



Stella Mordant:

The Cruise of the "Kingfisher."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"A man? It is the first time I have ever heard of a man being a woman's best friend," she said, with a suppressed bitterness. "As a rule, he is her worst enemy. I speak from experience. Yes, I'm married; I saw you looking at my wedding ring."

Stella blushed.

"I beg your pardon!" she faltered. "Oh, there's nothing to apologize for," said Nita. "I'm married, and I'm not a widow—that I know of."

"That you know of!" exclaimed Stella.

"No," said Nita, quite calmly. "My husband left me—deserted me."

Stella uttered a little startled cry of sympathy, and Nita laughed, and bit off the end of her cotton in a matter-of-fact way.

"Oh, that's not uncommon—at least not with women of my sort," she said. "Mine's quite an ordinary case; you read scores of similar ones in the newspapers. I'm sure I don't know why I've told you. I don't generally allude to it, but—suppose you bring it down on your luck, and—and so young and under my care made me tell you. You're not married, I can see."

Stella blushed again.

"No, I'm not married," she assented.

"Then don't be," said Nita, coolly. "I often wonder why young girls are so anxious to have a husband, when they can see for themselves that not one married woman in a hundred is happy; but it's the way of humanity, I suppose. Women were sent into the world to be the slaves of men."

"Most of them, anyway," rejoined Nita. "Do you like this dress?" she held up the garment, a rather striking combination of crimson satin and black lace. "It's one I'm going to wear to-morrow night when I sing 'The Society Girl,'—sing and dance. It tells of the life of a London lady who is supposed to work harder, going to balls and concerts and that sort of thing, than the women who make shirts and go out charring; and the girls who listen to it believe it, though some of them work in some way sixteen hours a day. It gratifies them to hear that it is not all beer and skittles for the lady slangs. I beg your pardon for the slang—you mustn't mind it. I hear it all day, and it comes natural."

"Why should you apologize?" said Stella. "I understood what you meant. And are you going to wear any other dress?" she asked, deeply interested, notwithstanding her pain, in the strangely novel life of her benefactress.

"Oh, yes; I wear four. Here's one—a man's suit. I'm a young sailor who has run away to sea because his sweetheart jilted him." She laughed bitterly. "They mostly run away to sea to jilt the sweetheart. You'll see portraits of me in my various costumes on the posters and bills when you go out," she added, with a touch of cynical pride which seemed sadder to Stella than anything else about her. "I'm a big success in my line, you see."

"I am very glad," said Stella.

"Are you? Thank you. It's more than I am. It came too late—it usually does, so they say. If it had come a few months earlier—But I don't know. I don't suppose things would have been very different, or I should have been any happier. I should always have known and felt that he was staying with me because it was worth his while."

"Your husband, do you mean?" said Stella in a low voice.

Nita bent lower over her work.

"Yes," she said, in a monotonous voice, as if she were answering an ordinary question. "Shocks you, doesn't it? It is evident you don't know anything of the profession. Almost all of us have got a husband living on her salary, and most of the women think I am lucky in being a grass widow. There! I didn't mean to whine to you, or to bore you. No doubt you've got enough of your own trouble to think of."

"You don't bore me," said Stella. "I'm so sorry for you! How unhappy you must be!"

Nita laughed shortly.

"Oh, no, I'm not," she said; then her lips twitched, and the lids dropped over the dark eyes, as if she had been suddenly smitten by a painful memory. "But I was at first," she went on, reluctantly. "You see, I was foolish enough to be fond of him, and while we were together I didn't mind how much I worked, or how rough a time we had. And it was a rough time. I hadn't made my name then, as I said, and I had to work hard to earn just enough for us—to keep body and soul together; but I was content if he threw me a kind word now and again, and that wasn't often; for men of his sort haven't many kind words to throw to their wives when the beer and tobacco run short and the cupboard's empty."

"But—why didn't he work too?" asked Stella in her innocence.

Nita shrugged her shoulders.

"Work was scarce, and when it wasn't, he didn't care about it. He left me to do the work for both of us; and one day when I was looking for it, he went off."

"Oh!" breathed Stella.

