

## Vows Made to be Broken.

CONCLUDED.

"I WISH," said Belle Blount, as we came to the river-side, "that we could take a sail; it would be delightful this warm day."

"Why can't we?" asked Annie Grierson.

"There's a boat." Of course everybody immediately clamored for a sail; and Julian Ferrean, Tom Revere, and myself were instituted a committee to "investigate" the boat, which lay rocking on the ripples just a little out from the shore. It proved to be a great, hulking affair, nearly as large as a whaler's boat, and half full of water. To add to its unpromising appearance, there was but one pair of oars, and these not of the strongest. Also the craft was quite destitute of any steering apparatus. However, all the ladies were eager for a sail, and we, in our gallantry, decided that these difficulties could be surmounted.

So we went manfully to work, all the masculines of the party except Phillips, who utterly declined to soil his white hands and wet his patent leathers, even in the service of Belle Blount. Harry indignantly declared that he should not accompany us unless he earned his passage; while Edna Reese curled her lip very perceptibly, and Annie Grierson murmured to Belle, in a contemptuous undertone,—

"Belle, dear, you ought to keep your cavalier in a glass case!"

Belle laughed good-humoredly, and ran her handsome, flashing eyes over the lounging figure and listless face of her escort, as she frankly exclaimed,—

"What a lazy fellow you are, Sidney Phillips!"

"Weally I'm cwushed." And Sidney spread his handkerchief over a stone before he sat down upon it to contemplate our industry.

We dragged the boat ashore, turned it upside down to tip the water out cull-ed leaves and grass with which to cleanse it of the mud which had settled on the bottom; made a temporary dry floor by laying down a couple of long, stout boards which we found upon the shore; and finally summoned the ladies to come and witness the result. They were in raptures, and declared it to be "splendid."

Forthwith we all seated ourselves in the boat, bestowing ourselves as we chose; for, though there was a scarcity of seats, there was plenty of room. Julian Ferrean and Blanche Chetwoode sat down in the bow, and it seemed perfectly proper that they should have the highest and driest seat; for certainly we all considered Julian a little superior to us other men,—perhaps because the ladies set him at so high a valuation; or perhaps because he so considered himself. And as for Miss Chetwoode, she seemed more like a goddess than a mortal girl, as she sat there at the head of the boat, her black dress and lace mantilla falling in most artistic drapery around her stately figure.

Belle Blount sat at the stern, and Sidney reclined on the dry boards at her feet; while the rest of the party sat upon those same lucky boards, except Harry and I, who took the oarsman's seat and the one pair of oars,—an oar piece,—and we pushed out into the river.

How merry we were! How we sang songs and laughed, and grew witty as to jokes, and brilliant as to compliments! And Death, with his utmost horror, was almost spreading his dark wings over us every one! Why had we no foreboding of it? Why did none of those mysterious presentiments come to any of us such as people tell us they experience in hours of unconscious danger? For we were on the verge of deadly peril.

Growing tired at last of propelling this boat load of youth and beauty, I rested on my oar, and called to Tom Revere,—

"Come and take my place, Revere; you are a rowist, are you not?"

"Capital one," answered Tom, leaving Annie Grierson's side reluctantly but good-naturedly; and, giving Sidney Phillips a shove, he politely observed to that reclining individual,—

"Get up, Lazy Lawrence, and take Blount's oar. You're a complete dead-head."

"I—aw—don't wow," lazily returned Sidney.

"Come and learn, then."

"Can't possibly. Pway excuse me, my dear fellow; this oppressive heat takes all the enawgy out of a fellow."

"As if you ever had a particle of energy in your composition, you incorrigible idler!" exclaimed Julian Ferrean, as he came forward to relieve Harry.

In rising to relinquish his oar, Harry inadvertently let it slip from his hold. He made a snatch to recover it, but it had floated beyond reach ere his fingers touched the water. Half a dozen hands were outstretched to grasp it, but it escaped them all, and sped away before us with such arrow-like swiftness that we were startled. None of us had noticed where we were, nor how fast we had been moving, until now; and, as the

boat veered suddenly around, and began to glide stern-foremost after the fast-disappearing oar, Belle Blount gave utterance to the horror-stricken exclamation which was trembling upon every lip,—

"We are in the rapids!"

"And drifting toward the falls!" murmured Nora turning pale.

