

DICK HARTWELL'S FORTUNE.

By SARAH DOUDNEY.

CHAPTER III.



AFTER Tom had left him Dick did not go straight home to his lodgings. His feet seemed to be drawn by some mysterious fascination to the quay. Great piles of red pine had been left by the Danish schooner, and as he touched the wood, he thought of the far-off Northern forests where it grew. A sudden longing seized him as he looked out across the quiet sea;

he wished that he could escape from his present life, with all its perplexities, and sail with Peter Jensen to the shores of the Baltic. At this very hour, perhaps, that dark-eyed girl was sitting on the deck, and looking up at the stars. Yes; he was absurdly romantic; he had always had dreams and fancies which Minnie had never been able to understand.

Nearly a month went by; and Dick, bent on saving for the piano-fund, lived as frugally as a hermit, while Minnie spent all her salary on the adornment of her pretty person. Her moods changed very frequently in these days, she was scornful and kind by turns, and her lover felt that she was restless and dissatisfied. It was a great relief to find a letter in a strange handwriting on his table one morning. His letters were so few that he was sure Miss Bendon had written to him. Besides, there was the Danish post-mark.

As soon as he had opened the envelope, he found an English bank-note for five pounds—the very note he had given the skipper.

"DEAR SIR," (the writer began), "I thank you heartily for your kindness, but of course I cannot use the money. Yet it has cheered me, and helped me to struggle on. No kind act is ever wasted; it is the expression of a good heart, a sign that human fellowship is not a mere fable, and so it always lightens some one's burden. May the gipsy's words prove true, and your good fortune come to you from the sea! The bread cast upon the waters shall be found again after many days. Yours gratefully,

"FORTUNE BENDON."

In all the six-and-twenty years of his life, Dick had never had such a letter as this. His mother, a quiet, hardworking widow, had died when he was a lad of sixteen, and brothers and sisters he had none. He had always led a clean life, loving right for right's sake, and gathering thankfully the few flowers that grew in the dusty path of duty. And then he had met Minnie Brace, and her smile had glorified the whole world.

But the light of that smile had soon begun to wane, and Dick, as an engaged man, was lonelier than ever. Minnie never cared to talk about any of the things that interested him; the progress of the age did not matter to her in the least. She was deeply absorbed

in her charming self, and saw in Dick a way of escape from the drudgery of her life. And in his simplicity he often wondered why he did not get more joy out of her love. He was always seeking honey in the cup of his pretty flower, and coming empty away.

When evening came he carried the five-pound note to Myrtle Terrace, leaving the little letter locked up in his desk. He did not want to show that letter to Minnie, just because she would not understand that it had done him good. It is not always wise to pass our blessings on; the handling of certain people takes off their bloom.

Miss Brace was sitting at the piano when he went in, and he had never seen the little room looking so gay. There were flowers in all the vases; Minnie herself wore a bunch of heliotrope tucked into the belt of a delicate lilac dress. She was quite a bewildering vision of beauty.

"I didn't think you would come this evening, Dick," she said. "You told me that you were going to Mr. Hedley's."

"So I am," he answered. "I just dropped in for a minute to bring you this. The five-pound note was never used at all; it came back in a letter this morning. And here are four sovereigns more to add to the fund."

Minnie flushed as she took the money. She shot a furtive glance towards the window.

"You look as if you were dressed for a wedding," he said. "That's a wonderful frock, isn't it?"

"Oh, no; it's only a cheap thing. You are such a duffer about dress, you see."

He stood still and surveyed her; and the charm of her presence, so flowery and sweet, made him feel as if he could not tear himself away.

"Well, I may be a duffer," he said slowly. "But I never saw you in anything so lovely. It's a pity that I have to go. I should like to sit here, dear, and just look at you for hours."

She laughed, and called him a silly old boy. But when she added that Mr. Hedley must be considered, he knew she was right. Mr. Hedley was the junior partner in the firm for which he worked, and the interview might be important. So he kissed her and departed.

