

## CHAPTER XXII

### A FRIEND IN NEED

Mara was so wearied with her night walk and the agitation she had been through, that once asleep she slept long after the early breakfast hour of the family. She was surprised on awaking to hear the slow old clock downstairs striking eight. She hastily jumped up and looked around with a confused wonder, and then slowly the events of the past night came back upon her like a remembered dream. She dressed herself quickly, and went down to find the breakfast things all washed and put away, and Mrs. Pennel spinning.

"Why, dear heart," said the old lady, "how came you to sleep so?--I spoke to you twice, but I could not make you hear."

"Has Moses been down, grandma?" said Mara, intent on the sole thought in her heart.

"Why, yes, dear, long ago,--and cross enough he was; that boy does get to be a trial,--but come, dear, I've saved some hot cakes for you,--sit down now and eat your breakfast."

Mara made a feint of eating what her grandmother with fond officiousness would put before her, and then rising up she put on her sun-bonnet and

started down toward the cove to find her old friend.

The queer, dry, lean old Captain had been to her all her life like a faithful kobold or brownie, an unquestioning servant of all her gentle biddings. She dared tell him anything without diffidence or shamefacedness; and she felt that in this trial of her life he might have in his sea-receptacle some odd old amulet or spell that should be of power to help her. Instinctively she avoided the house, lest Sally should see and fly out and seize her. She took a narrow path through the cedars down to the little boat cove where the old Captain worked so merrily ten years ago, in the beginning of our story, and where she found him now, with his coat off, busily planing a board.

"Wal', now,--if this 'ere don't beat all!" he said, looking up and seeing her; "why, you're looking after Sally, I s'pose? She's up to the house."

"No, Captain Kittridge, I'm come to see you."

"You be?" said the Captain, "I swow! if I ain't a lucky feller. But what's the matter?" he said, suddenly observing her pale face and the tears in her eyes. "Hain't nothin' bad happened,--hes there?"

"Oh! Captain Kittridge, something dreadful; and nobody but you can help me."

"Want to know, now!" said the Captain, with a grave face. "Well, come here, now, and sit down, and tell me all about it. Don't you cry, there's a good girl! Don't, now."

Mara began her story, and went through with it in a rapid and agitated manner; and the good Captain listened in a fidgety state of interest, occasionally relieving his mind by interjecting "Do tell, now!" "I swan,--if that ar ain't too bad."

"That ar's rediculous conduct in Atkinson. He ought to be talked to," said the Captain, when she had finished, and then he whistled and put a shaving in his mouth, which he chewed reflectively.

"Don't you be a mite worried, Mara," he said. "You did a great deal better to come to me than to go to Mr. Sewell or your grand'ther either; 'cause you see these 'ere wild chaps they'll take things from me they wouldn't from a church-member or a minister. Folks mustn't pull 'em up with too short a rein,--they must kind o' flatter 'em off. But that ar Atkinson's too rediculous for anything; and if he don't mind, I'll serve him out. I know a thing or two about him that I shall shake over his head if he don't behave. Now I don't think so much of smugglin' as some folks," said the Captain, lowering his voice to a confidential tone. "I reely don't, now; but come to goin' off piratin',--and tryin' to put a young boy up to robbin' his best friends,--why, there ain't no kind o' sense in that. It's p'ison mean of Atkinson. I shall tell him so, and I shall talk to Moses."

"Oh! I'm afraid to have you," said Mara, apprehensively.

"Why, chickabiddy," said the old Captain, "you don't understand me. I ain't goin' at him with no sermons,--I shall jest talk to him this way: Look here now, Moses, I shall say, there's Badger's ship goin' to sail in a fortnight for China, and they want likely fellers aboard, and I've got a hundred dollars that I'd like to send on a venture; if you'll take it and go, why, we'll share the profits. I shall talk like that, you know. Mebbe I sha'n't let him know what I know, and mebbe I shall; jest tip him a wink, you know; it depends on circumstances. But bless you, child, these 'ere fellers ain't none of 'em 'fraid o' me, you see, 'cause they know I know the ropes."

"And can you make that horrid man let him alone?" said Mara, fearfully.

"Calculate I can. 'Spect if I's to tell Atkinson a few things I know, he'd be for bein' scase in our parts. Now, you see, I hain't minded doin' a small bit o' trade now and then with them ar fellers myself; but this 'ere," said the Captain, stopping and looking extremely disgusted, "why, it's contemptible, it's rediculous!"

"Do you think I'd better tell grandpapa?" said Mara.

"Don't worry your little head. I'll step up and have a talk with Pennel, this evening. He knows as well as I that there is times when chaps must

be seen to, and no remarks made. Pennel knows that ar. Why, now, Mis' Kittridge thinks our boys turned out so well all along of her bringin' up, and I let her think so; keeps her sort o' in spirits, you see. But Lord bless ye, child, there's been times with Job, and Sam, and Pass, and Dass, and Dile, and all on 'em finally, when, if I hadn't jest pulled a rope here and turned a screw there, and said nothin' to nobody, they'd a-been all gone to smash. I never told Mis' Kittridge none o' their didos; bless you, 'twouldn't been o' no use. I never told them, neither; but I jest kind o' worked 'em off, you know; and they's all putty 'spectable men now, as men go, you know; not like Parson Sewell, but good, honest mates and ship-masters,--kind o' middlin' people, you know. It takes a good many o' sich to make up a world, d'ye see."

