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THE HOPE OF LEASCOMBE;

OR, THE CONSTANT ONE.

A TALE OF THE SEA.

(From the N. Y. Metropolitan Record)

CHAPTER I.

Newton-Alway is a village in Devonshire, close to the coast, and wholly inhabited by fishermen and such like—that is, men who get their living from the sea.

Sophy Lester was, however, much in advance of her little companions, who, destined to be fishermen, had no pretensions to aim at any very elaborate education.

On the morning in question, it was calm and tranquil all around. Nature appeared reposing. The sea was blue and placid, and everything seemed to serve the workers below.

Below, there were two rooms. One, a large one, served for schoolroom, workroom, and kitchen; while that behind was the bedroom of mother and daughter.

'Do you see you lodiaman, mother?' said Sophy, suddenly arousing herself from a reverie.

'Yes, my love,' replied Dame Lester with a deep sigh, 'it moves as slowly as the hours did when I had still hope of your father, and he came not.'

'Pardon me, mother dear, I did not mean to awaken painful thoughts. What a lovely day! How bright the sun is! I can fancy, as I gaze on the water now, the pleasure of being a sailor.'

'A fair sailor indeed would you make?' said a manly voice near at hand; 'an' perhaps you will not refuse a rest to a blue jacket who is weary.'

They turned, and saw a young sailor about twenty, handsome, genteel-looking, but tall and bony. His sunburnt face seemed to give token of long travel; while his dusty clothes, stick, and bundle, denoted his having walked hard, and apparently all night.

'Sit you down,' exclaimed the mother in half-trembling accents; 'no sailor was ever refused shelter in my humble home.'

'Thankee; that's hearty,' said the young sailor, seating himself. 'I am terribly tired.—My trade ain't long walks, and I've trudgeed twenty miles, I do believe, this night; though where I started from is not five miles away. I suppose I mustn't, though I offer to pay for it, ask for breakfast?'

'Most certainly,' continued Dame Lester; while Sophy, who as yet had not spoken, entered the house to prepare breakfast, which, in consideration of the sudden arrival of a hearty man, she thought necessary to make more abundant than usual.

'I never enjoyed a meal so in my life before,' he said, while adding a bleater to his already large share of the repast.

'You put me in mind, sir,' replied Mrs. Lester sadly, 'of my own poor dear husband. When he came home from a voyage, he had always an appetite, that—God forgive me!—used to make me laugh then.'

'You are a widow, madam?' said the sailor gently.

'Yes,' continued Mrs. Lester—while Sophy quite liked him for his tender tone, and the way in which he laid down his fork to listen—and she briefly told her story.

The sailor looked very grave, and did not speak for some minutes; then he resumed his meal, and after a while addressed the widow.—'Dame Lester—since that is the name you are called by in the village—I am a sailor just off a long voyage; I have money to spend, which, under other circumstances, I should have spent perhaps foolishly; I want a good rest. Will you take me to board and lodge at a pound a week? I could thus manage a good year's rest, which would be better than broiling myself directly in a hot sun, or freezing myself up in the north seas. I have received a good education, and would help to teach the boys. I won't be in your way. I can fish, I can shoot sea-gulls to pass the time; besides, I have books in my chest, which I will send for, and I can read.—So come here—ten weeks in advance: done's the word. Is it so?'

Mrs. Lester scarcely hesitated. She saw in the offer of the sailor something likely to be advantageous to her daughter. A pound a week was a magnificent sum for her, but she felt that it was too munificent.

'I should be tempted to accept, sir,' said Mrs. Lester, 'because certainly what you propose would be useful and agreeable to me; but a pound a week is too much for the accommodation I can give.'

'You will give me enough to eat, plenty of good cider; and you can let me swing my hammock aloft, I suppose. What more can I ask? Be sure I'll have my pound a week out of you. Come, ma'am, give me your hand, and let us say it is done.'

'But a total stranger—' 'I'm a jack tar, rated on the ship's books as William Harvey. I chose to sail in a merchant vessel instead of a man-of-war; and here I am pretty safe from the press. If you want my character, I'll get a written one from a person.'

'No. I will take you on your looks,' said Mrs. Lester, 'and trust to your word. You can send for your chest as soon as you like.'

