

**A WOMAN
VENTURES**

A NOVEL

BY
DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I. THE SHIPWRECK.

CHAPTER II. THE DESERT ISLAND.

CHAPTER III. SAIL—HO!

CHAPTER IV. A BLACK FLAG.

CHAPTER V. THE PENITENT PIRATE.

CHAPTER VI. A CHANGED CRUSOE.

CHAPTER VII. BACK TO THE MAINLAND.

CHAPTER VIII. AMONG A STRANGE PEOPLE.

CHAPTER IX. AN ORCHID HUNTER.

CHAPTER X. FURTHER EXPLORATION.

CHAPTER XI. SEEN FROM A BARRICADED WINDOW.

CHAPTER XII. A RISE AND A FALL.

CHAPTER XIII. A COMPROMISE WITH CONVENTIONALITY.

CHAPTER XIV. "EVERYTHING AWAITS MADAME."

CHAPTER XV. A FLICKERING FIRE.

CHAPTER XVI. EMBERS.

CHAPTER XVII. ASHES.

CHAPTER XVIII. "THE REAL TRAGEDY OF LIFE."

CHAPTER XIX. EMILY REFUSES CONSOLATION.

CHAPTER XX. BACHELOR GIRLS.

CHAPTER XXI. A "MARRIED MAN."

CHAPTER XXII. A PRECIPICE.

CHAPTER XXIII. A "BETTER SELF."

CHAPTER XXIV. TO THE TEST.

CHAPTER XXV. MR. GAMMELL PRESUMES.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE TRUTH ABOUT A ROMANCE.

CHAPTER XXVII. "IN MANY MOODS."

CHAPTER XXVIII. A FORCED ADVANCE.

CHAPTER XXIX. A MAN AND A "PAST."

CHAPTER XXX. TWO AND A TRIUMPH.

CHAPTER XXXI. WHERE PAIN IS PLEASURE.

CHAPTER XXXII. THE HIGHWAY OF HAPPINESS.

CHAPTER XXXIII. LIGHT.



EMILY.

A Woman Ventures.

CHAPTER I. THE SHIPWRECK.

WENTWORTH Bromfield was mourned by his widow and daughter with a depth that would have amazed him.

For twenty-one years he had been an assistant secretary in the Department of State at Washington—a rather conspicuous position, with a salary of four thousand a year. Influential relatives representing Massachusetts in the House or in the Senate, and often in both, had enabled him to persist through changes of administration and of party control, and to prevail against the “pull” of many an unplaced patriot. Perhaps he might have been a person of consequence had he exercised his talents in some less insidiously lazy occupation. He had begun well at the law; but in return for valuable local services to the party, he got the offer of this political office, and, in what he came to regard as a fatal moment, he accepted it. His wife—he had just married—said that he was “going in for a diplomatic career.” He faintly hoped so himself, but the warnings of his common sense were soon verified. “Diplomatic career” proved to be a sonorous name for a decent burial of energy and prospects.

He had drawn his salary year after year. He had gone languidly through his brief daily routine at the Department. He had been mildly fluttered at each Presidential election, and again after each inauguration. He had indulged in futile impulses to self-

resurrection, in severe attacks of despondency. Then, at thirty-seven, he had grasped the truth—that he would remain an assistant secretary to the end of his days. Thenceforth aspirations and depressions had ceased, and his life had set to a cynical sourness. He read, he sneered, he ate, and slept.

The Bromfields had a small additional income—Mrs. Bromfield's twelve hundred a year from her father's estate. This was most important, as it represented a margin above comfort and necessity, a margin for luxury and for temptation to extravagance. Mr. Bromfield was fond of good dinners and good wines, and he could not enjoy them at the expense of his friends without an occasional return. Mrs. Bromfield had been an invalid after the birth of Emily, long enough to form the habit of invalidism. After Emily passed the period when dress is not a serious item, they went ever more deeply into debt.

