

Half-Hearted.

If I could love thee, love, a little more, if thy fair love outlived the brief sweet rose...

RETURNED FROM THE GRAVE

By MRS. HENRY WOOD:

Author of "East Lynne," "Onward Gray," &c.

CHAPTER XII.—CONTINUED.

Lord Dane released her hand, and broke out into a half laugh; its derision was not so wholly suppressed, but that it jarred on the ear of Lady Adelaide.

"You threw me away when you married Mr. Lester, Lady Adelaide, and I fully understood that I was thrown away forever; I have not allowed myself to contemplate it in any other aspect."

"I have been struggling with myself, and I have not allowed myself to contemplate it in any other aspect. I ask you ten thousand pardons for having expressed myself badly, which I conclude I must have done."

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their very centre, imparting a weird-like, ghastly loneliness to the scene. Maria began thinking of the supernatural stories she had read of the old German forests; and as some object suddenly struck out from the trees, and stood in her path, she positively could not suppress a scream.

"How stupid I am. But you should not have started me, Wilfred."

"I did not intend to startle you, Maria; who was to think you would be in the wood to-night?" he said, as he turned to walk beside her.

"Miss Bordillon's. How—how—is Edith?" she asked, with much hesitation.

"What! I suppose it is high treason even to inquire after her," returned he, noting the timid tone. "Have they forbidden you even her name? Come Maria, confess; you can't say more than I guess; perhaps not so much."

"Something very like it," she replied. "Of course. Perhaps they have interdicted your speaking to me, if we happen to meet?" he pursued.

"No, Wilfred. They have not done that yet."

"Yet! That's to be the next thing. I suppose you live in daily expectation of it."

"How are you getting on?" she returned, evading his question. "Is Edith better?"

"We are not getting on at all, Maria; unless going backward is getting on. It's backward with us, generally, and backward with Edith."

"Is she getting strong?"

"No, and she never will, and never can, while things are as they are. If there's justice in Heaven—"

"Hush, Wilfred! It will do no good."

"And no harm—but have it as you like. You have not answered my question. Maria, I say you live in expectation, of an order to pass me when we meet. Is it not so?"

"Should it come, Wilfred, it will be partially your own fault."

"No doubt of it. I am all in fault, and they are all in the right. But I did not expect to hear you say it."

which were near fifteen. An ordinary spectator might have thought him ten.

"Hullo, Shad," cried Wilfred Lester, "where are you scattering off to?"

"The boy stopped. Rejoicing in the baptismal name of Shadrack, he had never in his memory of the neighborhood been called anything but Shad. His other name nobody knew, and it did not clearly appear that he had one."

"I've been on 'y' side of the hedge, miss; I doesn't like the wood when the trees moans and shakes."

"Have you not been in the wood?" she returned, looking keenly at him.

"I was there yesterday, miss."

"I spoke of this evening."

"No," he shaking his head from side to side something like the trees. "Granny told me to go into the wood, and bring her a good bundle, but I wouldn't when I heard the wind; and I expect a whacking for it."

"He shambled off. Miss Lester turned to her brother. 'Is he to be believed or not? It may have been he who was watching us.'"

"Very likely. It is of no consequence if he was. As to believing him, I think he is even less worthy of credit than his grandmother, and that's saying a great deal. Why! what does she want?"

"A decent looking woman, with a sour face, was coming full pelt toward them from the direction of Wilfred's cottage, calling out as she ran: 'Master! master!'"

"Wilfred took a step forward to meet her. 'Is the house on fire?' quoth he."

"Sir," returned Sarah,—"for that was the name she bore, and she was his servant—'my mistress is lying like one dead; I'm not sure but she's gone.'"

"A moment's bewildered hesitation, and he started off; but arrested his steps again, and turned to Maria."

"Will you not come, in the name of humanity? Your entering my house to say a word of comfort to Edith—dying as she may be, as I fear she is, for the want of countenance, of kindness—will not poison Mr. and Lady Adelaide Lester. Judge between me and them, Maria."

He waited for no answer, but sped on. The appeal was successful, and Maria followed with the maid.

rent for my house, which your father has never yet permitted me to do. I could make my income suffice for my moderate wants; but, alas, Maria, two families have to be kept out of it."

"Can I see your brother and Edith starve?"