After he had gone a few paces he looked back at the house, and saw Tom grinning in the front garden. A minute later he turned the corner of the road, and nearly ran into the arms of a good-looking fellow in a light overcoat. The man regarded him unfavourably with a pair of bold black eyes.

He had a satisfactory talk with Mr. Hedley, and then went straight home to his lodgings. To get to his rooms he climbed a flight of stairs, and the window of his little sitting-room commanded a view of the sea—a wide, grey sea this evening, save where a glittering pathway seemed to lead to the west. Dick sat down in his usual seat, and let the soft breeze blow upon his face. Its freshness always revived him, body and soul; it was like a greeting from an old friend, strong and true. Now that he was away from the spell of Minnie's presence he was almost glad to be here alone, and let his thoughts roam freely. Her beauty filled his eyes, but his spirit always asked for something which she did not give. The sea was more satisfying; it was full of deep, rich meanings; it shadowed forth that vast To be which held all the knowledge that he sought—yes, and all the love.

He sat there until the western glory grew dim, and the evening star came out over the vanishing light. And before he went to bed he opened his desk, and read Miss Bendon's

note again. He had helped her to struggle on; it was good of her to write those words, they meant so much to him. The sense of having helped some one was like a trusty staff to lean upon. He was one of those who are born helpers, silently lightening a burden wherever he could; but it was not often that he had a "thank you" for his aid.

All through the next day's business he was haunted with restless thoughts about Minnie. Something, he knew not what, seemed to be coming between them; when he called up a vision of the lovely sylph, with her pale lilac robe, he always felt that she was drifting farther and farther away. At six o'clock he came home, and found a little mauve letter lying beside the tea-tray. He knew the handwriting at once. Minnie's colour was heliotrope; and the perfume of that flower filled the room when he opened the envelope.

"DEAR DICK" (she wrote), "I do not feel strong enough to see you this evening. But if you will call at ten on Sunday morning, we can have a talk before service. I have something very painful to say to you."

"Yours sincerely,
"MINNIE BRACE."

Of course, he knew that this was the beginning of the end. To-day was Friday; Saturday would give him time to prepare his mind for the parting scene. There was nothing for it but to take his dismissal quietly; but at this moment he was feeling anything but quiet. His heart was brimming over with passionate anger and pain. Minnie was his first love, the only woman he had ever asked to be his wife; and memory told him that she had given him plenty of encouragement. If there had been a mother or sister at hand, his trouble might have been easier to bear. But there was no one—no one to whom he could turn in the hour of bitter need.

As usual, he was drawn to the sea by some strange influence which could never be explained. Still in a fury of grief and rage, he took up his hat, and walked down to the quay at sunset. And while he stood there, leaning against a pile of timber, staring out seaward with miserable eyes, someone touched him lightly on the arm.

"It's me, Dick," said Tom Brace. His voice was curiously gentle, and his small, sharp face wore quite a new expression. "I thought I should find you here. You've had a note from Minnie, I know; she told father to leave it at your diggings."

"Yes," Dick answered sullenly. He wished the boy would take himself off.

"You don't much like me, Dick. You think I'm an interfering kid, and you want to tell me to mind my own business. But I don't exactly know what my business is, and I must speak my mind to-night. Just listen for once, and I'll shut up for ever after."

Dick still stared at the sea, and was silent.

"She's going to throw you over for another man. Dobb, the new shopwalker at Faymond's, has taken a fancy to her, and she's wild with delight. He'll marry her out of hand, and they'll live in London, because this place isn't good enough for him. They settled it all yesterday evening. You must have met him when you turned the corner."

Dick remembered the man in the light overcoat, and thrilled with fury.

"I should like to smash him!" he muttered under his breath.

There was a faint return of Tom's grin. "And you could do it, too!" he said. "But just let him alone. He's done you a good turn. If I say much more I s'pose you'll