

Chapter LI. Dum Spiro, Spero.

Brisk and smiling, Mrs. Presty presented herself in the waiting-room. "We have got rid of our enemy!" she announced, "I looked out of the window and saw him leaving the hotel." She paused, struck with the deep dejection expressed in her daughter's attitude. "Catherine!" she exclaimed, "I tell you Herbert has gone, and you look as if you regretted it! Is there anything wrong? Did my message fail to bring him here?"

"No."

"He was bent on mischief when I saw him last. Has he told Bennydeck of the Divorce?"

"No."

"Thank Heaven for that! There is no one to be afraid of now. Where is the Captain?"

"He is still in the sitting-room."

"Why don't you go to him?"

"I daren't!"

"Shall I go?"

"Yes--and give him this."

Mrs. Presty took the letter. "You mean, tear it up," she said, "and quite right, too."

"No; I mean what I say."

"My dear child, if you have any regard for yourself, if you have any regard for me, don't ask me to give Bennydeck this mad letter! You won't hear reason? You still insist on it?"

"I do."

"If Kitty ever behaves to you, Catherine, as you have behaved to me--you will

have richly deserved it. Oh, if you were only a child again, I'd beat it out of you--I would!"

With that outburst of temper, she took the letter to Bennydeck. In less than a minute she returned, a tamed woman. "He frightens me," she said.

"Is he angry?"

"No--and that is the worst of it. When men are angry, I am never afraid of them. He's quiet, too quiet. He said: 'I'm waiting for Mr. Herbert Linley; where is he?' I said. 'He has left the hotel.' He said: 'What does that mean?' I handed the letter to him. 'Perhaps this will explain,' I said. He looked at the address, and at once recognized your handwriting. 'Why does she write to me when we are both in the same house? Why doesn't she speak to me?' I pointed to the letter. He wouldn't look at it; he looked straight at me. 'There's some mystery here,' he said; 'I'm a plain man, I don't like mysteries. Mr. Linley had something to say to me, when the message interrupted him. Who sent the message? Do you know?' If there is a woman living, Catherine, who would have told the truth, in such a position as mine was at that moment, I should like to have her photograph. I said I didn't know--and I saw he suspected me of deceiving him. Those kind eyes of his--you wouldn't believe it of them!--looked me through and through. 'I won't detain you any longer,' he said. I'm not easily daunted, as you know--the relief it was to me to get away from him is not to be told in words. What do you think I heard when I got into the passage? I heard him turn the key of the door. He's locked in, my dear; he's locked in! We are too near him here. Come upstairs."

Catherine refused. "I ought to be near him," she said, hopefully; "he may wish to see me."

Her mother reminded her that the waiting-room was a public room, and might be wanted.

"Let's go into the garden," Mrs. Presty proposed. "We can tell the servant who waits on us where we may be found."

Catherine yielded. Mrs. Presty's excitement found its overflow in talking perpetually. Her daughter had nothing to say, and cared nothing where they went; all outward manifestation of life in her seemed to be suspended at that terrible time of expectation. They wandered here and there, in the quietest part of the grounds. Half an hour passed--and no message was received. The hotel clock struck the hour--and still nothing happened.

"I can walk no longer," Catherine said. She dropped on one of the garden-chairs, holding by her mother's hand. "Go to him, for God's sake!" she entreated. "I can endure it no longer."

Mrs. Presty--even bold Mrs. Presty--was afraid to face him again. "He's fond of the child," she suggested; "let's send Kitty."

Some little girls were at play close by who knew where Kitty was to be found. In a few minutes more they brought her back with them. Mrs. Presty gave the child her instructions, and sent her away proud of her errand, and delighted at the prospect of visiting the Captain by herself, as if she "was a grown-up lady."

This time the period of suspense was soon at an end. Kitty came running back. "It's lucky you sent me," she declared. "He wouldn't have opened the door to anybody else--he said so himself."

"Did you knock softly, as I told you?" Mrs. Presty asked.

"No, grandmamma, I forgot that. I tried to open the door. He called out not to disturb him. I said, 'It's only me,' and he opened the door directly. What makes him look so pale, mamma? Is he ill?"

"Perhaps he feels the heat," Mrs. Presty suggested, judiciously.

"He said, 'Dear little Kitty,' and he caught me up in his arms and kissed me. When he sat down again he took me on his knee, and he asked if I was fond of him, and I said, 'Yes, I am,' and he kissed me again, and he asked if I had come to stay with him and keep him company. I forgot what you wanted me to say," Kitty acknowledged, addressing Mrs. Presty; "so I made it up out of my own head."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him, mamma was as fond of him as I was, and I said, 'We will both keep you company.' He put me down on the floor, and he got up and went to the window and looked out. I told him that wasn't the way to find her, and I said, 'I know where she is; I'll go and fetch her.' He's an obstinate man, our nice Captain. He wouldn't come away from the window. I said, 'You wish to see mamma, don't you?' And he said 'Yes.' 'You mustn't lock the door again,' I told him, 'she won't like that'; and what do you think he said? He said 'Good-by, Kitty!' Wasn't it funny? He didn't seem to know what he was

talking about. If you ask my opinion, mamma, I think the sooner you go to him the better." Catherine hesitated. Mrs. Presty on one side, and Kitty on the other, led her between them into the house.