While Mrs. Bromfield's craze for doctors and drugs was in one view as much an extravagance as Mr. Bromfield's club, in another view it was a valuable economy. It made entertaining impossible; it enabled Emily to go everywhere without the necessity for return hospitalities, and to "keep up appearances" generally. Many of their friends gave Mrs. Bromfield undeserved credit for shrewdness and calculation in her hypochondria.

Emily had admirers, and, in her first season, one fairly good chance to marry. The matchmakers who were interested in her—"for her mother's sake," they said, but in fact from the matchmaking mania,—were exasperated by her refusal. They remonstrated with her mother in vain.

“I know, I know,” sighed Mrs. Bromfield. “But what can I do? Emily is so headstrong and I am in such feeble health. I am forbidden the agitation of a discussion. I’ve told Emily that a girl without money, and with nothing but family, must be careful. But she won’t listen to me.”

Mrs. Ainslie, the most genuinely friendly of all the women who insured their own welcome by chaperoning a clever, pretty, popular girl, pressed the matter upon Emily with what seemed to her an impertinence to be resented.

“Don’t be offended, child,” said Mrs. Ainslie, replying to Emily’s haughty coldness. “You ought to thank me. I only hope you will never regret it. A girl without a dot can’t afford to trifle. A second season is dangerous, especially here in Washington, where they bring the babies out of the nursery to marry them off.”

“Why, you yourself used to call Bob Fulton one of nature’s poor jokes,” Emily retorted. “You overlooked these wonderful good qualities in him until he began to annoy me.”

“Sarcasm does not change the facts.” Mrs. Ainslie was irritated in her even-tempered, indifferent fashion. “You think you’ll wait and look about you. But let me tell you, my dear, precious few girls, even the most eligible of them, have more than one really good chance to marry. Oh, I know what they say. But they exaggerate flirtations into proposals. This business—yes, *business*—of marrying isn’t so serious a matter with the men as it is with us. And we can’t hunt; we must sit and wait. In this day the stupidest men are crafty enough to see through the subtlest kind of stalking.”

Emily had no reply. She could think of no arguments except those of the heart. And she felt that it would be ridiculous to bring them into the battering and bruising of this discussion.

It was in May that she refused her "good chance." In June her father fell sick. In mid-July they buried him and drove back from the cemetery to face ruin.

Ruin, in domestic finance, has meanings that range from the borderland of comedy to the blackness beyond tragedy.

The tenement family, thrust into the street and stripped of their goods for non-payment of rent, find in ruin an old acquaintance. They take a certain pleasure in the noise and confusion which their uproarious bewailing and beratings create throughout the neighbourhood. They enjoy the passers-by pausing to pity them, a ragged and squalid group, homeless on the curb. They have been ruined many times, will be ruined many times. They are sustained by the knowledge that there are other tenements, other "easy-payment" merchants. A few hours, a day or two at most, and they are completely reestablished and are busy making new friends among their new neighbours, exchanging reminiscences of misfortune and rumours of ideal "steady jobs."

The rich family suddenly ruined has greater shock and sorrow. But usually there are breaks in the fall. A son or a daughter has married well; the head of the family gets business opportunities through rich friends; there is wreckage enough to build up a certain comfort, to make the descent into poverty gradual, almost gentle.

But to such people as the Bromfields the word *ruin* meant—ruin. They had not had enough to lose to make their catastrophe seem important to others; indeed, the fact that a little was saved made their friends feel like congratulating them. But the ruin was none the less thorough. They were shorn of all their best belongings—all the luxury that was through habit necessity. They must give up the comfortable house in Connecticut Avenue, where they had lived for twenty years. They must leave their associations, their friends. They must go to a New England factory village. And there they would have a tiny income, to be increased only by the exertions of two women, one a helpless hypochondriac, both ignorant of anything for which any one would give pay. And this cataclysm was wrought within a week.

“Fate will surely strike the finishing blow,” thought Emily, as she wandered drearily through the dismantling house. “We shall certainly lose the little we have left.” And this spectre haunted her wakeful nights for weeks.

