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I WOULD RATHER BE RIGHT THAN PRESIDENT.—HENRY CLAY.

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## ADRIFT IN A BALLOON.

"Mr. Heywood, what have you done?" "Cut the stay-ropes of the balloon, Miss Kensett, and I am alone with you at last." There was a gleam of strange triumph in the young man's handsome eyes as he spoke, and the young lady flung back the thick veil that had until now shrouded her head, and turned a beautiful pale face away from him to look for help. It was too late to hope for any aid. As he had said, Ralph Heywood had severed with a strong, sharp knife, the cable that was to remain attached to the balloon during its perilous voyage, and in an instant it had risen beyond any reach of those below.—She saw the swaying crowd that had come to witness the ascent, presenting to her view a sea of upturned faces, each one white with the horror of the catastrophe that had occurred; she saw the men on the platform looking with amazement at the cut rope, and the professional aeronaut who was to have accompanied them gazing after them and stretching out his arms in a gesture of despair; she could hear the murmur of the excited throng, and even catch the shouts of some of the men who were trying to explain the accident, but at every second the sounds grew fainter, the mass of people more indistinct as the balloon rose steadily higher and higher, until the park, with its crowd, became a mere small portion of the great city that was spread out below them.

And so Kate Kensett and Ralph Heywood were alone together once more. A year ago this had not been so rare a thing. These two had spent long summer hours in rambles through the woods, in rides by the sparkling ocean, in chats on the moonlight piazza, and seemed never tired of the solitude *a deux*.

Kate Kensett was a handsome, imperious woman, an only child, and mistress for the many years since her mother's death, of her father's fine establishment. A haughty beauty, who had refused a score of offers, and thought herself proof against love, when she had attained the age of twenty-seven, still heart-whole.

Ralph Heywood was two years her junior, an impulsive young fellow, who adored Kate from the first moment he saw her, and was hopelessly and overwhelmingly in love with her by the time he had been three months with her—so much in love that, dreaming he had some encouragement in the softer light of her gray eyes, and finding himself wholly unable any longer to affect indifference, he made a mad, desperate avowal of his feelings, only to be refused with cold decision.

Ralph went out from Kate's presence after that, utterly stunned and overcome. It was all over, then, and the hopes that had been so dear to him must be given up. Yet he sorely had had some reason to indulge his passion, some encouragement to success from his haughty beauty. No! it must be his own vanity alone which had led him to this error; he was a conceited coxcomb, who deserved to suffer for his folly, and heart-rending and crushed, the poor fellow went from the dangerous country where Kate resided, back to town.

A little while after this, Heywood, by the sudden death of an uncle, became the inheritor of a handsome fortune. The moderate competence he had before possessed expanded to wealth, and Ralph was one of the richest single men in New York.

Soon after this Kate came to the city. Ralph saw her again. At their first meeting a quick flush overspread the whiteness of her complexion, and his heart beat high with a new hope. He lingered about her whenever he could. She did not repulse him, and then one day, when he chanced to find her alone, he burst out with a passionate renewal of his suit.

"Oh, Kate, Kate! I love you so desperately! Do listen to me, at least, and try to love me. I am rich now, you know.—Do let me share my wealth with you."

Miss Kensett started up and turned very pale at these words.

"Mr. Heywood, do you think I am to be bought?" she demanded haughtily.

"Oh, no, not that, Kate! But it does not seem so preposterous for me to ask you to marry me now. You are so glorious that you ought to have all the luxury that money can buy, and that I will give you."

"You remember, Mr. Heywood, what my answer was to you last summer. You must understand my character very poorly if you fancy your added fortune can make me change it."

"Don't you really care for me at all?" he asked, pleadingly, as he came and stood close beside her, his blue eyes full of passionate entreaty.

Miss Kensett's voice trembled a little as she said: "You know I liked you as a friend."

"As a friend!" he repeated, impetuously. "Oh, Kate, Kate! have you never loved me at all?" and he held out his hand imploringly.

Miss Kensett's lip curled. "You are so young, Ralph, you will outlive this fancy."

"You ridicule me," he said, sadly.—"Well, Kate, I can only prove my love by endurance, and that time alone can manifest. Oh, I know you think my character weak, and that I am not like the man you would choose for your husband.—Perhaps you think I have forgotten that description you gave me one day last summer of your ideal man. I recollect every word. He was utterly unlike me, I remember well. He has to be thirty-six years old, with black hair and eyes, stern, cold, reserved to all the world but you.—Kate, Kate! do you really think you could love such a man better than you ever could love me?"

He put the question so suddenly that Kate was unprepared for it, and he had clasped one of her hands in his and pressed it to his lips before she could prevent him.

A vivid color dyed her face as she felt the touch of that passionate kiss.

"Kate—Kate! my own! my love!" he murmured.

