

**Chapter LII. L'homme propose, et Dieu dispose.**

Captain Bennydeck met Catherine and her child at the open door of the room. Mrs. Presty, stopping a few paces behind them, waited in the passage; eager to see what the Captain's face might tell her. It told her nothing.

But Catherine saw a change in him. There was something in his manner unnaturally passive and subdued. It suggested the idea of a man whose mind had been forced into an effort of self-control which had exhausted its power, and had allowed the signs of depression and fatigue to find their way to the surface. The Captain was quiet, the Captain was kind; neither by word nor look did he warn Catherine that the continuity of their intimacy was in danger of being broken--and yet, her spirits sank, when they met at the open door.

He led her to a chair, and said she had come to him at a time when he especially wished to speak with her. Kitty asked if she might remain with them. He put his hand caressingly on her head; "No, my dear, not now."

The child eyed him for a moment, conscious of something which she had never noticed in him before, and puzzled by the discovery. She walked back, cowed and silent, to the door. He followed her and spoke to Mrs. Presty.

"Take your grandchild into the garden; we will join you there in a little while. Good-by for the present, Kitty."

Kitty said good-by mechanically--like a dull child repeating a lesson. Her grandmother led her away in silence.

Bennydeck closed the door and seated himself by Catherine.

"I thank you for your letter," he said. "If such a thing is possible, it has given me a higher opinion of you than any opinion that I have held yet."

She looked at him with a feeling of surprise, so sudden and so overwhelming that she was at a loss how to reply. The last words which she expected to hear from him, when he alluded to her confession, were the words that had just passed his lips.

"You have owned to faults that you have committed, and deceptions that you have sanctioned," he went on--"with nothing to gain, and everything to

lose, by telling the truth. Who but a good woman would have done that?"

There was a deeper feeling in him than he had ventured to express. It betrayed itself by a momentary trembling in his voice. Catherine drew a little closer to him.

"You don't know how you surprise me, how you relieve me," she said, warmly--and pressed his hand. In the eagerness of her gratitude, in the gladness that had revived her sinking heart, she failed to feel that the pressure was not returned.

"What have I said to surprise you?" he asked. "What anxiety have I relieved, without knowing it?"

"I was afraid you would despise me."

"Why should I despise you?"

"Have I not gained your good opinion under false pretenses? Have I not allowed you to admire me and to love me without telling you that there was anything in my past life which I have reason to regret? Even now, I can hardly realize that you excuse and forgive me; you, who have read the confession of my worst faults; you, who know the shocking inconsistencies of my character--"

"Say at once," he answered, "that I know you to be a mortal creature. Is there any human character, even the noblest, that is always consistently good?"

"One reads of them sometimes," she suggested, "in books."

"Yes," he said. "In the worst books you could possibly read--the only really immoral books written in our time."

"Why are they immoral?"

"For this plain reason, that they deliberately pervert the truth. Clap-trap, you innocent creature, to catch foolish readers! When do these consistently good people appear in the life around us, the life that we all see? Never! Are the best mortals that ever lived above the reach of temptation to do ill, and are they always too good to yield to it? How does the Lord's Prayer instruct humanity? It commands us all, without exception, to pray that we may not be led into temptation. You have been led into temptation. In other words,

you are a human being. All that a human being could do you have done-- you have repented and confessed. Don't I know how you have suffered and how you have been tried! Why, what a mean Pharisee I should be if I presumed to despise you!"

She looked at him proudly and gratefully; she lifted her arm as if to thank him by an embrace, and suddenly let it drop again at her side.

"Am I tormenting myself without cause?" she said. "Or is there something that looks like sorrow, showing itself to me in your face?"

"You see the bitterest sorrow that I have felt in all my sad life."

"Is it sorrow for me?"

"No. Sorrow for myself."

"Has it come to you through me? Is it my fault?"

"It is more your misfortune than your fault."

"Then you can feel for me?"

"I can and do."

He had not yet set her at ease.

"I am afraid your sympathy stops somewhere," she said. "Where does it stop?"

For the first time, he shrank from directly answering her. "I begin to wish I had followed your example," he owned. "It might have been better for both of us if I had answered your letter in writing."

"Tell me plainly," she cried, "is there something you can't forgive?"

"There is something I can't forget."

"What is it? Oh, what is it! When my mother told poor little Kitty that her father was dead, are you even more sorry than I am that I allowed it? Are you even more ashamed of me than I am of myself?"

"No. I regret that you allowed it; but I understand how you were led into that

error. Your husband's infidelity had shaken his hold on your respect for him and your sympathy with him, and had so left you without your natural safeguard against Mrs. Presty's sophistical reasoning and bad example. But for that wrong-doing, there is a remedy left. Enlighten your child as you have enlightened me; and then--I have no personal motive for pleading Mr. Herbert Linley's cause, after what I have seen of him--and then, acknowledge the father's claim on the child."

"Do you mean his claim to see her?"

"What else can I mean? Yes! let him see her. Do (God help me, now when it's too late!)--do what you ought to have done, on that accursed day which will be the blackest day in my calendar, to the end of my life."

"What day do you mean?"

"The day when you remembered the law of man, and forgot the law of God; the day when you broke the marriage tie, the sacred tie, by a Divorce!"

She listened--not conscious now of suspense or fear; she listened, with her whole heart in revolt against him.

"You are too cruel!" she declared. "You can feel for me, you can understand me, you can pardon me in everything else that I have done. But you judge without mercy of the one blameless act of my life, since my husband left me--the act that protected a mother in the exercise of her rights. Oh, can it be you? Can it be you?"

"It can be," he said, sighing bitterly; "and it is."

"What horrible delusion possesses you? Why do you curse the happy day, the blessed day, which saw me safe in the possession of my child?"