"My God!" said Julian Ferrean, in a hoarse whisper, and sank back white and faint into the seat from which he had arisen.

Tom Revere clutched his oar in a Herculean effort to head the boat toward the nearest shore. Slowly the bow came half way around, wavered for a moment—and then there was a cracking sound, and the frail oar snapped in twain! Tom fell backward among us, and the broken pieces of our last oar darted down the rapids.

A dead silence fell upon us all. We looked into each other's faces, and saw no hope. Every moment swept us nearer to the cataract, and the current rushed downward with such fearful velocity that no mortal man could swim ashore. It was an awful doom that stared us in the face. That was a time that tried our souls, and every one of us came out in true colors then.

Suddenly there was a crash,—a shock and jar that threw us all from our places and nearly overturned the boat. We were among the rocks; and as we struck the boat was held fast for a little space upon the hidden crag. Then were our hearts laid bare, our secrets revealed, and every man turned, with love's forgetfulness of self, to the woman he loved best,—all save one. Nora threw herself into my arms, and I clasped her to my heart; Tom Revere threw his arm about the waist of Annie Grierson; and Eustace Hardy knelt supporting the trembling form of Edna Reese. Harry Blount and his sister clasped hands, and calmly waited; and when Sidney Phillips bent over Belle, and spoke a quick request she lifted her pale lips and kissed him in silence, with that look of resignation which was fast settling upon all our faces—save one.

I thought I understood human nature, but I should never have taken Julian Ferrean for a coward. He was not a braggart, but there was an air about him which made one think he could be very brave, given the occasion; and now—not a girl screamed when we struck, but Julian Ferrean shrieked aloud and fell down in the boat, cowering in abject terror at the feet of Blanche Chetwoode.

They say that women love bravery in a man above other qualities; but perhaps there was so much of the masculine in Blanche Chetwoode's nature that she could dispense with a superabundance of manly spirit in the man she loved. I thought then, and think still, that she and Julian ought to have exchanged sexes, for she was the better man of the two. She seemed to feel no contempt for his more than womanish weakness. I believe it appeared to her as natural and excusable as Edna Reese's terror seemed to the lover who held her in his arms. She bent over the fellow as he groveled, moaning and whimpering, before her, and spoke to him in tender, pitiful accents, as if he had been a frightened child,—

"Julian do not give way in this manner. Look up, Julian, and try to think of the other world where we shall soon be all together."

"O Heaven, have mercy!" was all he answered; and he shrunk closer down nearer and nearer to her.

The boat began to grate and creak; another instant and we looked to see it part, and launch us into the torrent. Men clasped their loved ones closer, and women murmured low-toned prayers; but Julian threw up his hands with a cry, and clung to Blanche Chetwoode's garments.

"Blanche! Blanche! my darling! take hold of me! If I must die, let me die in your arms, for I love you!" he cried, in an agony of fright, to this woman whom he had known but a day. And I believe he fell in love with her in that very hour of trial for her strength and calmness. Yes, I believe it was then and there that they loved, each drawn to the other by those qualities that were lacking in themselves.

She drew his head upon her bosom, and tried to quiet his moaning; and I, who saw it all, despised him less for being almost dignified by the love of a woman so far his superior.

It is taking me a long time to tell of it but we hung upon that rock perhaps not more than two minutes. When the boat began to sway and creak, we thought that surely she was going to pieces; but it was not so. For a few seconds she strained and shivered like a living thing, and then the rushing water swept her off, and we darted onward toward the cataract.

At that moment, when hope seemed an idle thought, rose up our preserver, the hero of the occasion,—no other than Sidney Phillips!

"By Jove!"

He started up with a shout that made us all jump, and with a suddenness that half capsized the boat, and seized hold

of one of the long, wide boards which had been laid over the bottom of the boat.

"Let me have this board, quick!" he shouted, pulling at it frantically; and we all scrambled off with uncomprehending obedience.

In breaking away from the rock the boat had been whirled about, and was drifting now with her bow ahead; but already she was beginning to swing around again, when Sidney Phillips took the stout board and plunged it into the water at the stern, resting it in a deep notch which had once held the tiller. Tugging with all his might at his improvised rudder, he succeeded in turning the boat's head down the stream again.