"But oh, Captain Kittridge, did any of them use to swear?" said Mara, in a faltering voice.

"Wal', they did, consid'able," said the Captain;--then seeing the trembling of Mara's lip, he added,--

"Ef you could a-found this 'ere out any other way, it's most a pity you'd a-heard him; 'cause he wouldn't never have let out afore you. It don't do for gals to hear the fellers talk when they's alone, 'cause fellers,--wal', you see, fellers will be fellers, partic'larly when they're young. Some on 'em, they never gits over it all their lives finally."

"But oh! Captain Kittridge, that talk last night was so dreadfully wicked! and Moses!--oh, it was dreadful to hear him!"

"Wal', yes, it was," said the Captain, consolingly; "but don't you cry, and don't you break your little heart. I expect he'll come all right, and jine the church one of these days; 'cause there's old Pennel, he prays,--fact now, I think there's consid'able in some people's prayers, and he's one of the sort. And you pray, too; and I'm quite sure the good Lord must hear you. I declare sometimes I wish you'd jest say a good word to Him for me; I should like to get the hang o' things a little better than I do, somehow, I reely should. I've gi'n up swearing years ago. Mis' Kittridge, she broke me o' that, and now I don't never go further than 'I vum' or 'I swow,' or somethin' o' that sort; but you see I'm old;--Moses is young; but then he's got eddication and friends, and he'll come all right. Now you jest see ef he don't!"

This miscellaneous budget of personal experiences and friendly consolation which the good Captain conveyed to Mara may possibly make you laugh, my reader, but the good, ropy brown man was doing his best to console his little friend; and as Mara looked at him he was almost glorified in her eyes--he had power to save Moses, and he would do it. She went home to dinner that day with her heart considerably lightened. She refrained, in a guilty way, from even looking at Moses, who was gloomy and moody.

Mara had from nature a good endowment of that kind of innocent hypocrisy

which is needed as a staple in the lives of women who bridge a thousand awful chasms with smiling, unconscious looks, and walk, singing and scattering flowers, over abysses of fear, while their hearts are dying within them.

She talked more volubly than was her wont with Mrs. Pennel, and with her old grandfather; she laughed and seemed in more than usual spirits, and only once did she look up and catch the gloomy eye of Moses. It had that murky, troubled look that one may see in the eye of a boy when those evil waters which cast up mire and dirt have once been stirred in his soul. They fell under her clear glance, and he made a rapid, impatient movement, as if it hurt him to be looked at. The evil spirit in boy or man cannot bear the "touch of celestial temper;" and the sensitiveness to eyebeams is one of the earliest signs of conscious, inward guilt.

Mara was relieved, as he flung out of the house after dinner, to see the long, dry figure of Captain Kittridge coming up and seizing Moses by the button. From the window she saw the Captain assuming a confidential air with him; and when they had talked together a few moments, she saw Moses going with great readiness after him down the road to his house.

In less than a fortnight, it was settled Moses was to sail for China, and Mara was deep in the preparations for his outfit. Once she would have felt this departure as the most dreadful trial of her life. Now it seemed to her a deliverance for him, and she worked with a cheerful alacrity, which seemed to Moses more than was proper, considering he

was going away.

For Moses, like many others of his sex, boy or man, had quietly settled in his own mind that the whole love of Mara's heart was to be his, to have and to hold, to use and to draw on, when and as he liked. He reckoned on it as a sort of inexhaustible, uncounted treasure that was his own peculiar right and property, and therefore he felt abused at what he supposed was a disclosure of some deficiency on her part.

"You seem to be very glad to be rid of me," he said to her in a bitter tone one day, as she was earnestly busy in her preparations.

Now the fact was, that Moses had been assiduously making himself disagreeable to Mara for the fortnight past, by all sorts of unkind sayings and doings; and he knew it too; yet he felt a right to feel very much abused at the thought that she could possibly want him to be going. If she had been utterly desolate about it, and torn her hair and sobbed and wailed, he would have asked what she could be crying about, and begged not to be bored with scenes; but as it was, this cheerful composure was quite unfeeling.

Now pray don't suppose Moses to be a monster of an uncommon species. We take him to be an average specimen of a boy of a certain kind of temperament in the transition period of life. Everything is chaos within; the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and "light and darkness, and mind and dust, and passion and pure



thoughts, mingle and contend," without end or order. He wondered at himself sometimes that he could say such cruel things as he did to his faithful little friend--to one whom, after all, he did love and trust before all other human beings.

