

The Recognition
by Amy Graham

“WE are all so sorry!”

Emily Dunbar, looking through the mist that tears made over her dark eyes, saw faces round her that fully certified to the truth of the exclamation.

She was standing in the broad hall of the “Young Ladies’ Seminary,” of Oak Hall, the centre of a group of sympathizing schoolmates who had assembled to bid her farewell. Only one hour before a telegraph, cruel in its brevity, had summoned her home to her father’s death-bed, and before her melancholy packing was finished a second brief message told her she was too late for one parting word, and could only see the face she loved still in death. Her breaking heart silenced all words of answer as her companion’s words of sorrow fell upon her ears; she could only grasp the hands extended to her in close clasps of friendship, and sob broken words of thanks. One hand, the last extended, lingered long in hers, and Fanny Watson’s low, sweet voice broke the stillness that followed the departure of the others from the hall.

“Dear Emily, I have no words to tell you how I grieve for you! But you will consider me your best friend always, will you not? You will come to me if you need any service, Emily?”

“Indeed, indeed I will!”

“Good-by, then! Remember I am first friend.” And with the fond kiss of friendship upon her lips, Emily drove to the station.

She had been very happy in her school life, for her early childhood home had been but a pleasant visiting-place for the holidays. Her mother she had lost before she was old enough to print her face upon her memory, and she had gone from her nurse’s care to that of the principal of Oak Hall, under whose care she had been educated and trained. Her father, the indulgent master of the lovely house where she and Rupert, her only brother, passed their holidays, she had loved tenderly, and it was with a sore heart and bitter sense of orphanhood that she obeyed the summons to his funeral.

Other troubles were to follow. Lovingly, and with gentle preparation, Rupert broke to her news of utter destitution, of debt contracted to maintain an expensive household, of indulgences for these idolized children beyond their father’s reach, and finally of failure, bankruptcy, and death. Lying in her brother’s arms, in the luxurious drawing-room, looking into his bright, earnest face, the truth did not seem too terrible to bear; but when the house was sold, a little room taken for each taken in a boarding-house, and when day after day the animated face that had been so hopeful grew paler and sadder under the burden of enforced idleness, then Emily realized where was the thing of poverty.

Educated for a physician, without having had time to gain practice, Rupert Dunbar found no employment that he dared undertake. Clerking required some experience before the salary could support two; of trade he knew nothing; his diploma, but a month old when his father died,

seemed valueless when compared with that of established practitioners, and there seemed no opening for his labor, no prospect of work.

“Let me try.”

Emily fairly trembled at her own audacity when she saw the pain her proposal gave; but under her slight girlish figure she carried a brave woman’s heart, and she persisted in her resolve.

“Let me try. I have received a finished education, can draw, paint, speak German and French, and certainly understand enough of music for a really good teacher. Do let me try to get employment, Rupert.”

“You lady-bird, darling. What would our father say if he saw me thus shirking my duty to you?”

“You are not shirking. You have tried, and you will yet succeed in obtaining work, but in the mean time let me be a help and not a burden to you. Fanny Wilson was here this morning, and she—she—”

“Well, Emily?”

“Told me of the situation.”

“She is very kind!”

“Don’t speak bitterly, Rupert; she *is* very kind. She has seen for weeks how I longed to aid you, and to-day she told me of a family who are looking for a governess, and would take me upon her recommendation. You will let me go, brother. Think how much more *you* can do, if you are not hampered by me. We can still see each other, and I know you will feel freer to seek employment if I am in a pleasant home.”

“How do you know it will be pleasant?”

“It will! I will make it so.”

It required many a long argument to win the loving brother to view the case as his warm-hearted sister did, but an interview with Mr. Lee, the father of the children Emily wished to instruct, turned the scale so long quivering. The gentleman, a prosperous merchant, was deeply interested in the orphans, idolized Fanny Wilson, his wife’s niece, and was delighted with Emily. Hearing of Rupert’s situation, he offered him a seat in his counting-house to learn business, and placed a salary small, but not enough for a support at his command. Feeling that he could still protect his sister, and see her constantly, Rupert gave a reluctant consent to her entering upon the duties of a governess in the merchant’s family.