"For the worst and meanest of reasons," he answered--"a selfish reason. Don't suppose that I have spoken of Divorce as one who has had occasion to think of it. I have had no occasion to think of it; I don't think of it even now. I abhor it because it stands between you and me. I loathe it, I curse it because it separates us for life."

"Separates us for life? How?"

"Can you ask me?"

"Yes, I do ask you!"

He looked round him. A society of religious persons had visited the hotel, and had obtained permission to place a copy of the Bible in every room. One of those copies lay on the chimney-piece in Catherine's room. Bennydeck brought it to her, and placed it on the table near which she was sitting. He turned to the New Testament, and opened it at the Gospel of Saint Matthew. With his hand on the page, he said:

"I have done my best rightly to understand the duties of a Christian. One of those duties, as I interpret them, is to let what I believe show itself in what I do. You have seen enough of me, I hope, to know (though I have not been forward in speaking of it) that I am, to the best of my poor ability, a faithful follower of the teachings of Christ. I dare not set my own interests and my own happiness above His laws. If I suffer in obeying them as I suffer now, I must still submit. They are the laws of my life."

"Is it through me that you suffer?"

"It is through you."

"Will you tell me how?"

He had already found the chapter. His tears dropped on it as he pointed to the verse.

"Read," he answered, "what the most compassionate of all Teachers has said, in the Sermon on the Mount."

She read: "Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

Another innocent woman, in her place, might have pointed to that first part of the verse, which pre-supposes the infidelity of the divorced wife, and might have asked if those words applied to her. This woman, knowing that she had lost him, knew also what she owed to herself. She rose in silence, and held out her hand at parting.

He paused before he took her hand. "Can you forgive me?" he asked.

She said: "I can pity you."

"Can you look back to the day of your marriage? Can you remember the words which declared the union between you and your husband to be

separable only by death? Has he treated you with brutal cruelty?"

"Never!"

"Has he repented of his sin?"

"Yes."

"Ask your own conscience if there is not a worthier life for you and your child than the life that you are leading now." He waited, after that appeal to her. The silence remained unbroken. "Do not mistake me," he resumed gently. "I am not thinking of the calamity that has fallen on me in a spirit of selfish despair--I am looking to your future, and I am trying to show you the way which leads to hope. Catherine! have you no word more to say to me?"

In faint trembling tones she answered him at last:

"You have left me but one word to say. Farewell!"

He drew her to him gently, and kissed her on the forehead. The agony in his face was more than she could support; she recoiled from it in horror. His last act was devoted to the tranquillity of the one woman whom he had loved. He signed to her to leave him.

Chapter LIII. The Largest Nature, the Longest Love.

Mrs. Presty waited in the garden to be joined by her daughter and Captain Bennydeck, and waited in vain. It was past her grandchild's bedtime; she decided on returning to the house.

"Suppose we look for them in the sitting-room?" Kitty proposed.

"Suppose we wait a moment, before we go in?" her wise grandmother advised. "If I hear them talking I shall take you upstairs to bed."

"Why?"

Mrs. Presty favored Kitty with a hint relating to the management of inquisitive children which might prove useful to her in after-life. "When you grow up to be a woman, my dear, beware of making the mistake that I have just committed. Never be foolish enough to mention your reasons when a child asks, Why?"

"Was that how they treated you, grandmamma, when you were a child yourself?"

"Of course it was!"

"Why?"

They had reached the sitting-room door by this time. Kitty opened it without ceremony and looked in. The room was empty.

Having confided her granddaughter to the nursemaid's care, Mrs. Presty knocked at Catherine's bedroom door. "May I come in?"

"Come in directly! Where is Kitty?"

"Susan is putting her to bed."

"Stop it! Kitty mustn't go to bed. No questions. I'll explain myself when you come back." There was a wildness in her eyes, and a tone of stern command in her voice, which warned her mother to set dignity aside, and submit.

"I don't ask what has happened," Mrs. Presty resumed on her return. "That letter, that fatal letter to the Captain, has justified my worst fears. What in Heaven's name are we to do now?"

"We are to leave this hotel," was the instant reply.

"When?"

"To-night."

"Catherine! do you know what time it is?"

"Time enough to catch the last train to London. Don't raise objections! If I stay at this place, with associations in every part of it which remind me of that unhappy man, I shall go mad! The shock I have suffered, the misery, the humiliation--I tell you it's more than I can bear. Stay here by yourself if you like; I mean to go."

She paced with frantic rapidity up and down the room. Mrs. Presty took the only way by which it was possible to calm her. "Compose yourself, Catherine, and all that you wish shall be done. I'll settle everything with the landlord, and give the maid her orders. Sit down by the open window; let the wind blow over you."

The railway service from Sydenham to London is a late service. At a few minutes before midnight they were in time for the last train. When they left the station, Catherine was calm enough to communicate her plans for the future. The nearest hotel to the terminus would offer them accommodation for that night. On the next day they could find some quiet place in the country--no matter where, so long as they were not disturbed. "Give me rest and peace, and my mind will be easier," Catherine said. "Let nobody know where to find me."

These conditions were strictly observed--with an exception in favor of Mr. Sarrazin. While his client's pecuniary affairs were still unsettled, the lawyer had his claim to be taken into her confidence.

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The next morning found Captain Bennydeck still keeping his rooms at Sydenham. The state of his mind presented a complete contrast to the state of Catherine's mind. So far from sharing her aversion to the personal associations which were connected with the hotel, he found his one consolation in visiting the scenes which reminded him of the beloved woman whom he had lost. The reason for this was not far to seek. His was the largest nature, and his had been the most devoted love.



As usual, his letters were forwarded to him from his place of residence in London. Those addressed in handwritings that he knew were the first that he read. The others he took out with him to that sequestered part of the garden in which he had passed the happiest hours of his life by Catherine's side.

He had been thinking of her all the morning; he was thinking of her now.

