

TRUTH'S BEACON

It was a dull threatening day, but there was a deeper grayness than the sky's on the face of the solitary occupant of a compartment in the Great Western train...

"That is right. Say nothing about my coming to Miss Bentley and take me to your master." "Is it bad news?" queried the old man.

Oliver nodded, and nothing was spoken till the servant opened a door and announced him. Within the room Mr. Bentley started up and advanced to meet Oliver, but the words of welcome died on his lips, chilled by the sight of his visitor's gray face.

"What is the matter? You bring bad news?" he asked, quickly. "Yes," he said the quiet, but sad, response. "About Cyril Is he ill? Dead?" came the startled questions.

"I am afraid so." "But how? When? We never heard he was ill. Why were we not told?" And Mrs. Bentley joined her husband in quick, anxious inquiry.

So Oliver told his story. Himself a prisoner in the hotel through a sprained ankle, he had seen Cyril sail away to return, he hoped, in four days, he had waited and Cyril had not come. He told of the overturned boat, of the bodies of two drowned sailors being washed ashore, of the fading away of every hope during the following fortnight.

Then a voice—a merry voice—singing was heard and Mr. Bentley said imperatively: "Muriel—she must not be told." "But—" Oliver was beginning.

"No, not to-day, nor to-morrow. She must be prepared for the shock gradually. Not a word of your real news to her, Mr. Vernon, please." And Muriel came into the room. How her face lighted up when she saw that her parents were not alone!

"Oliver!" she said, stretching out both of her hands in greeting; "I am glad to see you!" Then, looking around the room, she asked: "Where is Cyril?" "Cyril, my dear, is delayed. He will be here, I think you said," turning to Oliver, "in two or three days."

Oliver nodded acquiescingly; he felt that there was nothing else to do. "But what is the matter? Why couldn't he come?" Muriel went on. "Well, you see, my dear," faltered Mr. Bentley, "he has met with a slight accident—only a very short one—he has sprained his ankle."

Oliver turned away, annoyed and hurt by Mr. Bentley's childish, stupid invention. He looked out through the window over a stretch of gray sea to where the beacon was standing firm and clear. But Muriel was pressing another question upon her father.

"Why didn't he write? It is more than six weeks since we heard from him." "He hurt his hand as well as his ankle." "He might have wired," was the natural and impatient comment from Muriel.

"Cyril always said you were the most honorable and truthful boy or man he ever knew. Tell me your real news." And her eyes—the most candid in the world he thought—were looking at him from the most innocent of the most trustful face he knew.

Whatever came or went, he could not lie with those eyes looking into his. And yet, how could he tell her the truth? His eyes fell and he turned his face aside.

"Ah, don't turn away; tell me what you know," she urged, "Has he gone away from me?" "Not that, not that," he replied, eagerly. "Has he gone away from all of us?"

"Yes, we think so." "Dead! Is he dead?" And her startled eyes looked wildly at him. Oliver grew afraid, yet her face demanded the truth more than ever.

"We are afraid so," he murmured, gently. The life died out of her face. She lay for a moment and Oliver was just in time to catch her as she fell forward in a dead faint.

He supported her to the couch and was ringing violently for assistance as her parents entered the room. They saw at a glance what had happened. "You have told her?" Mr. Bentley asked with vexation as Mrs. Bentley ran to the white-faced, unconscious figure.

"Yes; I couldn't help it," Oliver replied. "Couldn't help it!" Mr. Bentley repeated, scornfully. "And perhaps your foolishness has killed my child."

Certainly Muriel's condition was alarmingly serious. After a strangely long period of absolute unconsciousness she came back to a half comatose life, to a listlessness of body and mind more distressing to see than any kind of pain could possibly have been. Nothing interested her; she ignored all questions and sat staring at the fire, muttering uncanonically.

Two hours passed bringing no change. Daylight faded, the room remained unlighted save by the red fire into which the pale face of Muriel was peering so fixedly with a look which told of a mind straying on the border line of reason. Fitful gleams of the moon came through the wreck of flying clouds and the wind had arisen to a perfect hurricane. The scene was burning itself into Oliver's brain, and he felt that each moment was being treacherously the promise of a tragedy.

An exceptionally loud gust of wind shook the house and seemed to fill the room with noise. It awoke Muriel from her lethargy. "What is that?" she asked. "The wind," replied her mother; "a storm is raging."

"Is the beacon lighted?" came the quick question. "Oh, yes, dear," answered her mother. Muriel started up, stepped to the window and looked out. She saw at a glance that no light shone from where the beacon stood.

"It is not lighted; it must be," she said, firmly. "We cannot reach it now. No boat could live in such a sea," Mr. Bentley said. "It must be lighted," Muriel repeated, resolutely, her eyes flashing.

"But, Muriel, dear," her father urged, more coaxingly, "there is no necessity. It is never lighted except when boats are out at night." "Light it, light it," Muriel repeated again and again. And then she burst forth more scornfully: "You are cowards all; you will let good men go to their death while you stand idle."