But she snatched back her hand, and turned quickly away.

"I will not listen to you any longer, Ralph," she said, quickly. "Leave me, now, and do not come to see me any more. It will be useless, I tell you, for I never will be alone with you again."

"I will go if you insist," he said. "I would not persecute you with an unwelcome suit, but I will not promise not to come here, Kate. I shall see you as often as possible; it will be my only happiness."

He went out, and when the echo of his footsteps died away Miss Kensett sank down on a sofa and hid her face in her hands.

Could he have seen her then, perhaps Ralph would not have despaired.

Even as it was, he showed good pluck in his pursuit, for all winter he scarcely allowed a day to pass without seeing her; in the park, at the opera, at receptions or balls, he was near her, but for months Kate succeeded in keeping to her resolution, and they were never alone together.

As the time passed on, and Ralph saw her surrounded with other admirers and always inaccessible, he grew desperate.—He was resolved he would see her alone, at all hazards, and when chance threw in his way this strange meeting, he could not resist the temptation of procuring one last interview with the woman he adored.

As the balloon slowly rose, there was silence between the two for many minutes. Gradually the great city unrolled before them like a map. They could see the lines of the streets, the green reach of the great Park, and at last the sparkling waters of the two rivers, and the broad bay with its innumerable ships. It was a bright May afternoon, and the sky had seemed almost cloudless, but as they rose higher a chill struck them, and on a sudden they passed within a thin band of vapor, and the world beneath was shut out from them entirely. They were utterly alone now.

Kate shivered as the damp struck her heart, and Ralph drew near to her with a large shawl.

"You are cold; let me wrap this about you," he said, gently.

The haughty woman seemed almost conquered. She permitted him to draw the warm folds around her, and her large eyes, as they were turned on his for the first time, had a shadow of fear in their depths.

"Kate," said Ralph, and he half encircled with his arm, "you think I am a madman and have resolved to kill you."

"You are in the same peril yourself," she replied.

"But the danger is not so great as you imagine. I have been up in this same balloon several times before. Do you remember my telling you last summer how I had always had a fancy for aeronautics, or have you forgotten everything about that happy summer?"

"I do remember it," she said.

"I have read a good deal on the subject," he continued, "and this winter almost the only thing I have thought of but you has been these ascensions. As soon as this balloon was brought here, I came to examine it, and have been up in it nearly every Saturday since."

"But it was always attached to a rope."

"Yes, that is true; still that makes very little real difference in the danger. I understand the management of it perfectly, but I had never dreamed of seeing you at one of these ascensions."

"A sudden flush dyed Kate's face."

"No," she said, "I ought not to have come, but you know I have always had a fancy for investigating anything out of the way, and ever since I saw the advertisement of these ascensions I have longed to try one. This afternoon father was out; I wrapped myself up and put on a thick veil, and came up here, not thinking to be recognized."

"I knew you at once," said Ralph; "the moment I caught sight of your figure, I did not need to hear your voice. When you spoke to the professor, though, that would have set at rest any doubt."

"And I did not see you until I stepped into the car, or—"

"You would not have come," he added, sadly. "Well, Kate, I will not persecute you, now that we are so really alone to-

gether. I was resolved to see you once more before I go away."

"You are going away?"

"Yes, to Europe. I was determined to bid you good-by alone at every risk, and when I saw that we two were the only passengers, I could not resist the impulse that seized me to make the trip alone with you."

"You are very rash, Ralph."

"You have only yourself to blame for it," he said. "But there really is no danger; if we wish to go higher we have only to throw out some of these sand-bags, and when you wish to descend I will open the valve, the gas will escape, and we shall reach terra firma quickly and safely."

As he spoke they passed beyond the shrouding vapor, and Kate turned to look below her. The balloon was floating across the East River; beneath them they could see the broad stretch of the waters, the green shores dotted with neat country-seats, the islands with their stately buildings. They were so remote now that they could no longer distinguish any human beings, and the ships seemed to move over the waves as by enchantment, the vehicles on shore to glide along as in some fairy panorama, while the intense and strange stillness around them was unbroken by any sound. The effect was inexpressibly weird of this looking down on a city and country all wrapped in utter silence, and to float there, with only the vast heavens above them and the drifting clouds for companions.

"Is it not beautiful?" said Ralph.

"It is, indeed, awfully beautiful," and her eyes lit up with enthusiasm; "and I should enjoy it intensely if—"

"If it were not for me," said Ralph, bitterly.

"No, not that," she replied, quickly; "if it were not for the danger."

"There is no danger, Kate," he said; "we will go down at once if you wish it."

"Oh, not here," she cried; "we are directly over the water."

"Not just yet; the wind is a little north of west, and we shall soon be above Greenpoint; then, if you wish to descend, we will come down, and, as we can easily find a carriage there, we shall be back in town in an hour."