His better judgment protested; his accusing conscience warned him that he was committing, not only an act of folly but (with his religious convictions) an act of sin--and still she held her place in his thoughts. The manager had told him of her sudden departure from the hotel, and had declared with perfect truth that the place of her destination had not been communicated to him. Asked if she had left no directions relating to her correspondence, he had replied that his instructions were to forward all letters to her lawyer. On the point of inquiring next for the name and address, Bennydeck's sense of duty and sense of shame (roused at last) filled him with a timely contempt for himself. In feeling tempted to write to Catherine--in encouraging fond thoughts of her among scenes which kept her in his memory--he had been false to the very principles to which he had appealed at their farewell interview. She had set him the right example, the example which he was determined to follow, in leaving the place. Before he could falter in his resolution, he gave notice of his departure. The one hope for him now was to find a refuge from himself in acts of mercy. Consolation was perhaps waiting for him in his Home.

His unopened correspondence offered a harmless occupation to his thoughts, in the meanwhile. One after another he read the letters, with an attention constantly wandering and constantly recalled, until he opened the last of them that remained. In a moment more his interest was absorbed. The first sentences in the letter told him that the deserted creature whom he had met in the garden--the stranger to whom he had offered help and consolation in the present and in the future--was no other than the lost girl of whom he had been so long in search; the daughter of Roderick Westerfield, once his dearest and oldest friend.

In the pages that followed, the writer confided to him her sad story; leaving it to her father's friend to decide whether she was worthy of the sympathy which he had offered to her, when he thought she was a stranger.

This part of her letter was necessarily a repetition of what Bennydeck had read, in the confession which Catherine had addressed to him. That

generous woman had been guilty of one, and but one, concealment of the truth. In relating the circumstances under which the elopement from Mount Morven had taken place, she had abstained, in justice to the sincerity of Sydney's repentance, from mentioning Sydney's name. "Another instance," the Captain thought bitterly, as he closed the letter, "of the virtues which might have made the happiness of my life!"

But he was bound to remember--and he did remember--that there was now a new interest, tenderly associating itself with his life to come. The one best way of telling Sydney how dear she was to him already, for her father's sake, would be to answer her in person. He hurried away to London by the first train, and drove at once to Randal's place of abode to ask for Sydney's address.

Wondering what had become of the postscript to his letter, which had given Bennydeck the information of which he was now in search, Randal complied with his friend's request, and then ventured to allude to the report of the Captain's marriage engagement.

"Am I to congratulate you?" he asked.

"Congratulate me on having discovered Roderick Westerfield's daughter."

That reply, and the tone in which it was given, led Randal to ask if the engagement had been prematurely announced.

"There is no engagement at all," Bennydeck answered, with a look which suggested that it might be wise not to dwell on the subject.

But the discovery was welcome to Randal, for his brother's sake. He ran the risk of consequences, and inquired if Catherine was still to be found at the hotel.

The Captain answered by a sign in the negative.

Randal persisted. "Do you know where she has gone?"

"Nobody knows but her lawyer."

"In that case," Randal concluded, "I shall get the information that I want."

Noticing that Bennydeck looked surprised, he mentioned his motive.

"Herbert is pining to see Kitty," he continued; "and I mean to help him. He has done all that a man could do to atone for the past. As things are, I

believe I shall not offend Catherine, if I arrange for a meeting between father and child. What do you say?"

Bennydeck answered, earnestly and eagerly: "Do it at once!"

They left the house together--one to go to Sydney's lodgings, the other on his way to Mr. Sarrazin's office.

Chapter LIV. Let Bygones Be Bygones.

When the servant at the lodgings announced a visitor, and mentioned his name, Sydney's memory (instead of dwelling on the recollection of the Captain's kindness) perversely recalled the letter that she had addressed to him, and reminded her that she stood in need of indulgence, which even so good a man might hesitate to grant. Bennydeck's first words told the friendless girl that her fears had wronged him.

"My dear, how like your father you are! You have his eyes and his smile; I can't tell you how pleasantly you remind me of my dear old friend." He took her hand, and kissed her as he might have kissed a daughter of his own. "Do you remember me at home, Sydney, when you were a child? No: you must have been too young for that."

She was deeply touched. In faint trembling tones she said; "I remember your name; my poor father often spoke of you."

A man who feels true sympathy is never in danger of mistaking his way to a woman's heart, when that woman has suffered. Bennydeck consoled, interested, charmed Sydney, by still speaking of the bygone days at home.

"I well remember how fond your father was of you, and what a bright little girl you were," the Captain went on. "You have forgotten, I dare say, the old-fashioned sea-songs that he used to be so fond of teaching you. It was the strangest and prettiest contrast, to hear your small piping child's voice singing of storms and shipwrecks, and thunder and lightning, and reefing sails in cold and darkness, without the least idea of what it all meant. Your mother was strict in those days; you never amused her as you used to amuse your father and me. When she caught you searching my pockets for sweetmeats, she accused me of destroying your digestion before you were five years old. I went on spoiling it, for all that. The last time I saw you, my child, your father was singing 'The Mariners of England,' and you were on his knee trying to sing with him. You must have often wondered why you never saw anything more of me. Did you think I had forgotten you?"

"I am quite sure I never thought that!"

"You see I was in the Navy at the time," the Captain resumed; "and we were ordered away to a foreign station. When I got back to England, miserable news was waiting for me. I heard of your father's death and of that shameful Trial. Poor fellow! He was as innocent, Sydney, as you are of the offense which he was accused of committing. The first thing I did was to set

inquiries on foot after your mother and her children. It was some consolation to me to feel that I was rich enough to make your lives easy and agreeable to you. I thought money could do anything. A serious mistake, my dear--money couldn't find the widow and her children. We supposed you were somewhere in London; and there, to my great grief, it ended. From time to time--long afterward, when we thought we had got the clew in our hands--I continued my inquiries, still without success. A poor woman and her little family are so easily engulfed in the big city! Years passed (more of them than I like to reckon up) before I heard of you at last by name. The person from whom I got my information told me how you were employed, and where."

