

# The Eastroyds and the Murwoods

BY SARAH SELINA HAMER, IN THE 'ALLIANCE NEWS.'

## Chapter III.—Continued. Two Catastrophes.

And then he proceeded to tell him of the fatal accident to Robson.

'Another life sacrificed at the shrine of Bacchus then,' said the doctor, sorrowfully. 'I should not like your brother's feelings when they hear of it, Ernest, any more than your sister's who she fully realizes what she has done. Their conduct in inducing the men to drink on such an occasion was abominable,' he added.

'Alcohol is, there is no doubt about it,' said Ernest bitterly, 'the special bane of our family. I thank God,' he added reverently, 'that though late in the day I have, I trust, washed my hands of it for ever.'

'Yes, thank God, there is cause,' said the young doctor, grasping his friend's hand.

As the latter thought it unadvisable for Ernest to see his sister just then, he left a message for Kate, telling her to stay as long as she felt it needful, and then the two left West Moor together, the doctor to go to the Robson's Cottage, and Ernest to telegraph to Mr. Murwood, urging his immediate return. He did not tell him the whole truth. That would have been too cruel.

Edward and Tom Eastroyd had both arrived at the office when Ernest got back, and their bleared eyes and loose lips testified plainly to the previous evening's debauch. The former, as was usual with him on such occasions, was excessively irritable too. It was plain that they had only just arrived, and had as yet heard nothing.

'What's become of Lord, do you know?' Edward said to Ernest, after a curt 'good morning.' 'He has had time to go through the mill twice over by this, I should think, and ought to have been in his office. And I didn't go in; but there seems to be only one clerk in the book-keeper's office. What has become of everybody?'

'You'd better ask Lord himself, for here he comes,' said Ernest gravely; he could see him crossing the mill yard. 'You evidently have not heard of the results of last night's work.'

'Oh, if you are going to preach again I'm off,' said Edward, making for the door.

'Before you go you had better know what has happened at West Moor,' said Ernest, and without any comment whatever he told the story of their sister's sorrow.

'Maurice dead! The little chap poisoned!' exclaimed Tom, much moved; his nephew had been a great favorite of his.

'My stars, I wouldn't stand in Ellen's shoes for something!' exclaimed Edward, coarsely. 'Murwood will be fit to kill her.'

'How will you like to stand in your own, I wonder,' Ernest could not help saying, 'when you know that Robson is dead?'

'Dead! Robson dead!' exclaimed Edward, in a shocked and half incredulous tone.

'Yes,' said Ernest, sorrowfully enough; 'but I will leave Lord to tell you all about it. I have just had to retail it to the doctor, and I am about sick of horrors.'

Without another word Edward and Tom went to join the manager.

'What a fool the man must have been to have gone over the hill instead of down the valley in such a wind,' was the irritable comment of the former when he heard the story.

'If he had been sober he wouldn't have mattered a jot, Mr. Eastroyd,' said the manager. 'I've gone that way on worse nights than last, and so has he, poor fellow, and when there was no fence at all to the quarry.'

'You'd better keep a still tongue, Lord, about his not being sober,' said Edward Eastroyd, angrily.

'It was Earnshaw told me, sir,' said the manager, respectfully. 'I didn't see him; but he did.'

Tom held his peace. He was feeling wretchedly depressed.

'I could do with another brandy and soda,' he said to himself, which showed that he had already that morning partaken of such.

## Chapter IV.—A Desperate Remedy.

Matthew Murwood was well nigh distraught at the death of his little son, to whom he had been passionately attached. And then, the manner of losing him! It was terrible—it would not bear thinking about. From having once loved her dearly, he felt now that he almost hated his wife. The exposure, for one thing, had been as wormwood and gall to a man of his proud nature. To have lost his only son, destined, as he had proudly thought, to carry on the family name, a very old one in the district, was surely enough, without having that name dragged in the mire, as had been the case at the inquest—the proceedings of which had been reported in all the newspapers for many miles round. A plain-spoken jurymen or two, and a keen-eyed and keen-witted coroner, had elicited certain very damaging facts concerning his wife's drunken habits. At one time, indeed during the inquiry, she seemed to be in imminent danger of being committed for manslaughter. That catastrophe had fortunately been averted; but still, things were bad enough in all conscience. His son was no more; his wife was branded through the whole surrounding community as a drunkard, and his home was blighted, the relations between himself and his companion for life being strained to the last degree. Nor did compassion for his wife's manifest suffering greatly soften his feelings with regard to her. Being a man with complete control over his own appetites, he had little pity for those of his fellow creatures who had been cast in a weaker mould. His sympathy was scant, his blame ample. It may therefore be imagined that in all England there could be few more miserable women than Ellen Murwood. She had loved her child, too—tenderly loved him. She had inadvertently caused his death, and her conscience telling her how, gave her little or no peace. And to self-blame she had to bear the reproach—constant reproach, in manner, and occasionally in speech, of her husband and the father of her boy. Is it to be wondered at, therefore, that in her misery, she again yielded to the craving for strong drink? For a time, at any rate, in the comparative obliviousness it brought, her sense of suffering was deadened. But, oh, the wretchedness afterwards!