"I think we had better descend as soon as we can," said Kate; "it would be terrible if I were to be out late; even as it is, I fear there will be an unpleasant notoriety about the adventure."

"And you are vexed with me for that? But, Kate, there is no need of any one knowing your name. I will take care of all that. Oh, do not be angry with me!"

"I am not angry, Ralph. Do you really mean to go away?"

"Yes; why should I stay here longer, to be made wretched? After this, you will never see me again."

Kate changed color a little, but she set her lips resolutely and turned away her face.

"We are over the land now," she said; "I think we had better go down."

"You really wish it?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Kate! I might keep you here if I would it, for I am master now. Suppose I refuse to let you descend?" and there was a strange fire in his eyes as he spoke.

"Ralph, would you detain me here against my will?"

"I don't know, Kate. You have thought me weak in character, I know; I believe it has been one reason why you have not loved me. Suppose for once I prove myself the master, and keep you here, my beautiful prisoner, in mid-air?"

He had risen and laid his hand on the string which communicated with the valve in the upper part of the balloon, but he paused as he spoke, and the car sped on its course. Miss Kensett looked up at her companion with a strange expression of fear and entreaty in her eyes.

"Ralph! don't trifle with my anxiety!"

"You ask me to have pity for you, when you had none for me," he said.

Kate turned away her head and looked out with real terror.

"Ralph, we are rising higher! Oh, it is awful!" and she hid her face in her hands.

He was by her side in an instant.

"My love—my love!" he said, "do not be distressed! I do not wish to trouble you. Oh! Kate—Kate! I am more merciful than you. I would lay down my life to make you happy. Even to keep you with me a little longer, which is the highest joy I know, I would not give you one second's uneasiness."

"I was foolish to doubt your generosity, Ralph," said Kate, "but there is something so frightful in our position."

"We will go down at once, if it is safe," he replied. "But before we begin to descend, I must see that we are really over the land."

Ralph swung the small telescope fastened to the side of the car into position and looked down.

"We are quite right," he said; "sure, at least, to descend on the land. In a few moments, Kate, our romantic voyage will be over."

He raised his hand to the cord and pulled it; it did not yield to his touch. A sudden look of alarm passed over his face as he again essayed to move it. Miss Kensett watched him with keen apprehension.

"Ralph, what is the matter?"

"It is nothing," he answered, with an attempt to look unconcerned; "the rope is entangled in some way, that is all."

He again strove to control the valve that would relieve the balloon of the buoyant gas, but all his efforts were unavailing. The obstruction was somewhere out of sight, too, and he could do nothing to help them in his present position. His face was very white as he sat down beside Kate and took her hand in his.

"Kate," he said, "I do not ask you to forgive me for the awful peril into which we have come; but I have lost all control of the balloon!"

There was a moment of silence. Miss Kensett's face lost every vestige of color; but to Ralph's surprise, he saw a wonderful calmness come over it, though she clasped his hands tightly as she said: "Is there, indeed, no hope left us but to await our fate patiently?"

"There is but one chance left," he said. "What is that?"

"I will tell you presently, when you say you have forgiven me."

"I have already done that, Ralph," she said, and her voice was very gentle now.

"Oh, Kate! do you really forgive me for having risked your life?"

"You did not intend it, Ralph."

"No; God knows I thought only of seeing you alone a little while, and never dreamed of the possibility of this horror. Even now I do not understand how it happened."

"But you say there is a chance?"

"Yes; you know that as the gas in the balloon is lighter than air, it cannot escape except from an opening at the top. Now, as I cannot control the valve, it may be that it is loosened and will open of itself. We will wait a little while for that; then, if there is no help in that way, we must, indeed, prepare for the worst, though I promise you, Kate, I will save your life if I can, even at the sacrifice of my own."

As he spoke, it did indeed seem as if the chance Ralph had suggested might come to their aid. Certainly the balloon descended somewhat. Looking over the side, the voyagers could see more distinctly the earth beneath them, and cheered by the hope of soon reaching it in safety, for a little while could enjoy the beauties of the wonderful scene around and below them.

They were drifting always over Long Island; passing above its green plain, they could see the villages that dot so thickly its western shore, the lone farm-houses on the southern coast, the long sand beach that bars off the ocean, and the islets that are scattered on its edge. On the one side of the strip of land that seemed so narrow was the placid Sound, with its tranquil waters scattered over with many ships, while on the other was the great sea dashing its restless billows in a long line of foam on the white sands. As they sank down slowly and silently through the air, Kate and Ralph were so relieved from apprehension that they could enjoy turning their telescope to one point of interest after another, watching with amusement the groups of people that in some of the villages marking the line of the railroad were pointing out eagerly the distant balloon; and when they saw, from time to time, some spyglass directed toward them from below, they knew that human sympathy still followed them.