"Oh, Captain Bennydeck, who could the person have been?"

"A poor old broken-down actor, Sydney. You were his favorite pupil. Do you remember him?"

"I should be ungrateful indeed if I could forget him. He was the only person in the school who was kind to me. Is the good old man still living?"

"No; he rests at last. I am glad to say I was able to make his last days on earth the happiest days of his life."

"I wonder," Sydney confessed, "how you met with him."

"There was nothing at all romantic in my first discovery of him. I was reading the police reports in a newspaper. The poor wretch was brought before a magistrate, charged with breaking a window. His one last chance of escaping starvation in the streets was to get sent to prison. The magistrate questioned him, and brought to light a really heart-breaking account of misfortune, imbittered by neglect on the part of people in authority who were bound to help him. He was remanded, so that inquiries might be made. I attended the court on the day when he appeared there again, and heard his statement confirmed. I paid his fine, and contrived to put him in a way of earning a little money. He was very grateful, and came now and then to thank me. In that way I heard how his troubles had begun. He had asked for a small advance on the wretched wages that he received. Can you guess how the schoolmistress answered him?"

"I know but too well how she answered him," Sydney said; "I was turned out of the house, too."

"And I heard of it," the Captain replied, "from the woman herself. Everything that could distress me she was ready to mention. She told me of your

mother's second marriage, of her miserable death, of the poor boy, your brother, missing, and never heard of since. But when I asked where you had gone she had nothing more to say. She knew nothing, and cared nothing, about you. If I had not become acquainted with Mr. Randal Linley, I might never have heard of you again. We will say no more of that, and no more of anything that has happened in the past time. From to-day, my dear, we begin a new life, and (please God) a happier life. Have you any plans of your own for the future?"

"Perhaps, if I could find help," Sydney said resignedly, "I might emigrate. Pride wouldn't stand in my way; no honest employment would be beneath my notice. Besides, if I went to America, I might meet with my brother."

"My dear child, after the time that has passed, there is no imaginable chance of your meeting with your brother--and you wouldn't know each other again if you did meet. Give up that vain hope and stay here with me. Be useful and be happy in your own country."

"Useful?" Sydney repeated sadly. "Your own kind heart, Captain Bennydeck, is deceiving you. To be useful means, I suppose, to help others. Who will accept help from me?"

"I will, for one," the Captain answered.

"You!"

"Yes. You can be of the greatest use to me--you shall hear how."

He told her of the founding of his Home and of the good it had done. "You are the very person," he resumed, "to be the good sister-friend that I want for my poor girls: you can say for them what they cannot always say to me for themselves."

The tears rose in Sydney's eyes. "It is hard to see such a prospect as that," she said, "and to give it up as soon as it is seen."

"Why give it up?"

"Because I am not fit for it. You are as good as a father to those lost daughters of yours. If you give them a sister-friend she ought to have set them a good example. Have I done that? Will they listen to a girl who is no better than themselves?"

"Gladly! Your sympathy will find its way to their hearts, because it is animated by something that they can all feel in common--something nearer and dearer to them than a sense of duty. You won't consent, Sydney, for their sakes? Will you do what I ask of you, for my sake?"

She looked at him, hardly able to understand--or, as it might have been, perhaps afraid to understand him. He spoke to her more plainly.

"I have kept it concealed from you," he continued--"for why should I lay my load of suffering on a friend so young as you are, so cruelly tried already? Let me only say that I am in great distress. If you were with me, my child, I might be better able to bear it."

He held out his hand. Even a happy woman could hardly have found it in her heart to resist him. In silent sympathy and respect, Sydney kissed the hand that he had offered to her. It was the one way in which she could trust herself to answer him.

Still encouraging her to see new hopes and new interests in the future, the good Captain spoke of the share which she might take in the management of the Home, if she would like to be his secretary. With this view he showed her some written reports, relating to the institution, which had been sent to him during the time of his residence at Sydenham. She read them with an interest and attention which amply justified his confidence in her capacity.

"These reports," he explained to her, "are kept for reference; but as a means of saving time, the substance of them is entered in the daily journal of our proceedings. Come, Sydney! venture on a first experiment in your new character. I see pen, ink, and paper on the table; try if you can shorten one of the reports, without leaving out anything which it is important to know. For instance, the writer gives reasons for making his statement. Very well expressed, no doubt, but we don't want reasons. Then, again, he offers his own opinion on the right course to take. Very creditable to him, but I don't want his opinion--I want his facts. Take the pen, my secretary, and set down his facts. Never mind his reflections."

Proud and pleased, Sydney obeyed him. She had made her little abstract, and was reading it to him at his request, while he compared it with the report, when they were interrupted by a visitor. Randal Linley came in, and noticed the papers on the table with surprise. "Is it possible that I am interrupting business?" he asked.

Bennydeck answered with the assumed air of importance which was in itself

a compliment to Sydney: "You find me engaged on the business of the Home with my new secretary."

Randal at once understood what had happened. He took his friend's arm, and led him to the other end of the room.

"You good fellow!" he said. "Add to your kindness by excusing me if I ask for a word with you in private."

Sydney rose to retire. After having encouraged her by a word of praise, the Captain proposed that she should get ready to go out, and should accompany him on a visit to the Home. He opened the door for her as respectfully as if the poor girl had been one of the highest ladies in the land.

"I have seen my friend Sarrazin," Randal began, "and I have persuaded him to trust me with Catherine's present address. I can send Herbert there immediately, if you will only help me."

"How can I help you?"

"Will you allow me to tell my brother that your engagement is broken off?"

Bennydeck shrank from the painful allusion, and showed it.