"Yes; he left a note—just a few lines—saying that he was off to the Klondike to make his fortune. And I was fool enough to fret after him. If he had only said 'good-bye,' if he had only given me one kiss—but a short note! Bah! why am I raking it all up again?" she broke off, with a harsh laugh; but Stella saw a tear in the fierce eyes which belied the cynical bitterness of the voice.

Stella was silent for a moment or two, then she said, timidly:

"And—haven't you heard—"

"Not likely!" said Nita. "Oh, yes I expected to hear. I stayed in the same diggings for months, and I've left my address there—thinking, yes, hoping—that perhaps he'd got stone broke and work his way back. I was foolish then, you see; but I've got wiser since. I expect he made that fortune."

Stella leant forward in her eagerness.

"Oh, but—perhaps you are wronging him by such a thought! Perhaps he failed, and is poor still, and too proud."

Nita rose and shook out her dress.

"Too proud to come to me for money?" she said, quietly. "He couldn't have changed to that extent in this short time. No, miss, he wasn't the sort of man to own that sort of pride."

"He—may be ill," said Stella.

Nita shook her head.

"He'd have written. He knew I'd have come out, if I'd had to work my fingers to the bone to get to him. You don't like to say that he might be dead, I can see; but he's not dead. He's not the one to risk his life."

She saw Stella shudder, and for an instant the care-worn face flamed

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What Are You Doing for that Eczema?

"Nothing; I've about given up trying to cure it."

"That is not wise. Do as I did and you will probably be cured in a short time. I used Zylex and Zylex Soap with it and my Eczema began to improve at once. A couple of boxes cured. You can get Zylex at your druggist's."

Zylex, 50c. a box; Zylex Soap, 25c. a cake.

Zylex, London.

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and the eyes flashed.

"You think me a hard-hearted woman, I can see!" she said, with suppressed passion; "and perhaps you're right; but if you'd been deserted as I've been, and by the man you loved and worked for, you'd be hard-hearted. I was as soft and gentle as you, once."

The colour died out of her face and the flame from her dark eyes.

"I beg your pardon," she said, biting her lips, "but it all came back to me as we were talking, and I—I lost myself. If he's dead, as you suggest, then I've suffered too much to mourn for him—and there's many a woman who could say the same. Let me see if your foot's easier."

She made the examination with a gentleness in strange contrast to her recent outburst of passion; but Stella felt the thin hand tremble as it touched her foot, and, moved by a pitying impulse, she leant forward and touched Nita's forehead with her lips.

"I am so sorry for you!" she said.

Nita bowed her head for a moment, then looked up steadily.

"Thank you," she said in a low voice; "but you needn't be. There's some trouble that sears the heart, and mine was of that sort. I don't suffer now; and I'm too busy to—to have time to brood and think. I'm playing nearly every night—sometimes twice a night when I'm in London—and that occupies my mind. It's only sometimes that I miss having someone to work for and to bully me."

The sadness with which this was said brought the tears to Stella's eyes. Nita rose and lit a candle.

"I think you'd better go to bed," she said. "I'll help you. Lean heavily. Why, I could carry you in my arms. I'm strong; it's the dancing."

She not only assisted Stella to the bedroom which she had engaged for her, but quietly insisted upon helping her to undress. Then she stood and looked at Stella with a wistfulness faintly visible in the dark eyes.

"You kissed me just now," she said in a low voice. "You—you had no cause to be ashamed of it."

After a moment or two, Stella understood; and, with a cry of pity and comprehension, put her arms around Nita and kissed her again.

It was some time before she fell asleep, for her strange surroundings and Nita's pitiful story kept her awake. It seemed to her impossible that any man could be so heartless and cruel as this woman's husband.

She thought of Rath; so noble, so unselfish, and the bitterness of her love and her separation from him swept over her like a wave, and drove over her regret and self-reproach for Lord Lisle's grief from her mind. She dreamt of Rath through all her sleeping hours.

When she limped into the sitting-room the next morning, Nita, who was making the tea, greeted her quietly and with an air of repression, as if she wished to ignore the conversation of the preceding night.

"You ought not to have got up," she said. "I was going to bring you some breakfast. How is the foot?"

"Better—much better," replied Stella.

Nita shook her head.

"You can't get rid of a sprain like that so easily," she said, with the tone of experience. "You just lie up on the sofa—oh, but you must! I'll find you'll have to. If you don't rest now, you'll be in for a long bout. I

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FOR THE NURSERY.