"How do you suppose they have lived?" proceeded Miss Bordillon. "For a few months after their marriage, I remained very angry, and did not see them; I thought it so imprudent so unjustifiable a step to have taken, and I joined Mr. Lester in his blame. They were positively without resources, without any, and during that period they parted with all their trifling valuables, and also got into debt. Of course that stopped their credit; that, and Mr. Lester's known displeasure—"

"The tradespeople might safely trust them," interrupted Maria. "Wilfred is my father's eldest son, and the estate will descend to him some time."

"Have you forgotten that the estate is not entailed?" asked Miss Bordillon, striving to speak in a careless tone. "Not an acre of it need come to Wilfred, not a single shilling; he may find himself as penniless at his father's death as he is now."

"Oh, Miss Bordillon! do not hint at anything so unjust."

"A few weeks ago Edith's baby was born, and died. She was very ill, and they sent for me. I deliberated whether or not to go; my own heart was inclined to forgiveness, but I did not like to do what would displease Mr. Lester. However, I went. Apart from Edith's state, I found things very bad. The rent of the cottage was in arrear, and they had nothing. What could I do, but help them?"

"And you help them still?"

"My dear, but for me, they never would have a meal. And all out of my poor little income. So don't wonder, that my butter and sugar are too costly to be approached lightly."

Maria fell into a most unpleasant reverie. She was revolving all she had heard and seen, all she feared. The part of the whole which she most shrank from, was the rumor touching the ill-doings of her brother. Urged on by the necessities of home, of Edith, what might he not do?"

"Have you heard the whispers about Wilfred?" she asked, aloud, flying from her own thoughts. "That he—that he—has been seen out at night, on Lord Dane's lands?"

"Hush," interrupted Miss Bordillon, glancing around her with a tremor that seemed born of fear.

CHAPTER XIII.

RARELY had such a night been known within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Danesheld. The storm of wind was terrific; now, it swept through the air with a rushing, booming sound; now, it shook old gables and tall chimneys, unbinged shutters, and crushed down out-houses; and now it caused men and women to stagger as they strove to walk along. But for the wind, the night would have been nearly as bright as day, for the large clear moon was at the full; but the clouds that madly swept across its face obscured its brightness, causing a dark shadow to fall upon the earth. Even the fitful gusts, when clouds were absent, seemed to hide the moon's rays, and dim them.

A knot of men were congregated in the tap-room of the Sailor's Rest. Richard Ravensbird, looking not a day older than when you saw him last, hard, composed, phlegmatic as ever, was waiting on them, or joining in their converse, as the case might be. Sophie was in the bar-parlor. She did look older. Somehow, Frenchwomen, after they pass thirty, do age unaccountably. Not that Sophie had changed in manner; she was free of tongue and ready at repartee, like she always had been.

"How's Cattle getting on? Have ye heard?" asked one of the men of Ravensbird, taking his pipe from his mouth to speak.

was sitting. She had a candle in her hand, and appeared as though she had just been up stairs.

"I'm afraid, Richard," she said, "I protest I am; the very house seems to rock. I shall not go to bed to-night."

"Nonsense!" returned Richard Ravensbird, "Folks sleep best in windy weather."

"If they can get to sleep. It's what I shan't try at to-night. You just go up to your bedroom; and see what the wind is there; the bed itself shaking."

"They are calling for more ale in the tap room," cried a very smart maid, entering at this juncture. "Am I to serve it, sir? The clock wants but two minutes of eleven."

"Oh, for goodness sake let them stop on as long as they like to-night," put in Sophie to her husband. "Better be in danger in company, than alone."

Richard Ravensbird looked at her in surprise.

"Danger!" he repeated; "why, what is the matter with you, Sophie? You are surely not turning coward, because the wind is a little higher than ordinary?"

"The wind is worse than I have ever known it since I lived in the Sailor's Rest," she responded. "It's awful enough to make the bravest think of danger."

Ravensbird returned to the tap-room, and told the company it was eleven o'clock. They did not, however, seem inclined to move; and whether it was the wind howling without, which certainly does induce to the enjoyment of comfort within, or whether in compliance with his wife's words, Ravensbird proved less rigid than usual as to closing his house at eleven, and suffered more ale to be drawn. The servant was bringing it in, when a fresh customer entered. It was Mitchell, the preventive-man. He took off an oil-skin cape he wore, and sat down.