Mr. Bromfield was not a “family man.” He had left his wife and home first to the neglect of servants, and afterward to the care of his daughter. As Emily grew older and able to judge his life-failure, his vanity, his selfishness—the weaknesses of which he was keenly conscious, he saw or fancied he saw in her clear eyes a look that irritated him against himself, against her, and against his home. He was there so rarely that the women never took him into account. Yet instead of bearing his death with that resigned fortitude which usually characterises the practical, self-absorbed human race in its dealings with the inevitable, they mourned him day and night.

After one of his visits of business and consolation, General Ainslie returned home with tears in his eyes.

“It is wonderful, wonderful!” he said in his “sentimental” voice—a tone which his wife understood and prepared to combat. She liked his sentimental side, but she had only too good reason to deplore its influence upon his judgment.

“What now?” she inquired.

“I’ve been to see Wentworth’s widow and daughter. It was most touching, Abigail. He always neglected them, yet they mourn him in a way that a better man might envy.”

“Mourn him? Why, he was never at home. They hardly knew him.”

“Yet I have never seen such grief.”

“Grief? Of course. But not for him. They don’t miss him; they miss his salary—his four thousand a year. And that’s the kind of grief you can’t soothe. The real house of mourning is the house that’s lost its breadwinner.”

General Ainslie looked uncomfortable.

“Do you remember that Chinese funeral we saw at Peking, George?” his wife continued. “Do you remember the widows in covered cages dragging along behind the corpse—and the big fellow with the prod walking behind each cage? And whenever the widows stopped howling, don’t you remember how those prods were worked until the response from inside was satisfactory?”

“Yes, but—really, I must say, Abbie——”

“Well, George—poverty is the prod. No wonder they mourn Wentworth.”

General Ainslie looked foolish. “I guess I won’t confess,” he said to himself, “that it was this afternoon I told the Bromfields they had only five hundred a year and the house in Stoughton. It would encourage her in her cynicism.”

CHAPTER II. THE DESERT ISLAND.

THREE months later—August, September, and October, the months of Stoughton's glory—gave Emily Bromfield a minute acquaintance with all that lay within her new horizon. She was as familiar with Stoughton as Crusoe with his island—and was in a Crusoe-like state of depression. She thought she had found the lowest despond of which human nature is capable on the day she saw the top of the Washington monument disappear, saw the last of the city of her enjoyments and her hopes. But now she dropped to a still lower depth—that depth in which the heart becomes a source of physical discomfort, the appetite fails, the brain sinks into a stupor and the health begins to decline.

“Don't be so blue, Emmy,” Mrs. Ainslie had said at the station as they were leaving Washington. “Nothing is as bad as it seems in advance. Even Stoughton will have its consolations—though I must confess I can't think what they could be at this distance.”

But the proverb was wrong and Stoughton as a reality was worse than Stoughton as a foreboding.

At first Emily was occupied in arranging their new home—creeper-clad, broad of veranda and viewing a long sloping lawn where the sun and the moon traced the shadows of century-old trees. She began to think that Stoughton was not so bad after

all. The “best people” had called and had made a good impression. Her mother had for the moment lifted herself out of peevish and tearful grief, and had ceased giving double weight to her daughter’s oppressive thoughts by speaking them. But illusion and delusion departed with the departing sense of novelty.

Nowhere does nature do a kindlier summer work than in Stoughton. In winter the trees and gardens and lawns, worse than naked with their rustling or crumbling reminders of past glory, expose the prim rows of prim houses and the stiff and dull life that dozes behind their walls. In winter no one could be deceived as to what living in Stoughton meant—living in it in the sense of being forced there from a city, forced to remain permanently.

But in summer, nature charitably lends Stoughton a corner of the gorgeous garment with which she adorns its country. The sun dries the muddy streets and walks, and the town slumbers in comfort under huge trees, whose leaves quiver with what seems to be the gentle joy of a quiet life. The boughs and the creepers conspire to transform hideous little houses into crystallised songs of comfort and content. The lawns lie soft and green and restful. The gardens dance in the homely beauty of lilac and hollyhock and wild rose. Those who then come from the city to Stoughton sigh at the contrast of this poetry with the harsh prose of city life. They wonder at the sombre faces of the old inhabitants, at the dumb and stolid expression of youth, at the fierce discontent which smoulders in the eyes of a few.