Randal explained. "I am grieved," he said, "to distress you by referring to this subject again. But if my brother is left under the false impression that your engagement will be followed by your marriage, he will refuse to intrude himself on the lady who was once his wife."

The Captain understood. "Say what you please about me," he replied. "Unite the father and child--and you may reconcile the husband and wife."

"Have you forgotten," Randal asked, "that the marriage has been dissolved?"

Bennydeck's answer ignored the law. "I remember," he said, "that the marriage has been profaned."



Chapter LV. Leave It to the Child.

The front windows of Brightwater Cottage look out on a quiet green lane in Middlesex, which joins the highroad within a few miles of the market town of Uxbridge. Through the pretty garden at the back runs a little brook, winding its merry way to a distant river. The few rooms in this pleasant place of residence are well (too well) furnished, having regard to the limits of a building which is a cottage in the strictest sense of the word. Water-color drawings by the old English masters of the art ornament the dining-room. The parlor has been transformed into a library. From floor to ceiling all four of its walls are covered with books. Their old and well-chosen bindings, seen in the mass, present nothing less than a feast of color to the eye. The library and the works of art are described as heirlooms, which have passed into the possession of the present proprietor--one more among the hundreds of Englishmen who are ruined every year by betting on the Turf.

So sorely in need of a little ready money was this victim of gambling--tacitly permitted or conveniently ignored by the audacious hypocrisy of a country which rejoiced in the extinction of Baden, and which still shudders at the name of Monaco--that he was ready to let his pretty cottage for no longer a term than one month certain; and he even allowed the elderly lady, who drove the hardest of hard bargains with him, to lessen by one guinea the house-rent paid for each week. He took his revenge by means of an ironical compliment, addressed to Mrs. Presty. "What a saving it would be to the country, ma'am, if you were Chancellor of the Exchequer!" With perfect gravity Mrs. Presty accepted that well-earned tribute of praise. "You are quite right, sir; I should be the first official person known to the history of England who took proper care of the public money."

Within two days of the time when they had left the hotel at Sydenham, Catherine and her little family circle had taken possession of the cottage.

The two ladies were sitting in the library each occupied with a book chosen from the well-stocked shelves. Catherine's reading appeared to be more than once interrupted by Catherine's thoughts. Noticing this circumstance, Mrs. Presty asked if some remarkable event had happened, and if it was weighing heavily on her daughter's mind.

Catherine answered that she was thinking of Kitty, and that anxiety connected with the child did weigh heavily on her mind.

Some days had passed (she reminded Mrs. Presty) since the interview at which Herbert Linley had bidden her farewell. On that occasion he had

referred to her proposed marriage (never to be a marriage now!) in terms of forbearance and generosity which claimed her sincerest admiration. It might be possible for her to show a grateful appreciation of his conduct. Devotedly fond of his little daughter, he must have felt acutely his long separation from her; and it was quite likely that he might ask to see Kitty. But there was an obstacle in the way of her willing compliance with that request, which it was impossible to think of without remorse, and which it was imperatively necessary to remove. Mrs. Presty would understand that she alluded to the shameful falsehood which had led the child to suppose that her father was dead.

Strongly disapproving of the language in which her daughter had done justice to the conduct of the divorced husband, Mrs. Presty merely replied: "You are Kitty's mother; I leave it to you"--and returned to her reading.

Catherine could not feel that she had deserved such an answer as this. "Did I plan the deception?" she asked. "Did I tell the lie?"

Mrs. Presty was not in the least offended. "You are comparatively innocent, my dear," she admitted, with an air of satirical indulgence. "You only consented to the deception, and profited by the lie. Suppose we own the truth? You are afraid."

Catherine owned the truth in the plainest terms:

"Yes, I am afraid."

"And you leave it to me?"

"I leave it to you."

Mrs. Presty complacently closed her book. "I was quite prepared to hear it," she said; "all the unpleasant complications since your Divorce--and Heaven only knows how many of them have presented themselves--have been left for me to unravel. It so happens--though I was too modest to mention it prematurely--that I have unraveled this complication. If one only has eyes to see it, there is a way out of every difficulty that can possibly happen." She pushed the book that she had been reading across the table to Catherine. "Turn to page two hundred and forty," she said. "There is the way out."

The title of the book was "Disasters at Sea"; and the page contained the narrative of a shipwreck. On evidence apparently irresistible, the drowning of every soul on board the lost vessel had been taken for granted--when a

remnant of the passengers and crew had been discovered on a desert island, and had been safely restored to their friends. Having read this record of suffering and suspense, Catherine looked at her mother, and waited for an explanation.

"Don't you see it?" Mrs. Presty asked.

"I can't say that I do."

The old lady's excellent temper was not in the least ruffled, even by this.

"Quite inexcusable on my part," she acknowledged; "I ought to have remembered that you don't inherit your mother's vivid imagination. Age has left me in full possession of those powers of invention which used to amaze your poor father. He wondered how it was that I never wrote a novel. Mr. Presty's appreciation of my intellect was equally sincere; but he took a different view. 'Beware, my dear,' he said, 'of trifling with the distinction which you now enjoy: you are one of the most remarkable women in England--you have never written a novel.' Pardon me; I am wandering into the region of literary anecdote, when I ought to explain myself. Now pray attend to this:--I propose to tell Kitty that I have found a book which is sure to interest her; and I shall direct her attention to the lamentable story which you have just read. She is quite sharp enough (there are sparks of my intellectual fire in Kitty) to ask if the friends of the poor shipwrecked people were not very much surprised to see them again. To this I shall answer: 'Very much, indeed, for their friends thought they were dead.' Ah, you dear dull child, you see it now!"

Catherine saw it so plainly that she was eager to put the first part of the experiment to an immediate trial.

Kitty was sent for, and made her appearance with a fishing-rod over her shoulder. "I'm going to the brook," she announced; "expect some fish for dinner to-day."

