

'Let me look,' cried the other, putting out an eager hand. 'I beg your pardon, sir. May I use the glass a minute? I'm more used to this sort of thing than you, maybe.'

Mr. Stamford handed him the glass without a moment's hesitation, and the old man looked, with earnest, painful scrutiny, on the wide grey waste of restless billows.

Then he gave it back, dropped his arms by his side, and turned away with a long heart-sick sigh.

He did not go far, however. Only for a moment could he take his glance from the sea. The next he was back again by the sea-wall, looking out as if his eyes alone might discern what the glass could not.

'Are you anxious about your sons?' asked Mr. Stamford gently, after a minute. 'Are they much later than is usual in such cases?'

'Not much,' answered the old fisherman without turning round. 'Nay, I've known boats come in far later than this after a rough night, and all safe and sound. And she's a good boat—a good boat and seaworthy, and the lads know how to manage her, though I say it that taught them.'

'What is it then that troubles you so much?' asked the gentleman again; and the old man turned sharply upon him, as if half angry at such a question. The angry look faded after an instant, and he looked down as if in shame.

'I'll tell you,' he said, after a moment. 'I'll tell you—if only because it shames me to tell such a thing to one that's a stranger, and young enough, too, to be my son. I'm frightened about them because I don't deserve that ever they should come back again!'

'How's that?' said Mr. Stamford quietly, as the other suddenly craned his neck to look at a floating speck far out at sea, and then settled down again into a disappointed, hopeless attitude.

'I did a wrong thing once too often,' he answered bitterly. 'And I went against Scripture, and let the sun go down upon my wrath. . . . They're spirited lads, those of mine; and I was never one to keep my

temper. A bad temper I've had from my cradle. We've fallen out many a time, but never so as we did yesterday. . . . I believe they'd have made it up if I'd have done the same. But I'd neither speak nor look at them, and they sailed with the rest last night at the turn of the tide. . . . I've never known an easy moment since. . . . And here's all the other boats come in and theirs not with them. . . . I think I shall never know an easy moment again as long as I live!'

He was too old a man to rave and cry out; but his low voice was full of a dull despair. Mr. Stamford, kind and clever as he was, hardly knew how to answer him. He lifted the glass again to his eye and took another long look round.

'I can understand your feeling anxious,' he said, after a time; 'but you have lived long enough to know that it is not every trouble we fear that really comes upon us. God is more merciful sometimes than we expect.'

'Ay,' groaned the old man, 'but I've sinned against warning. I've professed myself a religious man this many a year, and I've been warned often and often that my temper was a snare to me and to others. But I've hardened my heart, and said that it was my nature and I couldn't help it. Well, I shall be punished now. Oh, I know now that I might have helped it if I had tried.'

'Then you do repent? And, come what may, you will endeavour to do better for the future—to curb the temper that you now feel to have been sinful?'

He laid his head down on his arms, which were folded on the low wall, and groaned:

'It's too late now. But if God would spare them, if He would give me back my boys, I'd strive, as never man did yet, to do what was right in His eyes.'

Mr. Stamford was still watching the sea through his glass, and at this moment he gave a little start, rubbed the lens clear, and looked again. After a moment he shut up the glass and looked down at his companion.

'It will not do to make conditions with God,' he said. 'If you feel that you have