Two years passed pleasantly for the orphans, with but one cloud to mar their happiness.

“Something.” Emily whispered to her heart, “something ailed Rupert.” From a frank, merry boy, full of mischief and animation, he had become a grave and reserved man, shrinking often from

his sister's offered caress, growing pale and careworn, and evidently suffering much mental pain. Emily watched and wondered; striving by many feminine arts to win his confidence, but finding her efforts vain, suffered in silence. It was the second anniversary of her father's death, and she was seated in her little room after school hours, when Rupert came to her. Something of the old light was in his face, some of the long lost spring in his step, as he entered.

"Emily, can you spare me for three years?"

"Three years, Rupert!"

"Don't look so white; don't faint!"

"No, no—but—three years—what?" she gasped.

"Assistant surgeon in the navy. Think what a chance! The commission is offered to me. Oh, let me go! Emily, sister, darling, let me go."

"Down, down, coward heart! Was not his heart in his profession? Did not each hour at the desk steal from his very life? Was her selfish love to take away this joy from him? All surged up in her heart, to her lips as she said—

"Yes, Rupert, you must go."

He appreciated the sacrifice, and drew her to his heart in one long, fervent embrace.

There was little time for thought in the next few weeks. An outfit had to be prepared from limited resources, and the sister's fingers busily stitched whenever blinding tears did not arrest her needle. Little luxuries Rupert had long given up found their way into the sea-chest, and Emily never valued her salary as she did when it permitted such purchases.

It was all ready at last, and the evening for farewell came only too soon. The vessel was to sail from New York on a three years' cruise, and Rupert had waited for the midnight train to spend the last precious hours with Emily.

Something of the sadness which had yielded to his late joy, came to cloud this farewell interview. Some untold grief marred the confidence Emily hoped for. Some secret rose in his heart to check words she knew were almost on his lips, and grieving over his reserve she yet strove to let no word of question pain him.

As he pressed his farewell kiss upon her lips he said:—

"Emily, Mr. Lee to-day sent me to his head clerk for my quarter's salary, to-day, though it is one month short; you must let me leave you this; to repay some of the expenses you have incurred for my outfit. Good-by, darling! God keep you!" And he was gone, leaving a note for one hundred dollars pressed in her hand.

She scarcely heeded the gift in her first agony of grief, tossing it carelessly into an open drawer when she sought her own room to wrestle with the bitter pain of separation, and try to banish the overwhelming thought of three years of loneliness.

Mrs. Lee was kindly thoughtful the next day, sending the children abroad for a long walk, and trying, by gentle caresses and loving words, to make the orphan feel that she was not friendless.

At dinner-time, the master of the house wore a clouded brow. The children's chatter, so unfailing at other times, passed unheeded now; even his wife's low voice seemed to fall upon deaf ears. Suddenly, pushing his untasted dinner from him, he spoke of the cause of his abstraction.

"Lucy, I have been robbed!"

"Robbed!" echoed round the table.

"Not once, now twice, but many times. I have been convinced for some months that money was abstracted from my private desk. Twice I have had the key altered, but still missing money. At last I placed a marked note for one hundred dollars there, and took the number. It was on H—— Bank, No. 2, 800, and I put a cross in red ink in one corner. Last night I missed it. To-day there has been a search made, but the note cannot be found. To-morrow I shall place the whole affair in the hands of a detective."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"Yes; but I cannot fix my suspicions enough to warrant me in naming them. To-morrow I will take active measures to prove them false or true."

"Have you lost much?"

"More than I can well afford, though not enough to injure my business. You see it must have been going on for some time before my suspicions were aroused. So much uncounted money goes into that desk, that even when I feared there was less, I could not be certain."

"Do your hands know?"