"The bath ready for baby, when baby is ready for the bath" should be an adage of every housewife—who should also keep in mind that a "cable saved to the nurse makes for a well-ordered, contented household. Gas Water-Heaters, whether of the Instantaneous or Circular type, offer the convenience of available hot water "upstairs, downstairs, and in my lady's chamber,"—without any labour at all—Independently of the state of the kitchen fire.

The cost is reasonable.

FOR THE BATHROOM.

An uncertain supply of hot water in the bathroom is a frequent cause of annoyance.

Hot water can only be secured, usually, by getting the cook to act as stoker, but at what a cost!

Think of the coal that is wasted—the fatigue of coal carrying—the after-labour of general cleaning—and the discomfort of a hot kitchen in warm weather!

A Gas Water-Heater is economical, because it only heats the water actually required; and labour-saving, because there are no coals to carry, no flues to clean, no ashes or dirt to remove.

The master of the house has hot shaving water and a hot bath whenever he wishes without delay or trouble.

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When "Spring cleaning days" engross the busy housewife then the convenience of an unlimited supply of hot water on the upper floors is brought home to her with special force.

But at all times—apart from convenience—a gas water-heater makes an irresistible appeal to the housewife from the point of view of dealing with the domestic problem.

Latter-day domestic life is difficult to keep unless due consideration is shown by saving them unnecessary drudgery—and in the category of unnecessary drudgery may be included the toil of carrying hot water or coal upstairs, the cleaning of grates and the removal of dirt and ashes.

The gas water-heater renders such labour superfluous.—may12, tf

know that kind of sprain."

"I'm afraid I'm intruding," said Stella.

Nita smiled.

"You wouldn't say so if you knew how glad I am to have you," she retorted; "indeed, if I wasn't so honest I'd let you pester about so that I could have you with me longer."

Stella looked at her gratefully; then she coloured.

"Of course, you will let me pay—I mean, I have money."

Nita shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, you shall pay—if you can really afford it," she said.

Stella, still blushing, took out her purse and showed her the gold.

"I am quite rich, you see," she said, gaily.

Nita laughed.

"So you are," she said. "I can remember when I should have considered as much as you've got there a small fortune. Now I earn as much in a week, I suppose," she added, checking a sigh. "So that if you run short, you must go shares with me. Why, what a child you are! I wish I could blush like that! But rouge isn't a bad substitute, if you know how to put it on."

"Is there anything I can do to help you?" Stella asked, as Nita got out her costumes after breakfast and began to overhaul them. "Perhaps I could help you mend some of those things?"

Nita shook her head.

"No, thanks," she said. "There's not much to do; but I like to look them over in case anything has gone wrong. We dress so quickly that sometimes something gives unawares. But you can hear me say the words of a couple of new songs I'm going to try, if you like."

(To be Continued.)

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EVERYDAY ETIQUETTE

Kindly advise me what is the proper way to address an announcement that is sent to the father, mother and family?" asked Alice over the phone one morning.

"It is not proper to make a single announcement serve for an entire household. One invitation should be sent to 'Mr. and Mrs. Smith,' another to the 'Misses Smith' and another to the 'Messrs. Smith,'" answered her aunt.

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and most up-to-date
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War News

Messages Received
Previous to 9

OFFICIAL.

LONDON, Ju

Hostile airships dropped
east and southeast of the
coast last night. There was
no material damage, and ver
casualties.

Sir John French reports he
in Chateau Hooge lost and
near Ginchy enemy troops
were captured with 48 prison
trenches were subsequently ul
ed, owing to enemy's fire.

The French Government
progress in direction of S
Three violent counter-attack
repulsed with heavy loss.

The Italian Government
stubborn fighting on the left
Isonzo River, against the
Montenaro.

DONAR

ST. PIERRE BULLETS

PARIS, via St. Pierre, J

In the region north of Arr
the evening and night, the
attempted desperately to
his recently lost positions. T
sector from Ablain to Neu
especially the sugar refinery
chez were sustained, despite
interrupted bombardment, to
artillery replied energetical
German counter-attacks were
against the eastern slopes
ete's Chapel. There were u

WHAT DO YOU
WHY, I MARRIED
ME YOUR PA

BUT THIS

SAVINGS BANK