And so it was settled. The same day William Harvey wrote a letter which he sealed up carefully, and sent by one of the young fishermen to a neighboring town. In the evening, the lad returned with a box that had been brought as far as the edge of the cliff in a cart. William Harvey went up to assist him, and even then the driver had to help them. It was a large iron-bound chest. With great difficulty they got it up stairs; but then the sailor paid them liberally and they departed.

The young man at once brought down a collection of well-bound books, many of them works on navigation, but others consisting of poems, works of fiction, well selected and choice, with several historical productions, the whole desultory enough, but all good. A large family Bible finished the collection. Then Harvey produced a small box of rare tea, which was a great treat to Mrs. Lester, and a thing she had scarcely tasted since her reserves. The house was now much changed. The school-hours, which were short, were generally spent by Harvey in roaming with a rod, a gun, or a book; then he would return, and if they could spare time, he would take them out for a walk, returning to supper; after which, they came out to their bench to gaze upon the sea, sometimes stormy, and at other times beautifully calm. Then they would sew for an hour or two, while William Harvey would

read to them. At eleven, they retired to rest. On Sundays, they all walked to a little church in a village at no great distance; and after dinner they would join the villagers of Newton, amongst whom, one or two young men excepted, the sailor was very popular.

Mrs. Lester soon became aware, that it was her daughter's deep blue eyes, sweet mild countenance, and amiable manners, that had decided the resolve of the young sailor. At a dance one evening, he refused to give up his partner to any one, and showed to a rival claimant, for an instant, such fierce passion as to alarm the widow. She saw that beneath the calm surface lay concealed a volcano, and she could not help feeling 'definite dread of the future. She called her daughter to her side that night and warned her affectionately but earnestly against allowing the young sailor to win her affections.

'Why, mamma?' said Sophy, blushing deeply.

'Because he is a violent and passionate man, with whom no woman could ever be happy,' she replied, watching her child most anxiously.

'William! O no, mamma; he is the gentlest and kindest of human beings; and I am sure any woman might be happy with him. Besides—he means to ask your consent to-morrow,' added Sophy, timidly.

'To what?' said Mrs. Lester, anxiously.

'To our marriage, on his return from his next voyage,' replied Sophy.

'I have spoken too late. Of course, if he has charged you to say this, he has already won his consent. Ah me, in three months he has gained more power over my child than I in nineteen years!' said the widow sadly.

'My dear mother, if it pains you I will not consent.'

'My dear child, I do not say it by way of reproach. I myself left father and mother to wed my husband after but a brief acquaintance. I have no objection to William Harvey—on the contrary, I am sure, from his superior education and manners, that he will rise. But I fear his temper and the mystery that surrounds him.'

'He will explain all that, mother, when he returns. He says that he must make another voyage, and try to get rated mate, when we might be married comfortably.'

Mrs. Lester smiled—she could not help it.—She saw in the brief courtship of the young people so much of the usual routine, of the sage plans, of the sanguine belief in the future which is its usual attribute, that she could not but smile.

'It is all settled then,' she said. 'Why, you naughty girl, to say never a word to me.'

'I asked him to speak; I didn't like myself.'

This was natural. William Harvey so lately a stranger, had, by his gentle manners, his knowledge and conversation, joined with his frank open face, completely won the heart of the simple young girl; and this once owned by her, she became more free in some things with him than with her mother. By the time she could sooner have told him point blank that she loved him, than have owned the fact to her mother unasked.

Next day, they all came to an understanding. William declared himself, was accepted, and then stated his intentions. He had £150 to begin the world with. This would suffice to furnish a house, and make a start in life. Besides he expected to bring home something from his next voyage, and to qualify himself for mate. He said he should now go as soon as he got a ship, that he might return the sooner and a few days after, went away to Plymouth, where his smart appearance at once obtained an engagement.—The ship, however, was not to sail for three months during which time he was to lie at Newton, out of reach of the press gang, who were just then particularly active.

William Harvey spent the three months wholly in the society of his future wife and mother. They took a girl now to do the household work, as their income permitted this little extravagance. The lovers had thus much more time for communion and study, in which they were indefatigable—perhaps because they read together; and thus time passed rapidly. The three months were nearly up before they thought they had commenced. The villagers, who now regarded him as the future husband of Sophy, gave him a farewell dance in the general store-room of the place. But the last evening he spent at home alone with his friends. After tea, he went off to his loft for a few minutes; and they were suddenly startled by his returning in the dress of a midshipman in the navy.

