow of my college, I shall get a living sometime, and I don't know a happier life, if one ought to take that as a test."

"I hope you will be a bishop, Mr. Briton."

"I am tired of teaching," was her answer. "I won't have you for a pupil."

"I would be very good," he said, in a low voice.

"No, you wouldn't; you know you wouldn't. You are too fond of teaching to learn."

"Listen to me, please," he urged. "I won't listen. I know what you are going to say and it is better left unsaid. Will you have a cup of tea? I will call auntie down to propitiate the proprieties."

"I don't want any tea. I am not going to be treated politely by you, Mildred."

"I am not going to treat you politely," she said, as she came back to the rug, laughing— "don't be frightened." She stood opposite, still laughing, her beautiful face dimpling and sparkling.

"Mildred," said Mr. Briton, "I will speak."

"No, you won't. Go with Fred Harold on to the Continent for twelve months, and I'll stay here trying to make my pupils understand what music means. When you come back I will listen to you and shall be able to answer."

"Now, Mildred—"

"No, and you mustn't call me Mildred, sir. Do as I tell you, as an earnest of good behavior in future."

"I may never come back—I may die abroad."

"Requiescat in pace. You can't make me serious, Mr. Briton. You will come back wedded to some alarming Italian woman."

"Very likely he said, bitterly. "Certainly it is; or I may marry some reformed German professor. I won't answer for myself."

"Or perhaps—" Mr. Briton did not finish his sentence. He bent down to pull Rollo's ears and did not see the dull flush that covered Mildred's face.

"Don't you think we have talked enough?" she said, "I want my tea, and I am tired."

"Well I will go; I shan't see you again, Mildred. Harold will join me in London if I go with him."

"Good-by, then; I shall miss your voice in choir, Mr. Briton—I hope your successor in the school will have a good tenor." He held her hand as she spoke.

"Twelve months is a long time," he said. "Give me something that will be a link with these happy days."

"To keep my memory green? Have one of these flowers. Take your choice."

"No; give me one."

She drew the bowl towards her.

"These geraniums are to brighten your present state of mind. I am afraid. You don't like heliotropes? What bad taste! Will you have one of these roses?—they are half dead, though."

"Never mind—I like them best. They have grown in the air and the sunshine."

"There then; and now you really must go." She went to the door with him, bidding him good-by with a gay smile.

"I shall come back," were his last words, "in twelve months, Mildred."

"Dolly, will you bring me in the tea? Auntie has had hers, I suppose?"

tea-tray. Rollo went to sleep, and Mildred got up to go to her aunt's room. The rest of the bunch of roses was lying on the ground. She picked them up, hot tears aching in her eyes.

"Poor little things!" she said, touching the withered petals with her dry, feverish lips. "I wonder what will be the end."

CHAPTER II.

The twilight of the next day was gathering as Miss Hugo came out of the gates of the great house with a roll of music in her hand and walked swiftly towards home. A dark, tall figure followed her, gaining rapidly on her foot-steps. She stopped waiting for him to come up.

"Fred, I can't have this; you mustn't do it."

"Why not," he asked eagerly. "I am going away with Briton next week you know; don't make me any more miserable than I am."

"It's very foolish," and she let him walk on at her side, talking to her in happy, broken sentences.

"In twelve months I shall be my own master, when I come back from that hateful Continent, and then we'll get married, eh, Mildred?"

"I don't know."

"You wouldn't have the heart to fill me now, Mildred?"

She stopped, her face flushing, her voice hot and broken.

"Mr. Harold, understand plainly there is no engagement between us. I will not be bound in any way."

He tried to speak, but she went on—"I don't care for you—you know I don't. I wish you would go home—you make me very uncomfortable."

"I beg your pardon. Don't be cross, Mildred. Of course I know you can't care for me as I do for you but I am sure that I can make you happy."

They had reached the garden gate by this time and Mildred lent back on it to answer him.

"People can be very wicked for three thousand a year, Fred."

"Perhaps so—what do you mean?"

"Has it never struck you that you are tempting me very much, even if I cared for anybody else—I have to work hard for my living and you will be a rich man."

I never thought of it like that," he answered simply. "I have too much faith in you, Mildred to think you would marry me for my money. I know you wouldn't, dear."

"It would be very pleasant—very pleasant to marry you and for your sisters to go back to Lancashire."

"I would make everything pleasant to you, if you would marry me, Mildred."

There was a moment's silence between the two. The night wind whispered in the boughs above them, the quiet moonlight fell on the churchyard and the silent fields. Suddenly, with a gesture of pain, as though she tore something from her heart and cast it down, Mildred answered—"I will marry you, Fred."

He would have clasped her in his arms, but she stepped back, shutting the gate between them.

