

given anything he possessed to know how Miss Bendon fared. Was she struggling still? Had she conquered circumstances? It was such a pity that he knew only a little bit of her life-story; such a pity that he must never try to help her again.

"There's rather a down-hearted look about you, Hartwell," said Hedley, the junior partner in the firm. "Want a holiday, don't you?"

It was sultry weather. Dick's bronzed face was paler than usual, and his steady grey eyes were a little dull. But he was not the man to complain.

"Well, sir, I may want freshening up a trifle," he admitted. "Perhaps I can get away in August for a couple of weeks."

"How would a trip to Denmark suit you?" the other asked.

Dick looked at him curiously. He fancied that he saw a twinkle in his eye; had Hedley been practising thought-reading?

"Very well indeed, sir," he replied as he turned away.

The days went slowly by; there was an early harvest, and reapers began work in the sheltered fields stretching down to the shore. Nothing was changed; the narrow path on the edge of the fields was just the same; the little convolvulus had done its best to comfort him last year, and its sweet pink face smiled up at him again in the old winsome way. Things grew and blossomed and lived their lives, obeying the universal law. Dick looked down tenderly at the small, creeping flowers, but he did not gather them—they were too frail. He left them there to sweeten the wayside.

One evening he had been working rather later than usual, and felt more tired than ever. He did not go straight home to his lodgings, but turned down the narrow street leading to the quay. The first sight which met his weary eyes was the big, white Danish schooner at her old moorings, and the jolly face of Peter Jensen looking over the side of his ship.

There was nothing remarkable in the return of the *Helsa* with another cargo of red pine. But Dick was conscious all at once of being lifted up, and taken completely out of his gloomy self. He was making straight for the skipper, when a soft voice said quietly—"Mr. Hartwell, I am so glad to see you again."

She was standing close to him, looking up at him with the sweet, dark eyes which no

longer showed any traces of tears. Not dressed quite as she had been a year ago; but wearing a suit of cream serge, and a red band round her sailor hat. And by her side was master John, grown stout and rosy, posing as a jovial British seaman; but Dick had scarcely a glance for him.

"This is—a great joy!" said the poor fellow, speaking out the inmost thought of his heart at last.

"We wanted another voyage," said Miss Bendon, rather rapidly. "The sea always sets us up, doesn't it, John? You will be glad to hear that we have got over our troubles, Mr. Hartwell. My sister is quite well, and she is married again."

"Really!" said Dick, uttering the first word that occurred to his dizzy brain.

"Yes, really. She has married Mr. Browne, a rich ship-builder in Copenhagen. As for me, I don't work as hard as I did, for my uncle in India is very kind. He is a tea-planter, and my brother is with him. But you are not looking quite well, Mr. Hartwell."

"It's the heat," said Dick vaguely. "I shall soon get all right again."

"I hope so. Do you know that we are likely to meet at the Hedleys' house? Mrs. Hedley is a distant cousin of mine, and we have only lately discovered the connection. The world is full of surprises. Well, John and I must be off to our lodgings; we have engaged some pleasant rooms near the sea."

Dick felt as if he were in the middle of a dream, but he had just sense enough to call a cab and put Miss Bendon, her nephew, and her other belongings into it. She told the driver where to go, and smiled her adieu from the window as they drove away.

The whole world had undergone a startling change; he went home looking five years younger, but did not ask himself why he was so absurdly happy. It was enough to feel glad. He was not the sort of man to take his joy in his hand and turn it over and over to see what it was made of. The next morning he was up early, and set off to his work feeling as strong as a giant. Hedley met him at the office door.

"Hullo, Hartwell!" he cried, "you look as fresh as paint. Will you come and dine with us this evening at half-past seven, just in a homely way? My wife says she wants to know you."