'Do not be surprised,' said he smiling; 'before I went, I wished you to know that I am an officer and a gentleman.—Why I appear to be a common sailor, you shall know by my return.—But remember this, my dear friends—I shall in future be only what I can make myself. I mean to carve my own fortunes, and owe nothing to favor.'

At that instant, there was a knock at the door.

'Who is there?' asked Sophy.

'Annie,' said the voice of the servant girl. 'Come in,' replied William himself.

'O my!' cried the girl, starting back, 'why, they're here before me.'

'Who? what?' said William Harvey quickly.

'What, sir, is it you? Why, our Bill has just a come in from the town, and an officer gentleman there asked a lot of questions—if he had seen a man like you, sir. Bill is foolish, and said yes; so they promised him ten pounds to keep all quiet until they came down—and they're coming to-night.'

'They shall never take me alive!' said the young man fiercely. 'I must away, first let me doff this hated dress.'

'But what have you done?' asked the mother anxiously.

'Nothing dishonorable. When I return I will tell my story; but until then, you must put faith in me.'

In ten minutes more William had said adieu, and set forth, with Bill for a guide, by a path only known to the fisherman. An hour later, six soldiers and a sergeant, with a peace officer, reached the village, and were furious when they found that the young man had gone to return no more. The soldiers, however, stayed a week in the village, keeping strict watch; but at length they departed, convinced that further stay was useless. The day after their departure, Bill returned with a packet of letters and little presents.

CHAPTER II.

Again Mrs. Lester and her child were alone; and the mother regretted more than ever having consented to her being affianced to a sailor. But Sophy never desponded; she simply regretted that William had selected this occupation, and hoped that circumstances might enable them to live without his going to sea. Her ambition was to keep a school of a higher grade than the one she now had; and this with a view to render it unnecessary for her future husband to go any longer to sea. She, accordingly, spent all her leisure time in study. William Harvey had left in her hands his £150, with strict injunctions to use any part of it they thought proper. But both Mrs. Lester and herself had at once determined not to break upon this sum under any circumstances. Of the money paid by him for board and lodging, there remained a few pounds, besides tea and other necessaries.

At the end of two months, they received a cheerful letter from William, who was then far advanced on his way to the line, being bound for China; and Sophy was full of joy and thankfulness—when Mrs. Lester fell ill. The illness was sudden, and at the same time serious. It was an illness scarcely definable. She felt weak, and coughed. It became necessary to send for the doctor, who came round on certain special occasions to the village, rarely troubled with other invalids than those whose interesting state was matter rather of congratulation than otherwise. He came and his dictum was decisive. She required to be taken away from the immediate vicinity of the sea, and to receive unremitting attention. For this purpose, he suggested removal to his own town, offering to attend her gratuitously, and to supply her with the medicines she required at a nominal price. He declared, however, that a little milder air, and good nourishing food, were the chief requirements in her case. So they gave up their cottage, and went away from dear Newton Alway, to live in a lodging in a town. This was comfortable enough; but then, they had now only their £10 a year. Mrs. Lester could do nothing; her eyes were bad. All fell on Sophy. Assisted by the doctor, she found work. He had long noticed her superior education and lady-like manners; and, with his wife, did all he could to aid her, without hurting her pride. But, work hard though she did, she earned, after all, but a shilling or eighteenpence a day. Still, this was of great assistance, and enabled her to make her mother tolerably comfortable, for it is wonderful on how little moderate and careful women will exist.

This lasted two months, and Sophy had got used to the new state of things, when one day Dr. Morris called the young girl into his private room, where sat a lady a few years older than herself, in deep mourning.

'My dear Miss Lester,' said the doctor kindly, 'I do not know whether my offer will suit you or not, but I have been speaking of you to Mrs. Desmond of Leascombe Park, who is in want of a nursery-governess—a young lady to take care of a little boy, two years old, and a little girl, four, to teach them the rudiments of education. Now, as you have been used to this, I have taken upon myself to recommend you—ahem!—forty pounds a year, board, lodging—in fact, a happy home.'