'I cannot bear my life, Kate. I think sometimes I shall go mad!' she said one day to her sister-in-law. It was some weeks after the death of little Maurice, and Ellen was fighting with fresh temptation, the stronger from having recently yielded to her appetite. To this new member of the Eastroyd family alone had the proud, stately woman ever spoken of her besetment, and that only once before. Kate's loving sympathy, which had been so great as to exclude reproach, had, at the time of Ellen's great sorrow, completely won her heart and her confidence; and ever since there had been a strong bond between them. But it was delicate ground on which to tread, and until Ellen herself should re-open the subject Kate had felt too much afraid of hurting a sore spirit to speak of it. Now, however, the opportunity she had longed for was within her reach.

'I am so sorry for you, Ellen, dear,' she said. 'This craving you speak of must be terribly hard to fight, since even the thought of your dear little girls is not enough to drive it away, as you have told me. You long to conquer it, you say, and cannot. It has got the mastery over you; practically, it has become a disease. Ellen, dear, you must go away from here. You must go where you can be cured. There are such places; pleasant homes, where the cause of all your sorrow is never allowed to enter. I have heard

of one such just lately near *Baleborough*.'

'But—but how can I go? What would *Mat* say to such a thing?' cried poor Ellen. 'It would be—such an exposure, and—the color flooding her face, 'my husband is so sore about that. I think sometimes,' she added bitterly, 'he feels the talk about me more than the death of our boy.'

'Well, dear,' said Kate, 'that shows, at any rate, that he still cares for you, as you seem sometimes to doubt.'

'He cares for his good name,' said Ellen, with a concentrated bitterness which made Kate shudder.

'Then, dear,' said Kate, 'if only for that, I feel persuaded that he would consent to your going. And when you come back cured—only think of it, Ellen!—you will soon win back the place you seem to think you have lost in your husband's heart. I have not a doubt upon the subject. Besides, the general public need not know where you are. Dr. Hasleham has already told you, again and again, that you ought to go away for a change. And you will have gone—that is all. Indeed, even if they do find out, everyone whose opinion is worth having will approve your resolution. For it must be your own act and deed, Ellen, dear; no one can force you to go. You will be obliged to sign a document pledging yourself to remain a whole year, and to conform to the rules of the home.'

'How can I ever do it?' moaned Ellen. 'It seems as if some days I should go mad if I did not have some brandy.'

'That shows, Ellen, dear, how needful it is that you should go,' said Kate, twining her arm about the poor victim to alcohol. 'Desperate diseases call for desperate remedies,' it is said. No doubt you will suffer at first—terribly, but the temptation will gradually become weaker in time. And think what it will be when it no longer assails you—with any force.'

'That would be heaven!' murmured Ellen, with bowed head.

'If you will only say the word, Ellen,' said Kate, gently; 'and, oh, do say it, darling. I will ask Dr. Hasleham to speak to *Mat* about it, and, his consent once gained, Arthur will arrange everything, I know he will, gladly.'

'Oh, I cannot, I cannot,' moaned Ellen.

'Ernest and I will take charge of the children at Underbank; their nurse can come with them; you need have no uneasiness about them,' urged Kate.

Alas! though Ellen Murwood loved her children, it was not of them she was thinking just then, so much as of the brandy she must give up.

'I cannot, I cannot,' she wailed again. 'I could not live; I—'

Kate was in despair. What was to be done? It seemed cruel, terribly cruel, to remind this tortured woman of that recent painful event, but as nothing else seemed to suffice, even that must be tried. As she had just before quoted, 'Desperate diseases demanded desperate remedies.'

'Ellen, darling,' she whispered, drawing the poor woman back into her arms, 'think of your two little girls, think of your little Maurice, and for his sake, for their sakes—'

But by this time Mrs. Murwood had flung off Kate's embrace, and had sprung to her feet.

'You, you, Kate, to tell me that!' she exclaimed, quivering all over with nervous excitement. 'Just as if I ever forget it, as if it did not haunt me, night and day! I did not think that you could have been so cruel, Kate, as to remind me of—of—' Here she broke off into hysterical weeping.

Kate waited until she was calmer, then she resumed: 'It is because I love you, Ellen, that I am so urgent in this matter, and you must forgive me if I hurt you in doing it. Nothing can bring Maurice back to you and your husband; but—but, Ellen—it would be some kind of atonement, would make up to *Mat* a little—if—from this time forth, at whatever cost, you renounced for ever the fatal cup. I can think of nothing else that will ever do it.'

There was complete silence after Kate had thus spoken, in a voice vibrant with feeling, for the space of a whole minute. A great mental struggle was evidently going on. Then Ellen Murwood fell on her knees by Kate's lap, and cried.

(To be continued.)