But if they stay they do not wonder long. For the town in the bare winter is the real town the year round. The town of summer, tricked out in nature's borrowed finery, is no more changed than was the jackdaw by his stolen peacock plumes. The smile, the gaiety, is on the surface. The prim, solemn old heart of Stoughton is as unmoved as when the frost is biting it.

In the first days of November Emily Bromfield, walking through the wretched streets under bare black boughs and a gray sky, had the full bitterness of her castaway life forced upon her. She felt as if she were suffocating.

She had been used to the gayest and freest society in America. Here, to talk as she had been used to talking and to hearing others talk, would have produced scandal or stupefaction. To act as she and her friends acted in Washington, would have set the preachers to preaching against her. There was no one with whom she could get into touch. She had instantly seen that the young men were not worth her while. The young women, she felt, would meet her advances only in the hope of getting the materials for envious gossip about her.

"It will be years," she said to herself, "before I shall be able to narrow and slacken myself to fit this place. And why should I? Of what use would life be?"

She soon felt how deeply Stoughton disapproved of her, chiefly, as she thought, because she did not conceal her resentment against its prying and peeping inquiry and its narrow judgments. She was convinced that but for her bicycle and her books she would go mad. Her ever-present idea, conscious or sub-conscious, was, "How get away from Stoughton?" A

hundred times a day she repeated to herself, or aloud in the loneliness of her room, "How? how? how?" sometimes in a frenzy; again, stupidly, as if "how" were a word of a complex and difficult meaning which she could not grasp.

But there was never any answer.

She had formerly wished at times that she were a man. Now, she wished it hourly. That seemed the only solution of the problem of her life—that, or marriage. And she felt she might as hopefully wish the one as the other.

Year by year, with a patience as slow and persevering as that of a colony of coral insects, Stoughton developed a small number of youth of both sexes. Year by year the railroads robbed her of her best young men, leaving behind only such as were stupid or sluggish. Year by year the young women found themselves a twelvemonth nearer the fate of the leaves which the frost fails to cut off and disintegrate. For a few there was the alternative of marrying the blighted young men—a desperate adventure in the exchange of single for double or multiple burdens.

Some of the young women rushed about New England, visiting its towns, and finding each town a reproduction of Stoughton. Some went to the cities a visiting, and returned home dazed and baffled. A few bettered themselves in their quest; but more only increased their discontent, or, marrying, regretted the ills they had fled. Those who married away from home about balanced those who were deprived of opportunities to marry, by the girl visitors from other towns, who caught with their new faces and new man-catching tricks the Stoughton eligible-ineligibles.

At twenty a Stoughton girl began to be anxious. At twenty-five, the sickening doubt shot its anguish into her soul. At thirty came despair; and rarely, indeed, did despair leave. It was fluttered sometimes, or pretended to be; but, after a few feeble flappings, it roosted again. In Stoughton "society" the old maids outnumbered the married women.

Clearly, there was no chance to marry. Emily might have overcome the timidity of such young men as there were, and might have married almost any one of them. But her end would have been more remote than ever. It was not marriage in itself that she sought, but release from Stoughton. And none of these young men was able to make a living away from Stoughton, even should she marry him and succeed in getting him away.

She revolved the idea of visiting her friends in Washington. But there poverty barred the way. She had never had so very many clothes. Now, she could afford only the simplest and cheapest. She looked over what she had brought with her from Washington. Each bit of finery reminded her of pleasures, keen when she enjoyed them, cruelly keen in memory. The gowns were of a kind that would have made Stoughton open its sleepy eyes, but they would not do for Washington again.

The people she knew there were self-absorbed, inclined to snobbishness, to patronising contemptuously those of their own set who were overtaken by misfortunes and could not keep the pace. They tolerated these reminders of the less luxurious and less fortunate phases of life, but—well, toleration was not a virtue which Emily Bromfield cared to have exercised toward herself. She could hear Mrs. Ainslie or Mrs. Chesterton or Mrs. Connors-Smith whispering: "Yes—the

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

