

now may I hear what it is you have to tell me?"

"It concerns Laura Wyndham," he answered, gravely. "I think you ought to know that she is likely to prove as false to Mr. Lisle as she has been to poor John Pemberton."

Mary turned round, and looked at him quite aghast at his words. "It is impossible," she said.

"I believe it to be certain, knowing Lurline as I do," he answered; "fate has thrown another man in her way, who will suit her far better, at the very time when she was becoming convinced that her engagement with a soldier who had joined the French army was an exceedingly bad speculation. I suppose you know she has had another letter from Bertrand since he entered on the campaign?"

"No, I have heard nothing," said Mary, breathlessly. "Has there been news of him? oh, tell me!" and as he saw how her chest heaved, and her faint colour went and came, his heart burned with mingled pity and indignation at the manner in which her happiness had been stolen from her.

"The letter had been sent by the field-post, and it had only reached her a day or two before I saw her yesterday: it was short, and Mr. Lisle had written it apparently with much difficulty, and with his left hand."

"Is he hurt?" Mary's blanched lips could scarcely frame the question.

"He is hurt, but not vitally. It seems he was enrolled in the French army as Bertrand de L'Isle, just in time to take his share in the dreadful battle of Gravelotte. He has been fortunate in escaping from it with his life, and without a fatal wound; but he has had a serious and painful injury to his right arm, which has completely incapacitated him from using it, the elbow-joint has been shattered by a bullet, and it may ultimately have to be amputated. In the meantime, however, those who are fighting for unhappy France may not stop to think of their own troubles, and as Mr. Lisle cannot go again into action in this state, he has volunteered for a service of even greater danger, and has been appointed to carry dispatches from the seat of war to the military commander in Paris. The Prussians, as you know, are said to be advancing on the capital, and Mr. Lisle felt so doubtful if he could reach his destination in safety, that he wished Lurline to know it was possible she might never hear from him again." Charlie stopped abruptly, terrified at the look of agony on Mary's white face. "Let me get you some water!" he exclaimed, starting up; "you look so faint; I ought not to have told you this."

"No, no!" she gasped, holding out a trembling hand to stop him—"I must know all! tell me, I beseech you! tell me every word you heard! I am certain that as yet, at least, he is not dead—I should have felt it if he had been. Oh, Charlie! keep nothing back from me!"

It was the first time she had called him by his Christian name, and although he saw she had done it unconsciously, he could not refuse the request she had made in such terms, even were it injurious to her to comply with it.

"Mr. Lisle wrote this letter just before starting on his perilous journey; he said that in the confusion attending the terrible battle he had lost everything he had with him, including his money, and that he now possessed nothing in the world but the horse which had been given him for all such portions of the distance to Paris as could not be traversed by any other means, and that,

he feared, on account of the vicinity of the hostile troops, would be nearly the whole way. He added, that he should be beholden to the hospitality of the country people where he travelled for mere subsistence, as a few stray sous, which might buy him one meal, was literally all he had in his pocket, and money was, unhappily, too scarce in the army at that moment for him to dream of asking for any. He is a brave, noble fellow!" added Charlie, enthusiastically.

"And so, alone and in pain, with his life in danger every instant, he is making that dreadful journey," said Mary, with tears welling into her eyes.

"Yes; and what do you think was Lurline's comment on this letter from the man whose wife she would have been but for this war? She said it gave ample proof of the wisdom she had shown in deciding to give him up from the moment she heard he had resigned his appointment and joined the army. 'It is pretty plain,' she said, 'in what guise he would come out of the war—if he lives to come out of it at all—as a broken down, one-armed soldier, without a penny in the world; and that is certainly not a position he will find me disposed to share.'"

"Mr. Davenant," said Mary, starting to her feet, "for very shame it cannot be that Laura ever spoke such words as these; you must have misunderstood her!" and the indignation she felt sent a glow over her white face, and dispelled the faintness which had nearly overcome her.

"I assure you I could not mistake her," said Charlie, "for she talked over the whole matter at great length and with the utmost coolness. I think, in her anxiety to be married, she might not so completely have discarded Mr. Lisle till she saw how his affairs would turn out, if it had not been that she expects the offer of an alliance infinitely more splendid than his would have been, even in his former position, and she is glad to be free in order to secure it."