Dick gladly accepted the invitation. He had always got on extremely well with the junior partner, but he wondered why Mrs. Hedley wanted to know him. He knew her by sight as a bright-faced young woman, but he did not dream that she had noticed him. She was, however, the kind of woman who is given to noticing. She had watched him going to church with Minnie Brace, and had thought him far too true a gentleman to be tied up to that over-dressed girl. And she was right. Dick was verily a gentleman by descent, as well as by nature. The last branch of an old tree, he had inherited the best qualities of the ancient family from which he had sprung. Strong, simple, manly and wonderfully tender, he was a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*.

He dined with the Hedleys that evening, and met Miss Bendon again. Mr. Hedley had a quiet talk with him after the ladies had left the table.

"Hartwell," he said, "we don't want to lose you—that goes without saying—but Browne has written to us, asking if you would suit him as manager. If you stayed with us all your life we couldn't afford to pay you such a salary as he can give, and we don't think we ought to stand in your way. What do you mean to say to his proposal?"

It was a splendid proposal; there was only one answer. Dick's heart was almost too full for speech.

"I shall miss you, Hartwell," Hedley went on. "But I know you ought to get out of this pottering place. As long as you stay here you'll be morbid and dull. There is a time to be bound, you know, and a time to be free."

Dick understood the kind hint conveyed in the words. And perhaps he understood it better still when they joined the ladies, and Miss Bendon's dark eyes met his.

"So you have accepted my brother-in-law's offer, Mr. Hartwell," she said, a little later. "Then I think there was some truth in the gipsy's prediction after all. Your good fortune has come to you across the sea."

As soon as she had spoken her face reddened suddenly. The Hedleys tried not to smile. Dick was radiant. And the brightness that came to him at that moment has never faded; it will stay with him to the end.

SARAH DOUDNEY.

SISTERS THREE.

By MRS. HENRY MANSENGH, Author of "A Rose-coloured Thread," etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE light was still dim the next morning when Hilary woke with a start to find her father standing by her bedside. Even in the first sleepy glance she was struck by the pale distress of his face, and sat up hurriedly, pushing back the hair from her face, and murmuring a confused, "What—what—what?"

"My dear, I am sorry to disturb you, but I need your help." Mr. Bertrand seated himself on the edge of the bed, and took the girl's hands in his. "Hilary, a great trouble has come upon us. Lettice wishes to break off her engagement. She cannot bear the idea of marrying Arthur Newcome. There will be no wedding on Thursday as we expected."

Hilary stared at him with dazed eyes. Her awakening from sleep had been so sudden, and the news was so over-

whelming, that it was some moments before she could grasp its full meaning.

No wedding! But the preparations were made—everything was ready. It could not be stopped at the very last moment. She drew in her breath with a quick, frightened respiration.

"Oh, father! is it true? Is she sure? Does she really mean it?"

"I am afraid there is no doubt about that, Hilary. Now that she has summoned up courage to speak, she acknowledges that she has been unhappy all along. She is in great distress, as is only natural. Norah is with her. I put off disturbing you as long as I could, for you have had too much fatigue lately, but I need your help, dear. You must get up at once. We have some painful duties before us."

"Oh, father—Arthur! What will he—how will you—?"

Mr. Bertrand drew a sharp sigh. "I have wired to him to stop all prepara-

tions, and come down himself by the early train. He will be here this afternoon. Poor fellow, he has been cruelly used. I am bitterly ashamed. I have told Mary to bring you up a breakfast tray at once, and here she comes; so eat as much as you can before you get up, and then come to me in my study. Be brave! Remember I rely on your help!"

"Yes, father," said Hilary tremblingly, and the next moment Mary entered the room; her rosy face awed and frightened, her ready tongue silenced by the seriousness of the situation.

That breakfast seemed like a hideous nightmare to Hilary. Every moment brought a fresh pang of recollection. In every direction in which her eyes glanced, they lighted upon some object which accentuated her misery—the long dress box, in which the bridesmaids' finery lay ready for use; the pile of letters on the table; the hundred and