

again go to Mr. Hope's room, that fact was clear, and blended with a dread that this departure was no mere ebullition of temper, but a settled purpose: for the youth had, as they all knew, plenty of that quality which is judged, by the way it is exercised, as obstinacy or perseverance. And as the morning passed, and conviction became more settled, Mysie, with that singular want of logic, which is as much a peculiarity as a female defect, began to utter a word or two that Marian construed into blame—

"He could not bear your calling him ungrateful, Marian."

"I spoke for his good, my dear. Is he never to be reproved? It is cruel of you, Mysie, to blame me."

The momentary heat was quenched in tears. But yet, from that small seed, there sprang a root of bitterness. Marian was sensitive, and the thought that if anything dreadful happened to Norry, or he came back to them no more, Mysie, and perhaps, too, even her father, would always consider her the occasion, if not the cause, of his being lost to them, was so painful, that she strove by resolutely shutting out such a possibility to reassure herself and the others.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hope, having written a note to the police station enclosing a description of the runaway, it became necessary for Marian to reply to Gertrude, who had asked her to appoint a time for calling.

How differently both father and daughter now looked at the letter, which had given them such brief pleasure in the morning. How clouded now was the future that then seemed to open so brightly before them. Mr. Hope especially was depressed, saying—

"I begin to think the responsibility was too great. I ought never to have undertaken it. I should have thought, my Marian, of you as my only companion."

"And there's truth, father, in the proverb, 'Blood is thicker than water.' I could never—never have so pained you."

Mysie was not present, and perhaps for the first time the daughter spoke to her father with a greater freedom, because of her absence. In this mood Mr. Hope entered into a consultation about the proposal that had been made by his visitor of the previous evening. And whether the conduct of Norry had weakened his faith in his own plans of education, or in the natures he had to deal with, or that he shrank from the responsibility, certain it was, that he considered the plan of Mysie, leaving for education very favourably; and arranged with Marian as to what had better be their future course, if Miss Gertrude Austwicke's parents (who they both hoped would give liberal terms for the few hours she would have to spend daily in Wilton Place) decided on engaging her.

Mysie, at a boarding-school, where she was being fitted for an honourable vocation, Marian exercising her talents and relieved from household drudgery, were considerations yielding something of balm to the sore heart. Yet, nevertheless, that heart continued to ache, and many a thought and silent prayer followed the wanderer.

CHAPTER XXIV. AMID THE WAVES.

"The young and the beautiful, why do they die,
With the bloom on their cheek, and the light in their
 eyes?"

Poverty admits no indulgences, or surely Miss Hope would not have sought her way to Wilton Place in such a gale as continued to blow. Once, however, arrived there, she was ushered into a room where a cheerful fire, and the warm glow of crimson draperies, and sofas and easy chairs, luxuriously inviting in their softness and warmth, presented such a contrast to the storm-swept streets, in all the dreariness of howling wind and drifting sleet and rain, that it seemed like the difference between her destiny—poor weary, fluttering bird!—and that of those who were thus cozily sheltered in a well-lined nest.

After waiting a sufficient time to recover her breath, and to shake her dress into something like order, Marian heard the door open, and Gertrude with a genial smile entered, and came to her side, uttering gentle greetings, and ready to

conduct her to Mrs. Basil Austwicke's boudoir. What a glittering confusion of pretty trifles in china and gilding lay upon the tables, and adorned the delicately-carved cabinets of this charming little retreat, where rose-coloured silk, softened with filmy lace, seemed fitting drapery for a lady wrapped in a white cashmere dressing-gown, richly braided, and with the most delicate of little lace caps on her head—a morning costume, that softened the angles of her shape and the hardness of her feature. A dainty writing-table, all a-glitter with silver and cut glass, and spread with satiny note-paper exhaling a delicate perfume of violets, was drawn before the couch on which she sat, or rather sank, amid billows of down cushions. Balancing an ornamental pen in her fingers as she spoke, Mrs. Basil Austwicke made a few ordinary inquiries, and was evidently by no means displeased at the deference of Marian's manners. It certainly is pleasant to see a face full of intelligence and feeling, look with a pleading grace, and a little flush of heightened colour on the cheek, when uttering a reply to inquiries.

Mrs. Austwicke's own manners were decidedly imperious. She had that sort of pride in her intellect which is more likely to make a woman give herself airs of command, than the mere possession of beauty. Not that the lady by any means undervalued her claims to admiration on the latter score, but she set up for the possession of mind as her crowning merit. The question whether her talents were ever used for any purpose that benefited any human creature, or whether her heart was the kinder for her brain being, as she thought, better than others, never troubled her.

She received Miss Hope with dignified politeness, and took note of the references Marian gave: but, knowing Miss Webb, and having heard Gertrude speak of Mr. Hope, she made but few inquiries. Unquestionably, she did not fail to observe, with a woman's keen glance, the carefully-mended gloves, and shabby cloak and bonnet, in which poor Marian fought her hard battle of gentility. The satirical curve of her mouth was not subdued even while she was, on the whole, greatly pleased with the gentle mannered and soft-voiced applicant. Here was a person who would, for some hours daily, occupy Gertrude; and a great saving, meanwhile, would be effected by withdrawing her daughter from an expensive finishing school—a saving that was by no means a matter of indifference, as every year made the expenses of the boy's education greater, and minute savings were not to be neglected; though as to pinching herself in either dress, company, or pleasure, that did not enter into her plan of economy.