Meantime, the afternoon faded rapidly away. Now that there was no help for it, Kate no longer reproached Ralph for the long detention from home which must result from their adventure; but as both of them felt confident of reaching the ground ere long, she was resolved to make the best of the position.

Slowly the sun sank down lower and lower over the land, that was fading into a gray line; the clouds that were above them now turned yellow and orange in the vanishing light, and in the darkening sky a bright star gleamed out. Still the balloon approached no nearer to the ground. The ever-increasing wind bore it on swiftly; the twilight gathered so fast that the telescope was useless, and silence fell upon the voyagers in mid-air.

The land beneath them was a little wrapped in shadow, only visible in contrast with the white gleam of the sea; on either hand then a red light shone across the eastward waters, and the moon's disk rose above the sea. At the same moment it faded suddenly from sight, and an awful chill struck to those two human hearts that were alone among the clouds.

"Kate! Kate!" cried Ralph, "we are rising higher; we have been deceived by a false hope."

Kate shivered, and as Ralph clasped his arms about her, let her head drop on his breast.

"My love! my darling!" he murmured; "but you shall not die even yet, if my life can save yours."

An awful stillness was around them, and the mist struck sharply on their faces as they sped through it. They were enveloped in total darkness, rushing blindly on to what dread fate!

Many moments passed thus, while these two clung there together in this aerial solitude; then a faint light stole in upon them, and they floated above the cloud. They had indeed reached a fearful altitude now. The land below them was a mere dark outline, scarcely distinguishable from the clouds that hung beneath. They

seemed to be alone in mid-heavens, above the earth, above the moon, with only the stars beyond them.

As soon as they were once more in the pale radiance, Ralph drew away gently from Kate, and stepped on to the seat.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, looking up in terror.

"I am going to make the attempt to save your life."

"How?"

"By climbing to the top of the balloon and opening the valve; then it will surely descend."

"But, Ralph! Ralph!" she cried, starting up, "you can never reach there in safety; you will fall down and be killed."

He looked at her with a calm smile as he answered: "That will not matter if I have opened the valve; there is very little danger of my falling in the ascent, and I shall have saved your life. It is only what I intended to do ever since I discovered the accident; but I thought until just now that it would be unnecessary."

She stood looking at him, holding his hand, her pale face lit up by the moonlight to unearthly beauty.

"Ralph, Ralph, you are going to die to save me!"

"Perhaps I shall not die, Kate; but I am going to save you at all hazards."

A sudden softness spread over her face, and her voice trembled with intense passion as she said: "Ralph, do not go! I love you, Ralph! I love you! Stay here and let us die together!"

"You love me, Kate!" and for a moment the young man paused.

"Yes, yes!" said Miss Kensett. "Pride was all gone now. 'I love you. I had resolved never to tell you so; but, oh, Ralph, I love you with all my heart! Do not leave me here. I had rather a thousand times die with you than live without you!'"

The young man stepped down beside her and clasped her in his arms, with the light of intense joy shining in his eyes.

"You love me! Then, Kate, I will not die. The knowledge of your love will give me courage I could never otherwise have had. I will save us both, and we will be happy together yet!"

He pressed his lips to hers, and then before she could detain him, sprang away from her and began to mount the ropes.

Kate uttered one wild cry, and then covered down on the floor of the car, hiding her face in her hands, as she waited in mortal agony for his return.

Steadily up over the great balloon the young man climbed his perilous way. But his nerves never quailed for an instant.—He was a practical gymnast, and calmly, as if on solid ground, he disentangled the cord, opened the valve, and then commenced the still more dangerous descent.

To Kate the seconds passed in slow, awful agony, and when Ralph again clasped her in his arms, she could only sob out her thankfulness in a voice choked with passionate tears.

They were falling now. There was no doubt of that.

The billowy clouds, that were all silvered on their edges with the moon's light, rose gradually above them, as they sank down through the air, until they were beneath the floating vapor, and could see once more the outline of ocean and shore.

Ralph shuddered as he looked out, they were so near the extreme end of the island. They could see the glancing waters of the great bays that divide it, and for a while it seemed doubtful whether they would descend on sea or land.

They sat silent, hand clasped in hand, as the end of their voyage approached, and the chances of life or death still hung in the balance. All the sea was alight now with silvery rays, the sand was sleeping like an enchanted country under the radiance, and as they drew nearer they could trace the alterations of shadow and light on forest and plain.

They were coming very near the southern shore, but their fall was so swift that there was danger of death at last by their being dashed too suddenly from the car.

Ralph threw out some of the bags of sand, which lightened the balloon and retarded their progress downward; but all the time the west wind bore them swiftly toward the sea