A wary old hand stopped Catherine, in the act of presenting "Disasters at Sea," to Kitty's notice; and a voice, distinguished by insinuating kindness, said to the child: "When you have done fishing, my dear, come to me; I have got a nice book for you to read.--How very absurd of you, Catherine," Mrs. Presty continued, when they were alone again, "to expect the child to read, and draw her own conclusions, while her head is full of fishing! If there are any fish in the brook, she won't catch them. When she comes back disappointed and says: 'What am I to do now?' the 'Disasters at Sea' will

have a chance. I make it a rule never to boast; but if there is a thing that I understand, it's the management of children. Why didn't I have a large family?"

Attended by the faithful Susan, Kitty baited her hook, and began to fish where the waters of the brook were overshadowed by trees.

A little arbor covered by a thatched roof, and having walls of wooden lattice-work, hidden by creepers climbing over them inside and out, offered an attractive place of rest on this sheltered side of the garden. Having brought her work with her, the nursemaid retired to the summer-house and diligently plied her needle, looking at Kitty from time to time through the open door. The air was delightfully cool, the pleasant rippling of the brook fell soothingly on the ear, the seat in the summer-house received a sitter with the softly-yielding submission of elastic wires. Susan had just finished her early dinner: in mind and body alike, this good girl was entirely and deservedly at her ease. By finely succeeding degrees, her eyelids began to show a tendency downward; her truant needle-work escaped from her fingers, and lay lazily on her lap. She snatched it up with a start, and sewed with severe resolution until her thread was exhausted. The reel was ready at her side; she took it up for a fresh supply, and innocently rested her head against the leafy and flowery wall of the arbor. Was it thought that gradually closed her eyes again? or was it sleep? In either case, Susan was lost to all sense of passing events; and Susan's breathing became musically regular, emulous of the musical regularity of the brook.

As a lesson in patience, the art of angling pursued in a shallow brook has its moral uses. Kitty fished, and waited, and renewed the bait and tried again, with a command of temper which would have been a novelty in Susan's experience, if Susan had been awake. But the end which comes to all things came also to Kitty's patience. Leaving her rod on the bank, she let the line and hook take care of themselves, and wandered away in search of some new amusement.

Lingering here and there to gather flowers from the beds as she passed them, Kitty was stopped by a shrubbery, with a rustic seat placed near it, which marked the limits of the garden on that side. The path that she had been following led her further and further away from the brook, but still left it well in view. She could see, on her right hand, the clumsy old wooden bridge which crossed the stream, and served as a means of communication for the servants and the tradespeople, between the cottage and the village on the lower ground a mile away.

The child felt hot and tired. She rested herself on the bench, and, spreading the flowers by her side, began to arrange them in the form of a nosegay. Still true to her love for Sydney, she had planned to present the nosegay to her mother, offering the gift as an excuse for returning to the forbidden subject of her governess, and for asking when they might hope to see each other again.

Choosing flowers and then rejecting them, trying other colors and wondering whether she had accomplished a change for the better, Kitty was startled by the sound of a voice calling to her from the direction of the brook.

She looked round, and saw a gentleman crossing the bridge. He asked the way to Brightwater Cottage.

There was something in his voice that attracted her--how or why, at her age, she never thought of inquiring. Eager and excited, she ran across the lawn which lay between her and the brook, before she answered the gentleman's question.

As they approached each other, his eyes sparkled, his face flushed; he cried out joyfully, "Here she is!"--and then changed again in an instant. A horrid pallor overspread his face as the child stood looking at him with innocent curiosity. He startled Kitty, not because he seemed to be shocked and distressed, she hardly noticed that; but because he was so like--although he was thinner and paler and older--oh, so like her lost father!

"This is the cottage, sir," she said faintly.

His sorrowful eyes rested kindly on her. And yet, it seemed as if she had in some way disappointed him. The child ventured to say: "Do you know me, sir?"

He answered in the saddest voice that Kitty had ever heard: "My little girl, what makes you think I know you?"

She was at a loss how to reply, fearing to distress him. She could only say: "You are so like my poor papa."

He shook and shuddered, as if she had said something to frighten him. He took her hand. On that hot day, his fingers felt as cold as if it had been winter time. He led her back to the seat that she had left. "I'm tired, my dear," he said. "Shall we sit down?" It was surely true that he was tired. He seemed hardly able to lift one foot after the other; Kitty pitied him. "I think

you must be ill;" she said, as they took their places, side by side, on the bench.

"No; not ill. Only weary, and perhaps a little afraid of frightening you." He kept her hand in his hand, and patted it from time to time. "My dear, why did you say 'poor papa,' when you spoke of your father just now?"

"My father is dead, sir."

He turned his face away from her, and pressed both hands on his breast, as if he had felt some dreadful pain there, and was trying to hide it. But he mastered the pain; and he said a strange thing to her--very gently, but still it was strange. He wished to know who had told her that her father was dead.

"Grandmamma told me."

"Do you remember what grandmamma said?"

"Yes--she told me papa was drowned at sea."

He said something to himself, and said it twice over. "Not her mother! Thank God, not her mother!" What did he mean?

Kitty looked and looked at him, and wondered and wondered. He put his arm round her. "Come near to me," he said. "Don't be afraid of me, my dear." She moved nearer and showed him that she was not afraid. The poor man seemed hardly to understand her. His eyes grew dim; he sighed like a person in distress; he said: "Your father would have kissed you, little one, if he had been alive. You say I am like your father. May I kiss you?"

She put her hands on his shoulder and lifted her face to him. In the instant when he kissed her, the child knew him. Her heart beat suddenly with an overpowering delight; she started back from his embrace. "That's how papa used to kiss me!" she cried. "Oh! you are papa! Not drowned! not drowned!" She flung her arms round his neck, and held him as if she would never let him go again. "Dear papa! Poor lost papa!" His tears fell on her face; he sobbed over her. "My sweet darling! my own little Kitty!"

