

have mistaken you, and urges me to ask if it is possible you can feel for him what he has ventured to hope within the last day—if so, he is the happiest—most fortunate of men. But if, through any vain misconception on his part, he is wrong, he leaves us forever to day, and his future life will become to him more desolate than ever—I repeat to you his own words. Now you have never yet deceived me, my beloved child, and I feel assured that your answer will be given in sincerity of heart. Speak, my Annie.”

Annie’s emotion became painful; she turned to the hue of death—her breathing was scarcely perceptible—she rested her face on the bosom of her father, while in the faintest tone she murmured:

“Tell him not to leave us—tell him he must stay for my sake—if I were never to behold him more, my heart would break.”

“God bless my child—my darling,” exclaimed Mr. Bertram, straining her to his heart, “Annie, in this answer, you have removed a weight from my mind.”

It will readily be believed how warmly I entered into this scene. Mr. Bertram, while tears of joy stood in his eyes, continued—

“From your own lips must Selby hear your answer—for so I promised him, whether it were for weal or for woe—he awaits you in our favourite room.”

“Not alone, my father—not alone,” cried Annie, “my courage would fail me.”

“My word has been given, and you must obey it, my dear child—but remember,” added Mr. Bertram, striving to be playful, “that I can only spare you twenty minutes, for it is long past our breakfast hour, and I am hungry, and want my bread and butter.”

Dear Annie smiled through her tears, but was still much agitated—she looked at me.

“My child, you must indeed go alone,” said I, taking her hand, “but I will lead you to the door of this formidable man—it were cruel to detain him longer in the suspense he must be suffering.”

Annie hesitated no longer. On reaching the door I left her. Her trembling hand was upon the lock—some one from within quickly turned it, and I had just time to see the timid and affectionate glance she cast on the tall figure standing close beside it—and the manly arm hastily stretched forth to support her, when it was instantly closed.

“Very pretty doings, indeed,” said Mr. Bertram, walking up and down the breakfast room with his watch in his hands, while I appeared deeply interested in the contents of a newspaper, as Captain Selby, with Annie on his arm, entered, “twenty minutes have become sixty, and though you may choose, good folks, to lose your breakfast, it is scarcely fair that Mrs. Mary and I should be the sufferers.”

“Your pardon, my dear sir,” replied Captain Selby, laughing, “but I forgot to wind my watch last night, and neither Annie nor myself had the slightest idea of time.”

I now ventured to look up—there was such an air of proud happiness on the countenance of Captain Selby, that it almost made him appear handsome—while Annie’s blushing, innocent face, beaming with the sweetest smile, seemed to turn to him alone for encouragement, which he most readily and delicately gave—and a very happy group we were this morning, after all the cares, the doubts, the fears of the preceding day. And most happy did the whole of this continue—though not without some alloy, since it was imperative for Captain Selby to depart on the morrow, to arrange his private affairs, owing to the recent loss he had sustained, which rendered his presence necessary at the late abode of his relation—he would be absent a month. More than this we knew not.

Annie was left with her friend to wander over every dear haunt, and to talk over their future plans—and hour after hour thus spent flew rapidly away. I was standing in the evening at the open casement with Captain Selby. Annie had sprang out on the lawn to join her father, who was apparently absorbed in peaceful thoughts, as he sauntered along, and as we watched her light graceful figure bounding towards him, I could not help saying:

“You are a fortunate man to gain such a treasure.”

“Fortunate, Mrs. Selwyn,” he replied emphatically; “there are moments when I can scarcely even now dare believe it. I have formerly fancied that I might perhaps meet one who would, in compassion, forget the imperfections of the war-stricken sailor, but that such an angel as that could love.” Here he paused.

“Ah, my dear Captain Selby,” I replied, touched by the feeling he displayed, “how little do you know of woman’s heart. It is not the external appearance which wins her affections, though it, at first, may attract her attention. Far more is wanting—and when she has once pleased these, she arrays the object with every perfection her own ardent imagination conceives.

“Then how is it,” returned Captain Selby, taking my hand, and looking most kindly in my face, “that one so versed in such knowledge should not have repaid the interest which she must have often called forth.”

“How do you know I ever had the chance,” I replied laughing, “and indeed it were a pity to rob the world entirely of old maids, since they are, at times, very useful in giving propriety, by their presence, to a knight-errant escorting a young damsel through the green woods and shady scenes. Is not this the case?”

A smile of happiness was his answer, as by me