There is no saying why it is that a man or a boy, not radically destitute of generous comprehensions, will often cruelly torture and tyrannize over a woman whom he both loves and reveres, who stands in his soul in his best hours as the very impersonation of all that is good and beautiful. It is as if some evil spirit at times possessed him, and compelled him to utter words which were felt at the moment to be mean and hateful. Moses often wondered at himself, as he lay awake nights, how he could have said and done the things he had, and felt miserably resolved to make it up somehow before he went away; but he did not.

He could not say, "Mara, I have done wrong," though he every day meant to do it, and sometimes sat an hour in her presence, feeling murky and stony, as if possessed by a dumb spirit; then he would get up and fling stormily out of the house.

Poor Mara wondered if he really would go without one kind word. She thought of all the years they had been together, and how he had been her only thought and love. What had become of her brother?--the Moses that once she used to know--frank, careless, not ill-tempered, and who sometimes seemed to love her and think she was the best little girl in the world? Where was he gone to--this friend and brother of her

childhood, and would he never come back?

At last came the evening before his parting; the sea-chest was all made up and packed; and Mara's fingers had been busy with everything, from more substantial garments down to all those little comforts and nameless conveniences that only a woman knows how to improvise. Mara thought certainly she should get a few kind words, as Moses looked it over. But he only said, "All right;" and then added that "there was a button off one of the shirts." Mara's busy fingers quickly replaced it, and Moses was annoyed at the tear that fell on the button. What was she crying for now? He knew very well, but he felt stubborn and cruel. Afterwards he lay awake many a night in his berth, and acted this last scene over differently. He took Mara in his arms and kissed her; he told her she was his best friend, his good angel, and that he was not worthy to kiss the hem of her garment; but the next day, when he thought of writing a letter to her, he didn't, and the good mood passed away. Boys do not acquire an ease of expression in letter-writing as early as girls, and a voyage to China furnished opportunities few and far between of sending letters.

Now and then, through some sailing ship, came missives which seemed to Mara altogether colder and more unsatisfactory than they would have done could she have appreciated the difference between a boy and a girl in power of epistolary expression; for the power of really representing one's heart on paper, which is one of the first spring flowers of early womanhood, is the latest blossom on the slow-growing tree of manhood. To

do Moses justice, these seeming cold letters were often written with a choking lump in his throat, caused by thinking over his many sins against his little good angel; but then that past account was so long, and had so much that it pained him to think of, that he dashed it all off in the shortest fashion, and said to himself, "One of these days when I see her I'll make it all up."

No man--especially one that is living a rough, busy, out-of-doors life--can form the slightest conception of that veiled and secluded life which exists in the heart of a sensitive woman, whose sphere is narrow, whose external diversions are few, and whose mind, therefore, acts by a continual introversion upon itself. They know nothing how their careless words and actions are pondered and turned again in weary, quiet hours of fruitless questioning. What did he mean by this? and what did he intend by that?--while he, the careless buffalo, meant nothing, or has forgotten what it was, if he did. Man's utter ignorance of woman's nature is a cause of a great deal of unsuspected cruelty which he practices toward her.

Mara found one or two opportunities of writing to Moses; but her letters were timid and constrained by a sort of frosty, discouraged sense of loneliness; and Moses, though he knew he had no earthly right to expect this to be otherwise, took upon him to feel as an abused individual, whom nobody loved--whose way in the world was destined to be lonely and desolate. So when, at the end of three years, he arrived suddenly at Brunswick in the beginning of winter, and came, all burning with

impatience, to the home at Orr's Island, and found that Mara had gone to Boston on a visit, he resented it as a personal slight.

He might have inquired why she should expect him, and whether her whole life was to be spent in looking out of the window to watch for him. He might have remembered that he had warned her of his approach by no letter. But no. "Mara didn't care for him--she had forgotten all about him--she was having a good time in Boston, just as likely as not with some train of admirers, and he had been tossing on the stormy ocean, and she had thought nothing of it." How many things he had meant to say! He had never felt so good and so affectionate. He would have confessed all the sins of his life to her, and asked her pardon--and she wasn't there!

Mrs. Pennel suggested that he might go to Boston after her.

No, he was not going to do that. He would not intrude on her pleasures with the memory of a rough, hard-working sailor. He was alone in the world, and had his own way to make, and so best go at once up among lumbermen, and cut the timber for the ship that was to carry Cæsar and his fortunes.

When Mara was informed by a letter from Mrs. Pennel, expressed in the few brief words in which that good woman generally embodied her epistolary communications, that Moses had been at home, and gone to Umbagog without seeing her, she felt at her heart only a little closer stricture of cold, quiet pain, which had become a habit of her inner

life.

"He did not love her--he was cold and selfish," said the inner voice. And faintly she pleaded, in answer, "He is a man--he has seen the world--and has so much to do and think of, no wonder."

In fact, during the last three years that had parted them, the great change of life had been consummated in both. They had parted boy and girl; they would meet man and woman. The time of this meeting had been announced.

And all this is the history of that sigh, so very quiet that Sally Kittridge never checked the rattling flow of her conversation to observe it.