The hysterical passion that had overcome her father filled her with piteous surprise. How strange, how dreadful that he should cry--that he should be so sorry when she was so glad! She took her little handkerchief out of the pocket of her pinafore, and dried his eyes. "Are you thinking of the cruel sea,

papa? No! the good sea, the kind, bright, beautiful sea that has given you back to me, and to mamma--!"

They had forgotten her mother!--and Kitty only discovered it now. She caught at one of her father's hands hanging helpless at his side, and pulled at it as if her little strength could force him to his feet. "Come," she cried, "and make mamma as happy as I am!"

He hesitated. She sprang on his knee; she pressed her cheek against his cheek with the caressing tenderness, familiar to him in the first happy days when she was an infant. "Oh, papa, are you going to be unkind to me for the first time in your life?"

His momentary resistance was at an end. He was as weak in her hands now as if he had been the child and she had been the man.

Laughing and singing and dancing round him, Kitty led the way to the window of the room that opened on the garden. Some one had closed it on the inner side. She tapped impatiently at the glass. Her mother heard the tapping; her mother came to the window; her mother ran out to meet them. Since the miserable time when they left Mount Morven, since the long unnatural separation of the parents and the child, those three were together once more!

## **AFTER THE STORY**

### **1.--The Lawyer's Apology.**

That a woman of my wife's mature years should be jealous of one of the most exemplary husbands that the records of matrimony can produce is, to say the least of it, a discouraging circumstance. A man forgets that virtue is its own reward, and asks, What is the use of conjugal fidelity?

However, the motto of married life is (or ought to be): Peace at any price. I have been this day relieved from the condition of secrecy that has been imposed on me. You insisted on an explanation some time since. Here it is at last.

For the ten-thousandth time, my dear, in our joint lives, you are again right. That letter, marked private, which I received at the domestic tea-table, was what you positively declared it to be, a letter from a lady--a charming lady, plunged in the deepest perplexity. We had been well known to each other for many years, as lawyer and client. She wanted advice on this occasion also--and wanted it in the strictest confidence. Was it consistent with my professional duty to show her letter to my wife? Mrs. Sarrazin says Yes; Mrs. Sarrazin's husband says No.

Let me add that the lady was a person of unblemished reputation, and that she was placed in a false position through no fault of her own. In plain English, she was divorced. Ah, my dear (to speak in the vivid language of the people), do you smell a rat?

Yes: my client was Mrs. Norman; and to her pretty cottage in the country I betook myself the next day. There I found my excellent friend Randal Linley, present by special invitation.

Stop a minute. Why do I write all this, instead of explaining myself by word of mouth? My love, you are a member of an old and illustrious family; you honored me when you married me; and you have (as your father told me on our wedding day) the high and haughty temper of your race. I foresee an explosion of this temper, and I would rather have my writing-paper blown up than be blown up myself.



Is this a cowardly confession on my part? All courage, Mrs. Sarrazin, is relative; the bravest man living has a cowardly side to his character, though it may not always be found out. Some years ago, at a public dinner, I sat next to an officer in the British army. At one time in his life he had led a forlorn hope. At another time, he had picked up a wounded soldier, and had carried him to the care of the surgeons through a hail-storm of the enemy's bullets. Hot courage and cool courage, this true hero possessed both. I saw the cowardly side of his character. He lost his color; perspiration broke out on his forehead; he trembled; he talked nonsense; he was frightened out of his wits. And all for what? Because he had to get on his legs and make a speech!

Well: Mrs. Norman, and Randal Linley, and I, sat down to our consultation at the cottage.

What did my fair client want?

She contemplated marrying for the second time, and she wanted my advice as a lawyer, and my encouragement as an old friend. I was quite ready; I only waited for particulars. Mrs. Norman became dreadfully embarrassed, and said: "I refer you to my brother-in-law."

I looked at Randal. "Once her brother-in-law, no doubt," I said; "but after the Divorce--" My friend stopped me there. "After the Divorce," he remarked, "I may be her brother-in-law again."

If this meant anything, it meant that she was actually going to marry Herbert Linley again. This was too ridiculous. "If it's a joke," I said, "I have heard better fun in my time. If it's only an assertion, I don't believe it."

"Why not?" Randal asked.

"Saying I do want you, in one breath--and I don't want you, in another--seems to be a little hard on Divorce," I ventured to suggest.

"Don't expect me to sympathize with Divorce," Randal said.

I answered that smartly. "No; I'll wait till you are married."

He took it seriously. "Don't misunderstand me," he replied. "Where there is absolute cruelty, or where there is deliberate desertion, on the husband's part, I see the use and the reason for Divorce. If the unhappy wife can find

an honorable man who will protect her, or an honorable man who will offer her a home, Society and Law, which are responsible for the institution of marriage, are bound to allow a woman outraged under the shelter of their institution to marry again. But, where the husband's fault is sexual frailty, I say the English law which refuses Divorce on that ground alone is right, and the Scotch law which grants it is wrong. Religion, which rightly condemns the sin, pardons it on the condition of true penitence. Why is a wife not to pardon it for the same reason? Why are the lives of a father, a mother, and a child to be wrecked, when those lives may be saved by the exercise of the first of Christian virtues--forgiveness of injuries? In such a case as this I regret that Divorce exists; and I rejoice when husband and wife and child are one flesh again, re-united by the law of Nature, which is the law of God."

I might have disputed with him; but I thought he was right. I also wanted to make sure of the facts. "Am I really to understand," I asked, "that Mr. Herbert Linley is to be this lady's husband for the second time?"

"If there is no lawful objection to it," Randal said--"decidedly Yes."