But the pulling up of that board had disclosed a new fact. I do not say a new peril, for when death is certain, as it then seemed to us all, nothing can add to the awful conviction. In breaking away from the rock the boat had sprung a leak, and the water was pouring in through the parted joint. We saw it, but never gave a thought to it until Sidney cried,—

"By Jove! we've sprung a leak! Bwandon! Ferwean! There's two dippers in the cuddy. Take 'em and go to balling, or she will sink!"

It is strange to me now with what unquestioning alacrity I sprang to obey what seemed so useless a command. If we were to die, why not as well drown here as under the cataract? But I thought of nothing save prompt obedience. There and then Sidney Phillips was my master. I felt that, and obeyed him.

"Ferwean!" he shouted again. "Quick I say! Quick! What is the mattah with Ferwean?"

For the first time he noticed Ferrean's condition, and he uttered that exclamation in a tone of pure astonishment.

"Don't waste words on him; he's idiotic with fright. I've seen fellows in that condition in the army," said Tom Revere, as he possessed himself of the only remaining dipper and commenced to bail.

Sidney gave one look of blank wonder at the groveling figure of Julian; such cowardice was evidently beyond his comprehension. Then, still straining at the long sweep with which he kept us headed aright, he turned to the rest of us, and, with a look in his face that was a revelation to us all, he said,—

"We have yet one chance for life!"

Nobody uttered a word, but all eyes were fixed on him.

"You all know Bwown's mill-flume above the falls?" he said.

We all knew of it—the sluice of which I have spoken that carried water-power to the factory.

"This current will carry us within ten feet of it," Sidney continued, in the same steady tones. "The watah wuns through the flume as swift as these wapids. There must be a strong eddy at its mouth; and if we can head the boat that way, we may be drawn into the flume. It is narrow, and we can catch hold of the twes, and save ourselves. I'm going to try it."

Heaven! how sweet life became in that moment! How our hearts leaped with the quick impulse of returning hope!

"Now, then, you fellows, ball for deah life!" said our commander, tugging at his sweep, as the fierce current threatened to shift the boat, in spite of his utmost efforts. "Only keep us afloat, and we may be saved. If we pass that flume, though, we're bound to go ovan the catawact!"

In the midst of our deadly peril I recollect how I almost smiled at the ghastly ludicrousness of Sidney Phillip's fopish lip. It was not a natural defect but had been so long a studied affectation that it had become second nature, and clung to him now in this hour of his supreme heroism.

But, in other respects, who could have known Sidney Phillips? All the lazy, drawing languor of an hour ago had vanished. He stood there, master of the situation, with his white face and firm-set lips, with gray eyes blazing, and dilated nostrils, holding the rudder with a grip that made the cords stand out like ropes upon his slim, white hands. The task he had undertaken was evidently too much for his strength, and he called to Harry Blount,—

"Harwy, come and help me hold this wuddah; I can't stand this confounded stwain."

In an instant Harry was beside him, and Sidney said, in tones that cut the air, they were so keen and clear,—

"Catch hold there; that's it. We are getting neah the falls. Hold on now like gwah death!"

We were shooting forward with fearful swiftness. Ahead of us we saw the tossing waters and white mists of the cataract. Its thunder filled our ears, and hushed our very heart-beats. Suddenly we saw the narrow opening in the bank which was our only hope. Into it rushed a current of water in a swift, smooth green slope that made us dizzy to look upon.

"Now, Harwy!" spoke Sidney, in a quick, hoarse whisper. "Head her for the flume! Now!"

One mighty effort. Two strong men working for life and love against that surging torrent! The boat wavered for an instant, and then wheeled around and slid down that long, smooth slope, without a shake or tremor, and shot swiftly into the flume.

A sickening faintness came over me then, such as I never felt before or since. It lasted but an instant, and I fell to balling vigorously. Belle Blount struck her hands together, with a sharp "Ah!" Nora burst into tears; and Julian Ferrean started up as we rushed under the bending branches of a tree, and made a spring to catch them.

"Sit down, you idiot, or I'll brain you!" thundered Sidney, with menacing eyes. "Do you want to down us now?" Julian shrank down in silence, fearing the wrath of that man more than he feared death.

On we swept. The narrow banks were so close on either hand that we could almost touch them; but we dared not arrest the boat while it moved at such a rate of velocity.