"Go now. I am tired, and I have to practice the organ for to-morrow."

"When shall I see you again?" he asked eagerly.

"I don't know. Oh! I am so tired. Why won't you go?"

"I am going. Good-by, dear." She went up the path and left him.

In the little parlor the fire burnt brightly—Rollo sprang up to meet her wagging his tail in ecstasies of joy. She took him up in her arms as if the touch of some warm living thing could cease the throbbing of her heart.

"Bought with a price." The words were echoing in her thoughts as she laid her brow on the cold chimney-piece, with a strange sudden memory of whose arm had rested there the night before.

CHAPTER III.

The Sunday morning dawned bright and clear. Mildred was up early—she was organist at the church opposite, and generally practiced a little before the service began. With her music in her hand she came across the road and opened the wicket by the large gate.

A tall figure standing in the shadow of the porch. In dull surprise Mildred found herself shaking hands with Mr. Briton.

"I came down this morning. I could not resist the temptation of spending another Sunday here and I have some news to tell you, Mildred."

She sat down on the porch seat, hardly speaking.

"I am so happy," he said eagerly, "I came straight down here to speak to you. Mildred, you won't be so cruel to-day. I love you dearly."

"Hush," she said, picking up her music and smoothing out the leaves with trembling hands. "You mustn't speak to me like that—I have never given you any right to do so."

"Mildred!"

"I haven't," she returned in a stifled voice. "I am very sorry, but—"

"What do you mean?" he asked sternly.

"I am engaged," she said almost in a whisper. "Why do you look at me like that? I have done no more than girls do every day."

He took her music from her trembling fingers in his tight clasp.

"What do you mean?" he asked harshly. "What are you talking about, Mildred?" By a violent effort she regained her calmness and stood up.

"I am engaged," she said—his look forced her to add despite herself, "to Fred Harold."

A look of the most intense contempt and disgust crossed his face.

"A worthy rival," he said scornfully. "It has half cured my love for you to know you would choose a thing like that, with no man of his own." His anger and disdain had made her quite calm again.

"We won't discuss his character," she said. "Can't we be friends still, Mr. Briton?"

"Friends!" he repeated, without touching her hand, "you are a strange woman, Miss Hugo, to think that I can feel any friendship for you."

"I am very sorry—would you tell me your news? I shall be so glad to hear you have prospered in anything." Her manner was so simple and unaffected that it softened him.

"If it had only come a week ago it might, perhaps, have made a difference with you," he answered. "The chancery suit that has been an heirloom in our family is finished most unexpectedly, and the lawyers have kindly left two thousand a year, which belongs, I am told, to me."

Mildred did not speak—she leant back against the porch, looking across at her home with eyes that saw not.

"It might have made a difference to you Mildred," he said bitterly, "you have ruined my life and yours."

"Not your life," she said tremulously, "there is plenty of happiness for you yet."

"Perhaps so," he answered, taking his last look at her sweet face.

"Good-by. It is no use to say any more," she said, taking up her music and passing up the stairs to the organ loft. He did not attempt to follow or speak to her. He sat down on the porch seat for a moment and then went back to the town. It was years before Mildred saw him again.

party and the old round of life went on for Mildred. The winter passed and the bright summer, with no change but the death of Mildred's aunt. They had never loved each other much, but Mildred felt lonelier still without her.

In the early autumn came a letter to the cottage from Mrs. Harold.

"My son tells me," the letter ran, "that there has been something like an engagement between you and him; I don't wish to write about the unworthiness of your conduct—that is all past and gone. I am merely obeying my son's wishes in addressing you. He is to be married to-morrow to Miss Adela Bremer, and he hopes you thought no more of his words than he did of yours."

The letter all through was in the same strain, trampling Milly's pride into the dust—a bitter punishment.

CHAPTER IV. AND LAST.

Four years had passed since Mildred left Waltham, heart-sick of the place—four dreary years of life as a governess, partly in a school, partly in the family she was with now. Her pupils—three little romping children, who had been playing at a little distance on the sands—came running up with some pretty shells.

"Look, Miss Hugo, we are going to take them home to mamma." She answered them pleasantly—the children seemed her only friends just now.

"We had better go back," she said, taking little Arthur's hand. The little Italian village to which the family had come for the winter on account of Mrs. Wilson's health, was about a mile from the sea. She was waiting for her governess at the top of the broad steps that led to the house.

"I thought you were never coming back. Is it wise to take the children so far, Miss Hugo?"

"They like the sea," returned Mildred.

"Ah! I am afraid you spoil them; but I am glad you are come home. We expect visitors and there is nothing ready. Would you mind helping Marie a little, Miss Hugo? Ellen has a bad headache and is lying down."