My good wife, in all your experience you never saw your husband stare as he stared at that moment. Here was a lady divorced by her own lawful desire and at her own personal expense, thinking better of it after no very long interval, and proposing to marry the man again. Was there ever anything so grossly improbable? Where is the novelist who would be bold enough to invent such an incident as this?

Never mind the novelist. How did it end?

Of course it could only end in one way, so far as I was concerned. The case being without precedent in my experience, I dropped my professional character at the outset. Speaking next as a friend, I had only to say to Mrs. Norman: "The Law has declared you and Mr. Herbert Linley to be single people. Do what other single people do. Buy a license, and give notice at a church--and by all means send wedding cards to the judge who divorced you."

Said; and, in another fortnight, done. Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Linley were married again this morning; and Randal and I were the only witnesses present at the ceremony, which was strictly private.

## **2.--The Lawyer's Defense.**

I wonder whether the foregoing pages of my writing-paper have been torn to pieces and thrown into the waste-paper basket? You wouldn't litter the carpet. No. I may be torn in pieces, but I do you justice for all that.

What are the objections to the divorced husband and wife becoming husband and wife again? Mrs. Presty has stated them in the following order. Am I wrong in assuming that, on this occasion at least, you will agree with Mrs. Presty?

First Objection: Nobody has ever done such a thing before.

Second Objection: Penitent or not penitent, Mr. Herbert Linley doesn't deserve it.

Third Objection: No respectable person will visit them.

First Reply: The question is not whether the thing has been done before, but whether the doing of the thing is right in itself. There is no clause in the marriage service forbidding a wife to forgive her husband; but there is a direct prohibition to any separation between them. It is, therefore, not wrong to forgive Mr. Herbert Linley, and it is absolutely right to marry him again.

Second Reply: When their child brings him home, and takes it for granted that her father and mother should live together, because they are her father and mother, innocent Kitty has appealed from the Law of Divorce to the Law of Nature. Whether Herbert Linley has deserved it or whether he has not, there he is in the only fit place for him--and there is an end of the second objection.

Third Reply: A flat contradiction to the assertion that no respectable person will visit her. Mrs. Sarrazin will visit her. Yes, you will, my dear! Not because I insist upon it--Do I ever insist on anything? No; you will act on your own responsibility, out of compassion for a misguided old woman. Judge for yourself when you read what follows, if Mrs. Presty is not sadly in need of the good example of an ornament to her sex.

The Evil Genius of the family joined us in the cottage parlor when our

consultations had come to an end. I had the honor of communicating the decision at which we had arrived. Mrs. Presty marched to the door; and, from that commanding position, addressed a few farewell remarks to her daughter.

"I have done with you, Catherine. You have reached the limits of my maternal endurance at last. I shall set up my own establishment, and live again--in memory--with Mr. Norman and Mr. Presty. May you be happy. I don't anticipate it."

She left the room--and came back again for a last word, addressed this time to Randal Linley.

"When you next see your friend, Captain Bennydeck, give him my compliments, Mr. Randal, and say I congratulate him on having been jilted by my daughter. It would have been a sad thing, indeed, if such a sensible man had married an idiot. Good-morning."

She left the room again, and came back again for another last word, addressed on this occasion to me. Her better nature made an effort to express itself, not altogether without success.

"I think it is quite likely, Mr. Sarrazin, that some dreadful misfortune will fall on my daughter, as the punishment of her undutiful disregard of her mother's objections. In that case, I shall feel it my duty to return and administer maternal consolation. When you write, address me at my banker's. I make allowances for a lawyer, sir; I don't blame You."

She opened the door for the third time--stepped out, and stepped back again into the room--suddenly gave her daughter a fierce kiss--returned to the door--shook her fist at Mrs. Linley with a theatrically-threatening gesture--said, "Unnatural child!"--and, after this exhibition of her better nature, and her worse, left us at last. When you visit the remarried pair on their return from their second honeymoon, take Mrs. Presty with you.

### **3.--The Lawyer's Last Word.**

"When you force this ridiculous and regrettable affair on my attention" (I think I hear Mrs. Sarrazin say), "the least you can do is to make your narrative complete. But perhaps you propose to tell me personally what has become of Kitty, and what well-deserved retribution has overtaken Miss Westerfield."

No: I propose in this case also to communicate my information in writing--at the safe distance from home of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Kitty accompanies her father and mother to the Continent, of course. But she insisted on first saying good-by to the dear friend, once the dear governess, whom she loves. Randal and I volunteered to take her (with her mother's ready permission) to see Miss Westerfield. Try not to be angry. Try not to tear me up.

We found Captain Bennydeck and his pretty secretary enjoying a little rest and refreshment, after a long morning's work for the good of the Home. The Captain was carving the chicken; and Sydney, by his side, was making the salad. The house-cat occupied a third chair, with her eyes immovably fixed on the movements of the knife and fork. Perhaps I was thinking of sad past days. Anyway, it seemed to me to be as pretty a domestic scene as a man could wish to look at. The arrival of Kitty made the picture complete.

Our visit was necessarily limited by a due remembrance of the hour of departure, by an early tidal train. Kitty's last words to Sydney bade her bear their next meeting in mind, and not be melancholy at only saying good-by for a time. Like all children, she asks strange questions. When we were out in the street again, she said to her uncle: "Do you think my nice Captain will marry Syd?"

Randal had noticed, in Captain Bennydeck's face, signs which betrayed that the bitterest disappointment of his life was far from being a forgotten disappointment yet. If it had been put by any other person, poor Kitty's absurd question might have met with a bitter reply. As it was, her uncle only said: "My dear child, that is no business of yours or mine."

Not in the least discouraged, Kitty turned to me. "What do you think, Samuel?"

I followed Randal's lead, and answered, "How should I know?"

The child looked from one to the other of us. "Shall I tell you what I think?" she said, "I think you are both of you humbugs."