"Not yet. I hope to catch the thief off his guard."

More conversation on the same subject followed, until the family left the table, and Emily went to her own room. Feeling that it was wrong to give way to her despondency, she resolved to occupy herself with the children, and called Sophie, the eldest, a lovely girl of fourteen, to take a French lesson.

"You will find your last exercise in my table-drawer, Sophie," she said, as the willing child answered her call. "Bring it to me for correction."

The little girl opened the drawer, and stood as if spell-bound, gazing into it. Every shade of color left her face, and she trembled violently.

“Come, Sophie! Why, dear child, are you ill?” cried Emily, going quickly to her side, and then reeling back as if from a heavy blow. For there, where she had tossed it the night before, lay the note, Rupert’s parting gift, the note, 2,800 on the H—— Bank, with Lee’s red cross in one corner. There was a long silence, broken at last by the child’s sobbing voice.

“Oh, Miss Dunbar, how did it get there?”

“Hush, Sophie, hush; let me think. I—I think I know. Stay here for an hour, and if I am not back then, take the note to your father.”

An hour. By hasty walking she could catch the afternoon train for New York. Perhaps Rupert had not sailed. He would explain! She almost ran to the nearest corner, caught the car, and was on her way to the depot before Sophie realized that she was alone, with the stolen note lying before her.

Only to see Rupert! Rupert would explain. Emily repeated this hope to her sick heart as she was carried rapidly over the New York road. Her purse still held some twenty dollars of her last quarter’s salary, and she could return again after her brother had told her how the note came into his possession. But as the hours crept on, other thoughts crowded on her brain, and would not be driven back. Rupert’s long reserve, his pale face and restless manner, the many instances of his want of confidence that had puzzled and pained her, all came rushing over her heart, till she could have cried out with agony. A thief. Her noble brother, whom she had almost worshipped, a thief. Yet if, in moments of temptation, when poverty’s face was too black for his courage, he *had* what?—robbed his employer! Oh, if the train would fly forward. To see him! only to see him!

It was night when at last the ferry boat left its load of passengers at the New York wharf, and Emily engaged the first hackman who spoke to her.

“Can you tell me whether the ‘Ariadne’ has sailed?”

“Lor’ yes, ma’am; sailed at six this morning!”

“You are sure?” she gasped, as this last hope was wrenched from her.

“Certain, ma’am. What hotel?”

“What hotel? Where could she go? She stood, stunned and bewildered, hardly conscious of the jostling crowd or impatient hackmen.

“Miss Emily? Can it be possible this is my little Miss Emily?”

A friendly voice and grasp of her hand. Emily's pale lips quivered a moment, and then she fainted into the arms of the speaker.

"Bless my soul! Here, Martha! Ellen! Where are you, girls?"

"Here, papa! Can we ever get out of this crowd? Why, where? what? Papa?"

"Yes, my dear. It is Emily Dunbar."

"Emily Dunbar. Alone here on the wharf?"

Propriety shrank back, but papa called a hack and carried his senseless burden into it, the two girls following with puzzled faces.

"There, now, take care of her while I get the baggage." And papa bustled away.

Something in the pallid, inanimate face of their old friend and schoolfellow wakened the womanly hearts of Martha and Ellen Baxter, and before their father returned they had found salts and wine in their neat travelling bags, and were working heartily to call life back to the pale face. "There, never mind; you can tell us all about it at the hotel," said Mr. Baxter, as Emily opened her eyes and tried to speak. "Don't talk now. You're all right! I'm taking you to the St. Nicholas, and to-morrow you can go wherever you were going when you met me. There, there! don't cry. Poor child! some new grief. Think, Martha and Ellen, if it was I you were wearing that for," and he touched the black dress.

"Rupert," gasped Emily.

"Not dead?"

"No—sailed this morning in the 'Ariadne!' Assistant Surgeon. I was too late to see him."

"He didn't run away?"

"No, no; but I was too late!"