"Why, Mitchell! is it the wind that has blown you here?" were the words Ravensbird greeted him with. "I thought you were on duty to-night."

"The wind won't let me stop on duty, Mr. Ravensbird, so it may be said to have blown me here," replied Mitchell. "I saw you were not closed through the chinks in the shutters. It's an awful night."

"Not much danger of a contraband boatload stealing up to the beach to-night," laughed one of the company.

"No, the Flying Dutchman himself couldn't bring it up," said Mitchell. "What with the security from that sort of danger, and the non-security from another; namely, that we might get whirled off the heights into the sea, and be never more heard of, the supervisor called us off duty. What a sight the waves are, to be sure!"

"The men have not been on duty below all day."

"Couldn't have stood it," answered Mitchell, "the sea would have washed them away. It's great rubbish to keep men there at all, now they have put us on the heights. I'm afraid of one thing," he added, lowering his voice.

her build, and declared she was an American. Whatever she might be, she was certainly drifting on rapidly to her doom. She had probably been at anchor, and the chain had broken.

"Her position was a little to their left hand as the people stood, and she would most likely strike just beyond the village toward Dane Castle. The wind was as a hurricane, howling and shrieking, buffeting the spectators, and taking away almost their life's breath; the waves rose mountains high, with their hoarse roar; and the good ship cracked and groaned as she bent to their fury."

"Oh! the scene on board—could those watchers from the shore have witnessed it! Awful indeed seemed the jarring elements to them; what then, must they have been to those who were hopelessly in their power!"

Reader, we may assume that it has never before your fate to be on board one of these ill-fated ships at the moment of its doom. No imagination, however vivid can picture the awful bearings of the scene. Bewildering confusion, sickening distress, unbounded fear. Almost as terrible is it as that Great Day, pictured to us of what shall be the last judgment; for that Great Day for them is at hand—time is over—eternity is beginning—and all are not prepared to meet it!

Two gentlemen came together, arm-in-arm, and the crowd parted to give them place. They were Lord Dane and Mr. Lester. Mr. Lester carried a night-glass, but the wind would render it almost useless.

"Why, they're nearly close in shore!" uttered Lord Dane, in an accent of horror.

"Another half-hour, my lord, and she'll be upon the rocks," responded a by-stander.

"Mercy! how fast she's drifting! One can see her drift!"

"My men," said Mr. Lester, addressing himself more particularly to the fisherman and sailors, many of whom had congregated there, "can nothing be done?"

One unanimous, subdued sound was heard in answer. "No."

"If one of 'em, any crack swimmer, could leave the ship and come ashore with a hawser, that's their only chance," observed an old man. "Not that I think he'd succeed; the waves would swallow him long before he got to it."

"There's the life-boat," cried Lord Dane. "The crowd shook their heads with a smile. 'No life-boat could put off in such a sea as this!'"

Never, perhaps had been witnessed a more hopeless spectacle of prolonged agony. Once, twice, three times, a blue light was burnt on board the ship, lighting up more distinctly than the moon had done her crowd on deck, some of whom were standing with outstretched hands. And yet those on shore could give no help. Men ran from the beach to the heights, and from the heights to the beach, in painful, eager excitement, but they could do nothing.

On she came—on, on, swiftly and surely. The night went on; the hurricane raged in its fury; the waves roared and tossed in their terrific might; and the good ship came steadily to her doom. In two hours from the time that the castle-bell boomed out she struck; and simultaneously with the striking, many souls were washed overboard, and were battling their own poor might and strength with the waters as hopelessly as the ship had done. The agonized shrieks of woe were borne over the waters with a shrill, wailing sound, and were echoed by the watchers; some of whom—women—fell on their knees in their nervous excitement, and prayed God to have mercy on the spirits of the drowning.

"She'll be in pieces! she'll be in pieces! and no earthly aid can save her!" was the cry that went up around.

As it was being uttered, another dashed into the heart of the throng—one who appeared not yet to have been among the spectators. It was Wilfred Lester. He wore his sporting-clothes, as he had done when Maria met him in the evening. Pressing through it to the front with some ceremony, he leaned his arms on the rails of the little jetty, and contemplated the heaving vessel.