

## **Chapter XVIII. The Nursemaid.**

Pale, worn, haggard with anxiety, Sydney Westerfield entered the room, and looked once more on the faces which she had resigned herself never to see again. She appeared to be hardly conscious of the kind reception which did its best to set her at her ease.

"Am I in time?" were the first words that escaped her on entering the room. Reassured by the answer, she turned back to the door, eager to hurry upstairs to Kitty's bedside.

Mrs. Linley's gentle hand detained her.

The doctor had left certain instructions, warning the mother to guard against any accident that might remind Kitty of the day on which Sydney had left her. At the time of that bitter parting, the child had seen her governess in the same walking-dress which she wore now. Mrs. Linley removed the hat and cloak, and laid them on a chair.

"There is one other precaution which we must observe," she said; "I must ask you to wait in my room until I find that you may show yourself safely. Now come with me."

Mrs. Presty followed them, and begged earnestly for leave to wait the result of the momentous experiment, at the door of Kitty's bedroom. Her self-asserting manner had vanished; she was quiet, she was even humble. While the last chance for the child's life was fast becoming a matter of minutes only, the grandmother's better nature showed itself on the surface. Randal opened the door for them as the three went out together. He was in that state of maddening anxiety about his poor little niece in which men of his imaginative temperament become morbid, and say strangely inappropriate things. In the same breath with which he implored his sister-in-law to let him hear what had happened, without an instant of delay, he startled Mrs. Presty by one of his familiar remarks on the inconsistencies in her character. "You disagreeable old woman," he whispered, as she passed him, "you have got a heart, after all."

Left alone, he was never for one moment in repose, while the slow minutes followed each other in the silent house.

He walked about the room, he listened at the door, he arranged and

disarranged the furniture. When the nursemaid descended from the upper regions with her mistress's message for him, he ran out to meet her; saw the good news in her smiling face; and, for the first and last time in his life kissed one of his brother's female servants. Susan--a well-bred young person, thoroughly capable in ordinary cases of saying "For shame, sir!" and looking as if she expected to feel an arm round her waist next--trembled with terror under that astounding salute. Her master's brother, a pattern of propriety up to that time, a man declared by her to be incapable of kissing a woman unless she had a right to insist on it in the licensed character of his wife, had evidently taken leave of his senses. Would he bite her next? No: he only looked confused, and said (how very extraordinary!) that he would never do it again. Susan gave her message gravely. Here was an unintelligible man; she felt the necessity of being careful in her choice of words.

"Miss Kitty stared at Miss Westerfield--only for a moment, sir--as if she didn't quite understand, and then knew her again directly. The doctor had just called. He drew up the blind to let the light in, and he looked, and he says: 'Only be careful'--" Tender-hearted Susan broke down, and began to cry. "I can't help it, sir; we are all so fond of Miss Kitty, and we are so happy. 'Only be careful' (those were the exact words, if you please), 'and I answer for her life.'--Oh, dear! what have I said to make him run away from me?"

Randal had left her abruptly, and had shut himself into the drawing-room. Susan's experience of men had not yet informed her that a true Englishman is ashamed to be seen (especially by his inferiors) with the tears in his eyes.

He had barely succeeded in composing himself, when another servant appeared--this time a man--with something to say to him.

"I don't know whether I have done right, sir," Malcolm began. "There's a stranger downstairs among the tourists who are looking at the rooms and the pictures. He said he knew you. And he asked if you were not related to the gentleman who allowed travelers to see his interesting old house."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, I said Yes. And then he wanted to know if you happened to be here at the present time."

Randal cut the man's story short. "And you said Yes again, and he gave you his card. Let me look at it."

Malcolm produced the card, and instantly received instructions to show the gentleman up. The name recalled the dinner at the London club--Captain Bennydeck.