A governess entirely in the house, particularly a fashionable governess, would have been, as she said to her self, "a nuisance not to be thought of;" but a quiet, unobtrusive, intelligent young person—poor, also, which would make her humble, and, no doubt, educationally competent (for those quiet people often knew far more than any one gave them credit for) was quite another thing; besides, she had been trained to teaching; it was a sort of professional inheritance, and there would be no sensitive nonsense about lady-like feelings in the case of a writing-master's daughter—so matters were soon arranged.

Marian, at the conclusion of the interview, thankful for employment, most certainly felt that a very wide social gulf separated her from her employer; but Gertrude's little hand, as she laid it on Miss Hope's arm while they descended the stairs together, seemed to bridge over the chasm, as a narrow plank bridges a misty abyss, and Marian, like a tired Alpine traveller, was grateful for it. Entering the drawing-room into which she had first been ushered, to speak a few words with Gertrude, Miss Austwicke was seated there, dreary in her sable garments; she lifted her anxious grey eyes with a very fixed look, and followed her morning salutation with the inquiry—

"Is my niece to have the benefit of your assistance in her studies, Miss Hope? But I need not ask, I see it in her smiles. She is a wilful child, and does what she likes with her papa; but, pray, may I inquire if you will be able to leave home—will Mr. Hope's health permit?"

"For some hours daily I can be spared, madam."

"But surely not to trust to you—to the young—?" A little nervous cough, oppressed Miss Austwicke, and Marian frankly said—

"We are thinking of placing Mysie at school."

"Quite right, quite. I do not think, Miss Hope, that it would be right otherwise for you to leave so young—a person, and at a difficult age—without your superintendance. You will place the two—brother and sister, I believe?—you will place them both at school?"

Marian's lips quivered, and she grew a shade paler, as, without speaking, she bowed an affirmative. What use was it to allow the sorrow, and what Marian felt was the impropriety, of Norry's flight being made known to strangers? perhaps it might even create a prejudice against her father or herself—against the whole household. It never occurred to her that there was anything at all strange in Miss Austwicke's remarks. She knew how sometimes a managing or curious lady elevated her officiousness into kindly interest by such inquiries; or they might really be dictated, she considered, by a conscientious desire to prevent injury to the young.

"You cannot possibly return home just now, Miss Hope," interposed Gertrude, looking gaily out of the window as a tide of sleet swept down so black and rapid in its rush that it hid the opposite side of the street. "You are weather bound, and I'm much obliged to the rain," she continued, laughing, for to her it was a pleasure that Miss Hope was detained. But the remarks that had just been made by Miss Austwicke about Mysie and Norry had so far unnerved Marian, that, as her eyes followed Gertrude's, she heaved a sigh so deep as she said—

"What stormy weather!" that it startled Gertrude into the inquiry—

"Have you any one at sea in whom you are interested, Miss Hope?"

"No, not at sea; but—some are cut adrift from all social ties. I think of all wanderers in such weather, driven away like stray waifs. They are at sea in a sense the most sad."

"I live not far from the coast," said Miss Austwicke; "and we notice storms more there, I think, than you dwellers in or near the great metropolis."

"My father did expect a German friend with whom he had often corresponded; but I should not think he will come while the weather is so unsettled." She all at once remembered the purport of a foreign letter received a week ago, intimating the speedy coming of Herr Rath, a German professor. For the first time since the morning's trouble she looked up with a sudden access of anxiety at the cloudy sky. She had scarcely done speaking, when a brougham was driven up to the house in great haste, and there was loud knocking at the door, and a moment after, the sound of hurried footsteps ascending the stairs. Before either Gertrude or her aunt could utter the inquiry that rose to their lips, as to what had happened, Mr. Basil Austwicke, looking very pale, not with illness, but excitement, and not perceiving, in his haste, that a stranger was present, entered, and said—

"Gertrude, where is your mamma? Go to her."

Gertrude left instantly, and her father continued—

"Honour, I'm the bearer of astonishing—of, indeed, most sad tidings."

Miss Austwicke rose and came towards him, saying, hastily—"Nothing very dreadful, brother—"

"Yes, I fear, very dreadful. There was a collision in the channel, in a great fog, yesterday, and the *Batavian Ida* was lost—went down—and none, not one, saved, neither passengers nor crew."

"Well?" said Miss Austwicke, inquiringly, in a tone that expressed, "That is very dreadful; but what, in any special sense, is it to us?"

"Well!" repeated her brother. "It is anything but 'well.' Why, I fear—I'm sure—our nephew, De Lucy, was on board."

Miss Austwicke retreated a few steps, and sunk bewildered into a chair.

"De Lucy Austwicke, Basil?"