'I know not how to thank you, sir; I am deeply grateful; but I cannot leave my poor mother,' faltered Sophy.

'Ah, Mrs. Desmond, I told you so—deep

knowledge of human nature—wouldn't leave her poor mother. I knew it. Good girl—clever—excellent principles. But do not alarm yourself, my dear young friend. Your room is four times as large as that you live in now, and Mrs. Desmond offers to give it up to you. Mother an invalid—take your meals together in the nursery.'

'Then, madam, if I am thought worthy of the post, I am most happy to accept it; and be assured, madam, I will seek, by doing my duty, to prove my gratitude.'

'I am sure of it,' said Mrs. Desmond gently. 'I shall be glad to see you next Saturday. As you may have some preparations to make, pray allow me to pay you your first quarter in advance.'

'Take it, my dear friend,' continued the good doctor, rubbing his hands. 'There—there! no thanks; tell all that to Mrs. Morris: good by, my dear.' And pressing the £10 into her hands, he hurried poor Sophy out of the room.

The young girl was enraptured, but suddenly she recollected something, turned pale, and went back. She knocked timidly at the door.

'Come in,' said the doctor. 'Ah, you, but why so pale and trembling? Sit down, my dear.'

'I cannot accept this excellent offer; I forgot something. I am engaged to be married in about a year'—she began timidly.

'Bravo! excellent. Good girl, 'pon my word. But to whom?' laughed the doctor, while Mrs. Desmond turned very pale.

'To William Harvey—a young sailor.'

'That is but another recommendation, young girl,' said Mrs. Desmond, in a voice of emotion. 'I am a sailor's widow myself, young as you see me. He sailed six months ago, to die in a month. I have a brother, too, a sailor. You shall tell me the history of your fortunes another day; and she herself, this time, led her kindly to the door.

Oh how grateful was that little heart now!—She was quite bappy. She loved the handsome young widow already; and so delighted was she, that on entering her humble home, her mother quite started.

'What good news bring you, my child? Have you had another letter from William?'

'No, mother; but I have good news.' And she told her story.

Mrs. Lester was as much pleased as her child, if not more so. It hurt her feelings much to watch Sophy bending for hours over needle work; and she saw in this new position, supposing any accident happened to William, some hope for the future career of her daughter; she thanked God then, in her heart for His goodness, and felt deep gratitude to man. She was surprised at being herself so readily received, and justly ascribed this indulgence to the sympathy awakened in Mr. Desmond by her own recent affliction. They now set their whole energies to work to be ready by the day appointed; and on the Saturday they went up to Leascombe Park in a coach with their boxes. They were very kindly received by Mrs. Desmond and shown by herself in person to their room, which they found to be on the third story, beside the nursery.—The two children were nice little things, and Sophy was quite pleased at the prospect of their companionship.

The house was picturesquely situated in the centre of a vast park. It was not Mrs. Desmond's own house. She resided with Sir Edward Templeton, Bart, and Lady Templeton, her parents; to whom, in the evening, the children being in bed, and Mrs. Lester also asleep, Sophy was introduced. They were a grave and serious couple. Sir Edward was a little over fifty, gray-haired, and slight in figure. Benevolence and gentleness were indicated in his countenance; but there were tokens, likewise, of severe mental struggle. Sir Edward, in fact, had been a passionate and violent man; but in the middle passage of his life he had suffered so much from giving way to his feelings, that he had vowed to conquer them. He had now succeeded almost wholly, and for years had never allowed the old spirit to conquer him—that spirit which had been productive of so much misery. The house was not, indeed, a lively one for a young girl to come to. All its inhabitants were weighed down, it was clear, by sorrow. But the presence of so interesting a stranger seemed to rouse them; and in her cheerful society they shook off insensibly a little of the weight that bowed them down.

At the end of a week, Sophy was a general favorite. She was pleasant-spoken, cheerful, and amiable; and, somehow or other, no one explained it to themselves, or were hardly conscious of it, but she shed a warming influence around. The house was far less sad since she had come in to it. They wished her to join them at meals; but her mother was unable from weakness to come down stairs, and Sophy would not leave her; so the idea was abandoned.

Meanwhile, she began her trial of the school.

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