"There, there, don't talk about it. Too bad! You can tell us all about it to-morrow."

And, overcome by fatigue and excitement, Emily was only too glad to be taken up to a bedroom and told to rest quietly until morning.

It was a night of sore perplexity; but before morning her resolve was taken. She could never return to Mr. Lee. They would suppose her a thief when Sophie told her story. Well, better so than to think Rupert one. She would tell the Baxters enough to explain her appearance upon the wharf, and then try to gain employment in New York. They would recommend her, she felt sure. They had known her from a little child, and only her deep mourning and busily employed time had caused the intimacy to languish in the past two years. Yet if they ever met the Lees! Poor

Emily was dizzy with painful thought long before the breakfast gong broke in upon her reflection.

Mr. Baxter listened with kind interest to her story. That she had been a governess, but had left her situation suddenly, to try to see Rupert once more, was all she told of herself, and their inference that she had come from some far distant point, she did not contradict. She had lost her baggage, she said, left it behind her in her hurry to catch a train.

“Dear, dear, what a pity! I have no time to hunt it up for you, for you see the girls and I are going to Europe in to-day’s steamer. Now my dear, are you going back?”

“I cannot! I have forfeited my situation by running off so suddenly.”

“What folly!” rose to Mr. Baxter’s lips, but he glanced at the pale face and suppressed the exclamation.

“Papa!” said Martha, and dragged him off to a distant window for a long whispered conference, while Ellen caressed Emily and scolded at the hard-hearted people who would have prevented her seeing Rupert off. The pair at the window became very animated, but at last Ellen’s curiosity was relieved.

“Emily,” said Martha, crossing the room with a jump and slide, “you can speak French, can’t you, and German?”

“Yes.”

“Then papa wants you to come with us. Nell and I have a kind of hodge-podge we call French, but are as ignorant as owls of German, and you can be our interpreter.”

“Miss Dunbar,” said Mr. Baxter, “will you accompany us as a governess and companion for these two madcap girls of mine?”

“Ah, do; say yes!” said Ellen, kissing her.

“You say Rupert will be gone for three years. We will return before then, so you can be here to meet him. Martha says she can help you about the lost baggage.”

“Oh, yes, we have oceans of clothes. You will only want a black dress or two. Do say yes,” pleaded Ellen.

“But I have no references, no—”

“Pshaw! Who is a better reference than your father’s old friend, who has known you from a baby? To be sure, you have buried yourself pretty well since your father died, but Martha and Ellen never tire of telling wonders of your scholarship at Oak Hall. Look in my eyes, Emily.”

She obeyed.

“Steady now. You have never done anything that makes you an unfit companion for my motherless girls?”

“Never! so help me Heaven in my utmost need!” said Emily, solemnly, meeting his eyes with a steady, firm gaze.

“I believe you, dear. You will go with us?”

“Thankfully.”

It is in vain to attempt to describe the consternation at Mr. Lee’s when Sophie, having patiently waited her hour, came to the sitting room with the lost note in her hand. Emily or Rupert? Emily or Rupert? Who was the thief? The one far on the Atlantic before this; the other—where? All night the gentle mother watched for the unhappy girl’s return, but watched in vain. Mr. Lee could but place this new evidence in the hands of the detective, though none of his former suspicions pointed to Rupert. Indeed, some of the evidence he laid before that grave official contradicted entirely any such appearance of guilt. Fanny Watson’s distress was uncontrollable. She would not hear her friend’s name coupled with guilt, and indignantly protested against any accusation of Rupert. Yet there was the note!

And while Mr. Lee advertises for his runaway governess, while Fanny distractedly haunts railroad depots and wharves in that vain hope of seeing the dark eyes and short curls of her friend, while the grave detective steadily sifts evidence, and watches hourly for proof of guilt, Emily in her new position is far away, “outward bound.”