"Certainly," said Mildred pleasantly. She was tired already, but she busied herself all the afternoon dusting and arranging and giving orders to the Italian servants.

Evening came, and the visitors, Mr. Wilson's brother and sister-in-law and a tall, bearded friend of theirs, whom Mildred bowed to in the lamp-light and did not recognize until he spoke. Had he recognized her? Mildred could not tell. He had chatted all the evening to Mrs. Wilson and her daughter Ellen, while the governess sat by the table with her work, casting rare glances at the dark, pleasant face, so much older and sadder.

Mildred had thought over and over again what their meeting might be like if they ever met again. She had never fancied it like this, without a look of recognition from the dark eyes that had sought hers so often once.

Next morning before dawn Ellen Wilson came into Mildred's room.

"Will you get up? We are going to spend the day among the hills and mamma wishes the children to go. Will you mind helping me to pack?"

It was a radiant day, without a breath of autumn coldness in the air. Mildred was tired before she started and the children wearied her at every step. She sat down at last, utterly unable to go any further.

The others were on ahead, laughing and talking. Mr. Briton walking beside Ellen and making himself very agreeable.

"I wonder where Miss Hugo can be?" asked Miss Wilson, at last, missing the governess. "Those children will surely fall over the rocks."

"Miss Hugo?" said her companion, "is that the lady's name?"

"Yes, our governess. Where can she be?"

"She's tired," said Susie, "and she is sitting down behind with Arthur."

"I will go back," said Mr. Briton, turning eagerly.

"Don't trouble, Mr. Briton," exclaimed Ellen, loth to lose her cavalier, but he had already hastened down the grassy slope. He had not recognized Mildred; indeed he had hardly

looked at her, for she was changed very much, but the name roused his curiosity. Perhaps it might—

He came down the grass slope until he reached the little hollow where Mildred sat resting with Arthur sound asleep at her side. She was lying back against a tree, looking down on the warm blue sea, her lips trembling with silent pain. Mr. Briton lingered a moment—he knew her now, and, looking at her, he saw she had suffered even more than he had.

"I am afraid you are tired," he said, coming forward hastily.

She rose, quite calm and self-possessed.

"I am a little. Poor little Arthur has fallen fast asleep," and she turned away, bending over the child.

"Don't wake him," said Mr. Briton, touching her hand; "let him sleep while he can. It is a pity we can't all be children."

"It is a pity," she said nothing more, but looked straight away on to the sea.

The silence grew intolerable after a moment, yet Mr. Briton hardly knew how to break it.

In a sudden thought he took from his pocket-book a folded paper. Inside, carefully wrapped away, was a little faded rose. He came to her side and touched her bent head to make her look at him.

"Do you remember this?" he said. "I have kept it ever since. My love is as fresh as ever. Shall we forget and forgive all that is sad in the old long yore?"

"Merry voices came from the hill, sounding closer every moment."

"We shall be interrupted in a moment," he said. "Tell me, Mildred, shall I keep this rose or throw it away?"

"Keep it," she whispered, still hiding her face; and just as Mr. Briton put his flower back, Ellen and the others appeared at the top of the hollow.

Mildred's punishment was over at last. She had more than her deserts after all in the faithful love of the man she married; but even in their happy wedded life bitter memories had their place, though unspoken. They could neither of them forget that Mildred had once been "Bought with a Price."—A. K., in the Family Herald.

An English scientist has discovered a fact important to farmers. It is that sulphate of lime appears to exercise a decided influence in arresting the spread of decay in potatoes affected by the potato disease. In one experiment the soil was dusted over some tubers partly decayed from this cause, when they were stowed away. Some months afterwards the potatoes were found to have suffered no further injury.

"THE DOOR UNLOCKED."—Sometime since I wished to enter a strange church with a minister a little before the time for service. We procured a key, but tried in vain to unlock the outside door with it. We concluded we had the wrong key and sent to the janitor for the right one. But he came and told us the door was already unlocked. All we had to do was to push, and the door would open. We thought ourselves locked out, when there was nothing to hinder us from entering.

In the same way we fail to enter into love and fellowship with God. The door, we think, is locked against us. We try to fit some key of extraordinary faith to open it. We try to get our minds wrought up to some high pitch of feeling. We say, "I have the wrong key; I must feel more sorry; I must weep more." And all the time the door is ready to open if we come boldly, with humble earnestness to the throne of grace. We may enter freely, at once, without laying to unlock the door. Christ is the door, and his heart is not shut against us. We must enter without stopping to fit our key of studied faith, for His mercy is not locked up. We must enter boldly, trustingly, not doubting His readiness to receive us "just as we are." He is willing already, and we must not stop to make Him willing by our prayers or tears.—S. S. Gem.