The current slackened at last, and we began to move less rapidly. Sidney had left Harry to hold the rudder alone; and coming carefully forward, he took a coil of rope from the cuddy, and began to fasten it firmly to an iron ring in the bow. Then he stood up, and looked ahead. In advance of us, a great tree threw its branches quite across the canal and they bent so low as to touch the water.

"Catch hold of those bwanches with one hand, and hang on to the boat with the othah, all of you," he said, in a clear, distinct voice.

We all obeyed. As we swept in among the wet branches, we clung to them, and to the boat also; but Sidney, with the rope in his hand, leaped ashore. He fastened the rope to a stout sapling; and in three minutes we were all standing, safe at last, on terra firma.

As Sidney took Belle Blount from her brother's arms, and lifted her up the bank, he strained her to his heart in a long, passionate embrace, and the tears poured down his cheeks like rain.

"Belle! Belle!" he uttered, in choking sobs.

"Sidney!" she answered softly, with her head on his breast.

And then the storm of emotion was over, and he released her from his clasping arms. And, as we all stood there, he uncovered his head, and bowed it, saying, in tones of the deepest reverence,—

"God be thanked!"

With bare, bent heads, we all responded to that prayer of thank,—the most heart-felt prayer I ever listened to.

We stood in silence for a moment. Then Sidney turned, and held out his hand to Belle. She placed her own within it, and without a word we followed them as they led the way to the road that was near at hand.

We walked back to Chetwoode Hall in perfect silence. There was no necessity for speech, and nobody spoke.

As we entered at the gate, Rose Ferrean and Roy came forward to meet us; but the saucy smile died out of Rose's face, and the boyish mischief fled from Roy's, as they noted our sober faces, and wet, disheveled appearance.

"Why, what on earth has happened to you?" cried Rose. "How did you all get so wet?"

"Did you—aw—catch any fish, Miss Wose?" and Sidney Phillips was himself again.

The explanation and the sensation that followed our arrival in such a state shall be "skipped," as also all the rest of that eventful day, until the time arrived, when, refreshed by "ten," and somewhat reconstructed as to dress, and revived as to spirits, we assembled in the parlor to make our adieux. Then it was that Sidney Phillips spoke.

"Does anybody wemenbah anything about an antimatwimonial awangement that was contwived heah a few houahs ago?"

That was a crusher. Everybody looked at his neighbor in blank confusion. The gentlemen finally began to laugh, and the ladies to blush, and the indomitable Sidney continued:

"Allow me to make a statement and a woposition.—Belle, my angel, don't run off.—You undabstand, ladies and gentlemen, that Belle and your humble servant are anxious to entah into that—aw—pwosewibed state of matwimony."

Here Belle blushed to the roots of her hair, and said hastily,—

"Sidney Phillips!"

But he laughed, and proceeded, with great gravity.

"And, to the best of my observation, all othah membahs of this club are in the same pwedicament. Now I move that our antimatwimonial club be mutually dissolved."

"Second the motion," cried E. squeezing Nora Chetwoode's hand.

Nobody objected, and "our antimatwimonial club" was necessarily dissolved

on the spot, by mutual consent, after enjoying a turbulent existence of about five hours' duration.

Since then, several marriages have taken place among its members, the first of which was that of Julian Ferrean and Blanche Chetwoode. He followed her home to the city, and married her there; and there he remained. We do not miss him from our set; for none of us forget what a poltroon he showed himself in that trying hour which held us all up in our true colors, and our former admiration for him is altered to contempt.

Sidney Phillips is our "Hon'" now. We no longer despise him for his laziness, and we rather admire his foppish ways and his super-extra neatness of apparel. Whenever a leader is wanted in any undertaking, be it for pleasure or profit, and anybody is superfluous enough to ask who shall fill the position, the rest of us answer with one voice,—Harry Blount's usually.

"Phillips, of course."

Sidney married Belle Blount, and I am going to marry little Nora.

As for Rose Ferrean there has been no engagement announced, to be sure; but after our league was dissolved, that night, I saw her standing on the veranda, while Harry wrapped her shawl about her, preparatory to accompanying her home, and I heard him say.

"Rose, I think you took a very sensible view of the marriage question this morning. Tell me, darling, do you consider me at all desirable?"

"Oh, don't be silly?" was the reply of Rose.

But I fancy she did not think him very foolish, judging from the fact that she offered no remonstrance of which I will not particularize.

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