Meeting only love and kindness from her new friends, filling her hours with teaching and study, training the girls in French, and initiating them into the mysteries of German, she passes the day usefully, and thankfully realizes the mercies of her lot. Yet the agony of suspense, the bitter suspicions are undermining her health and spirits, and it requires all her self-control not to let her pupils see her grief. Worst of all, she has cut herself off from communication with her brother. She cannot write, and his letters will be directed to Mr. Lee’s care. They will write, will tell him all, and then—will he appreciate her sacrifice, or, himself innocent, blame her for thus casting suspicion upon him?

The foreign lands that would have been a dream of delight to her a year ago, the galleries and scenes, the wonders of the old world of which she has heard and read, pass before her numbed heart like a dream, and only duty keeps her calm and attentive to her pupils. Still, as the months passed on, she found youth would seek relief from sorrow, and unconsciously the interest came back, and her sore heart clung to the kind friends who met her in her desolation. Time, which heals the sorest wounds, was laying his fingers over her heart, and ever-present duty and constant change were bringing back her smiles, while hope whispered words of comfort. Three years would soon pass, then she would see Rupert, and he would explain all.

Two years passed rapidly, and then the Baxters recrossed the Atlantic. It was in July that they landed in Boston, and resolved before returning home to pass away the hot months at Nahant. Emily, who had shrunk from parting, willingly agreed to accompany them to the watering-place, to remain until fall. Return home before the three years were over, she dared not. She had seen, in her long exile, notices of the “Ariadne’s” safety, and more she could not hope for until Rupert’s return.

There was one spot, not far from the hotel, where she became fond of lingering. It was not in the regular walks taken by frequenters of watering-place, and she soon made it a daily resort. There with her sketch-book or some needlework she passed the hours when most of the visitors slept away the time, namely, in the early afternoon. She had learned, early in her self-imposed martyrdom, to avoid sleeping during the day, finding every hour’s work and wakefulness added to her rest at night, and while Martha and Ellen napped away the hours, she touched up sketches, read and sewed till they were awake and ready for her music or chat.

It was not many days after her arrival, when she was seated in her favorite spot, fancying herself safe from any intrusion, that, close behind her, she heard:—

“Fanny, look! look at that young girl sketching! I am sure it is Emily Dunbar!”

She tried to rise to flee, but could only look up in wild helplessness.

A cry of “Emily, dear, dear Emily!” followed Mrs. Lee’s recognition, and Fanny Watson was sobbing over her, kissing her lips, cheeks and eyes, scolding and caressing all at once.

“Oh, how could you? how could you? Do not speak! I know why you ran off! You simpleton, not to wait till the truth came out.”

“The truth!” gasped Emily.

“You don’t deserve to hear it! It was the head clerk. Uncle Robert suspected it, and the detective proved it. He took thousands of dollars.”

“But the note?”

“He confessed when he saw that all was found out. The note he took the day before Rupert left, and slipped it in amongst his money, knowing he would sail the next day, and hoping he would not pass it at home.”

“But,” said the bewildered girl, “what made Rupert so strange, so—”

“He was in love, and—afraid I would not love a poor clerk. He has written it all since, for his position now is secure, and his anxiety about you broke down all fancied barriers. He will be home in a year, and—and—Emily, will you have me for a sister?”

Mrs. Lee here claimed a share in the joy, and Emily went back to the hotel to introduce the new arrivals to the Baxters, and clear up the mystery they had never questioned.

Rupert's letters were the next joy, and after reading all his loving interest in her disappearance, his pain at his own inability to aid in searching for her, she could echo his cry—

“Oh, how could she doubt me, or dare to peril her own good name by fleeing when she was innocent? Poor Emily! God guard her and bring her home soon, to feel that no one may safely undertake to bear another's guilt.”

One year later, there was a grand wedding at Mr. Watson's, and in all the group of happy hearts none throbbed with a purer joy than that of the dark-eyes bridesmaid, Emily Dunbar.

Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine, April 1865
Hartford Daily Courant, September 14 & 15, 1866
The South Side Signal [Babylon, NY], May 4, 1878