Mary sat down again in silence, she was too gentle to speak the contempt and almost loathing with which such conduct filled her; but after a moment she asked Charlie if he meant to imply that Laura was likely to marry some other man.

"Certain, I should say, if the gentleman continues to be as willing as he seems to be at present; but as they have only known each other ten days I suppose he thinks it necessary to wait as long as he can before definitely asking her to marry him. It will not be very long, however, for it seems he is anxious to get back to Italy as fast as possible, and he has told Mrs. Wyndham he would like to take Laura with him as his wife. But I have not yet explained to you that he is a Mr. Brant, an enormously wealthy merchant, who has a sort of palace in the beautiful city where Mr. Lisle lived. He brought Lurline some jewels which Bertrand wished to send her, and thus made her acquaintance, and he has already given her thoroughly to understand that if she marries him she will have every luxury and pleasure money can procure. You know what a temptation that must be to the Lorelei."

"It is terrible!" said Mary; "Bertrand loves her."

"Or thinks he does," replied Charlie, with a smile, "he was dazzled and infatuated, but I think when Lurline shows herself to him in her true colours, as she now will, he may find his love for her much more an imagination than a reality." "But he will suffer—he must suffer in being so betrayed."

"Lurline is not worth it if he does,"

said Charlie, sharply; "the man she is likely to marry will suit her far better. I saw him; he came in while I was there yesterday, and his character may be read on his face—a hard, cold, selfish man of the world, who has his own interests at heart and nothing else; if he marries the Lorelei it will be because it is convenient for his own purposes, whatever they may be. Lurline carried him off into the back drawing-room to talk to him in private, so soon as he appeared, and it was then I got Mrs. Wyndham to tell me the whole history of his acquaintance with them. She says he is very anxious to be married that he may have an English lady to manage his princely establishment abroad; but he has to return there in a very few weeks, and she believes that he will have the marriage settled and finally accomplished in time to take Lurline home with him."

"So soon! while even yet Bertrand believes her engaged to him," said Mary, slowly; "Mr. Davenant, it is inconceivable; I cannot give credit to it!"

"I believe there is another motive weighing with Lurline at this moment which I almost shrink from telling you," said Charlie, half reluctantly; "yet it seems best you should know all. It appears that Mr. Wyndham has been very unwell since he has been in town, and the doctors have told both his wife and daughter that he has an incurable malady, which is certain to end his life very soon. Were he to die the Lorelei would be completely without a home, as Mrs. Wyndham would have to go back to her own friends, and I think Laura wishes to provide an establishment for herself before that event."

"Mr. Davenant, I must hope that you are judging poor Laura too harshly," said Mary with enough of reproach in her gentle voice to make Charlie stumble uncomfortably to his feet, saying, "Anyhow, I dare say you have had enough of me and my surmises, so I will leave you now; but let me tell you one more fact which you ought to know: Lurline wrote to you to ask for your address in Paris, did she not?"

"Yes; and I sent it to her. Letters forwarded to the care of Madame Brunot, the wife of the *colporteur* with whom nurse Parry is going to lodge, will always reach me safely."

"Well, Lurline told me why she asked you for it. She said she certainly would have to write to Mr. Lisle very soon on a matter of importance, and as she had not the remotest idea where he was, or was likely to be, she should send her letter to you, and ask you to give it to him, as you would be certain to find him out." Charlie glanced furtively at Mary as he spoke, but the quiet dignity of her manner was not ruffled for a moment; she was far above the petty spite of such a woman as Laura Wyndham. She made no remark on Charlie's statement, but, holding out her hand to him, she said, "It may be long before we meet again, Mr. Davenant, if ever; let me give you my best wishes for your happiness wherever you may be."

He caught her hand and wrung it in both of his. "And you, Miss Trevelyan, come back safe—oh, come back safe! We cannot spare such as you are out of this wicked world," and then, overcome by his emotion, he rushed from the room.

Not much more than four and twenty hours later Mary Trevelyan was seated on the deck of the steam packet which was conveying her and her associates from Dover to Calais. It was a most lovely night, so fair and peaceful that it seemed scarce possible to believe the land whose quiet shore was already looming in sight could really be convulsed by all the horrors of war, and rent from end to end by struggles not only against the common foe