

dance.' 'Oh, Frank!' She stopped, and they were both silent. Then some evil genius prompted her to ask, just as calmly as she asked all other things, 'Was she very pretty, Frank?'

'Lovely,' he answered shortly. The tone made her look up. She had not heard it in his voice since the days of five years ago.

'Did you love her?' He nodded his head.

'Do you now?' she whispered.

He nodded again, and then he stooped over her and said gently—

'For good or evil, bitter or sweet, I have always told you the truth, Jean.'

'I know. Did she love you back?'

A little sound escaped his lips. 'The line should be drawn at some questions,' he said. He waited for a moment, and added in a hard voice, 'She is waiting for Halstead. She cried for joy when she heard that he was coming back.'

Then Jean, too, understood, and was silent. He looked at her with a long, strange expression in his eyes. He took her face between his hands, and scanned it curiously—then he spoke, and his words seemed like a dream to her.

'Jean,' he said, 'something is going to happen to you.' He stopped, as if it were a little incredulous. 'Jean—you are going to be married.'

She looked up with the birdlike expression of enquiry. She would wear it while the Recording Angel gave out her eternal portion, he thought.

'We may as well be married,' he said sadly enough; 'then I can put things straight for you. I know Ben has been at his old tricks. I didn't expect to find you with a stick left.'

'There's a man downstairs now.'

'Is there?' he laughed. 'By Jove! then I am just in time. We'll pay him and turn him out. Didn't you say Ben was going to New Zealand?'

'He talks of it.'

'It'll be better than marrying Rose Volney,' and the determined manner that Jean knew well came back. 'He told her that her husband was dead, the idiot. What time does he come home?'

'At seven or eight?'

'Then let me stay. I am ill, and want you. You shall take care of me for just a little while. Jean, I should not like to die without a woman to smooth my pillow.'

'But you are not going to die, Frank.' There was affectionate concern in her voice, but not a trace of passionate fear.

'That's as may be, dear,' he said, desperately, 'but we'll get a ring, and a license, and be married. It doesn't matter—' He wrinkled up his forehead, and stopped. He was thinking of Helen.

'Do you love me, Frank?'—still with the look of inquiry.

His face grew dark.

'Don't seek to know too much, dear, but take the man you love now that you have the chance.' And then he kissed her, but it was only with affection. Even Jean felt that, and it did not now satisfy her. It satisfies no woman, for while it is a man's only feeling towards her, she knows that there is room in his heart for another dweller. 'Are you going to take me, Jean?'

'Yes, of course I am, Frank. I always loved you,' she answered calmly.

'I don't think I even expect much back.'

'We'll be married as fast as it can be managed, and get away—'

'We might go a voyage. You like the sea.'

'No, not a voyage,' he said quickly. 'I have had enough of it. We can arrange all that latter,' he added, as if impatient to dismiss a subject that was not of much interest. Look here,' he went on with more animation, 'I'll telegraph for my portmanteau. I told Sampson to come too. He'll attend to the gentleman downstairs.'

'Yes,' she said, getting up. 'If you don't mind,' she went on uneasily, 'I will leave you to rest a little. I am sure you must be tired, Frank.' Jean was anxious to go and arrange for this sudden addition to the establishment.

'Yes, dear,' and with a little sigh of relief he lay back on the sofa. Poor little Jean! He was glad to think that he was going to make the world an easier place for her. Sampson would arrange all that; and for the rest—well, she, at any rate, would belong to the being she loved best in the world. Fate had been more cruel to him.

After his talk with Ben that evening, he wrote a wild, extravagant letter to Mrs. Ives, telling her he was going to marry Jean.

'Oh, he is mad,' she said to Percy; 'I saw this girl once years ago, met them at the Zoo.'

'What did she look like?' asked Mr. Ives, who was secretly of opinion that if she was pretty it would not matter.

'Neat, prim and dowdy. She was looking at the animals one after the other, and evidently asked intelligent questions.'

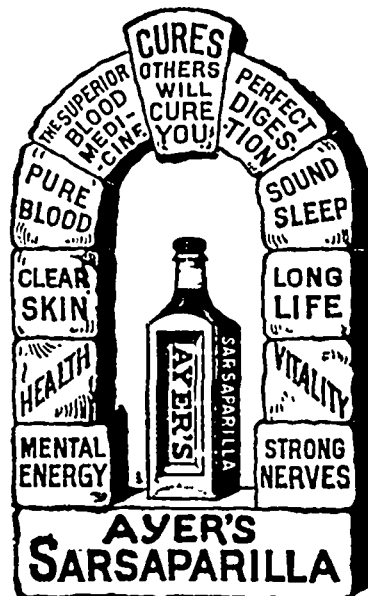
'That would be trying. Perhaps he likes her, though. I don't see why he should marry her else.'

'He's a dear boy, and this girl is fond of him. Probably he thinks it will be kind to marry her. He may be in love with his own deed, but he's not in love with the woman. He couldn't be, after all that time with Helen.'

(To be Continued.)

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