"I tell you, Muriel, that no boats are out," he father said, sternly. She ignored the remark and demanded: "Where is David?" David, a weather-beaten old fisherman, was brought to her, and sad and very much startled, he looked when he saw a pale, wild-eyed figure asking him to light the beacon, which stood with a quarter of a mile of raging sea between it and the shore.

"All right, missy; don't be worry; there ain't no boats out." "You won't go. Then I'll go myself. Mr. Vernon, will you come with me? Truth's Beacon must be lighted to-night." Oliver would have welcomed certain death as a relief from the horrible torture of the last two hours. He looked at David inquiringly. "I am willing to try, sir," the fisherman replied to the unspoken query.

"Muriel, we will light that beacon for you," Oliver said, adding to himself, "or we shall not come back." Two hours later Oliver and David returned. Drenched, sore and utterly exhausted, they had the gratification of knowing that the beacon was lighted. Oliver had hoped that the new would rouse Muriel from her terrible lethargy; but no, she simply thanked him and relapsed into semi-consciousness. All food or stimulants she refused; she was headless as to her father pacing the room still furious with Oliver, and of the mother seated near, anxiously and helplessly watching the marble-like figure of Muriel. The doctor had been sent for early in the evening and had not come. No one seemed to think of retiring to rest.

Oliver, despite feeling in the way, could not withdraw. He waited and watched and wondered as midnight came and passed, and 1 o'clock struck and then 2. The silence within the room was oppressive and made the sound of the wind and the booming of the waves more terrible, whilst the brooding sense of impending tragedy made Oliver curiously nervous.

"Would morning never come?" he groaned to himself. And then he half thought he heard the sound of a bell. On the instant Muriel started up. "He has come! He has come!" she cried, facing the door. "Why don't you let him in?" she added, angrily, as no one stirred.

Mrs. Bentley wrung her hands despairingly. "Oh, my poor child!" broke from Mr. Bentley. "He has come! He has come!" Muriel cried again, and the strange set look in her face broke into a smile of welcome as another and louder thrall rang through the house.

Oliver threw open the door, a servant was heard shouting back the bolt of the front entrance and the almost impossible happened—the dead came back—Cyril's voice was heard. A moment later Cyril himself bounded into the room, and Muriel with an inarticulate cry of welcome, fell unconscious into his arms.

An hour later, when wine and gladness were bringing back the color to Muriel's cheeks, Cyril told his story. When his yacht capsized he had clung to a spar for hours and had been picked up by another yacht. Then he had been ill for a fortnight and had been unable to tell his name or residence. When he had recovered his rescuers had endeavored to make for Palmouth and had been caught in the storm. As a last desperate resort Cyril had taken charge of the vessel and had made for the little harbor which he knew so well. He had relied upon the beacon being lighted.

Had Muriel not been told, had she not in her strange unreason insisted upon the beacon being lighted, Cyril would have steered himself and his rescuers to certain death. As Cyril ended his narrative, Mr. Bentley rose and shook Oliver warmly by the hand. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Vernon," was all he said. But Oliver understood fully and both men glanced across at the beacon. For both of them a beacon had been newly lighted in their lives—the beacon of firm, unflinching truth—The Catholic Fireside.

COUNTRY OF RAIN AND CLOUD, with the trooping mists ever stealing from the hills, the wide, lonely stretches of brown bog walled in by purple fortresses of mountains, is it any wonder the people should see visions of many kinds? The visions are usually of the dead or of fairies.

I like best to think on the prettier fairies, who lend themselves so delightfully to poetry, writes Katharine Tynan. There is the leprechaun, the fairy shoemaker. Autumn fields would seem to be his natural setting. As Allingham sings in one of his delightful poems:

Little cowboy, what have you heard, Up on the lonely rath's green mound? Only the plaintive yellowbird Piping to sultry fields around, Chary, chary, chary, chee-ee. Only the grasshopper and the bee! "Tip-tap, rin-rap, Tack-a-tack, too, Scarlet leather sewn together, This will make a shoe. Left, right, pull it tight; Summer days are warm; Underground in winter, Laughing at the storm." Lay your ear close to the hill, Do you not catch the tiny clamor, Busy click of an old elfin hammer, Voice of the leprechaun singing shrill, As he merrily plies his trade?

If you could only catch the leprechaun at his work and hold him, he would tell you where the crock of gold, the hidden treasure, is to be found. Nor would it turn into fairy gold, once found. But the leprechaun is artful and plays sharp tricks sometimes. He was once caught by a peasant, and in return

for his release indicated where a crock of gold lay. It was under a spike of ragweed in a thirty acre field. The peasant cautiously took care to mark the ragweed, since such things flourish commonly. He tied his garter about the neck of this one, and returning at dawn with his spade to dig up his treasure, lol all the field was thick with ragweed, and every one carried a garer round its neck! And though he dug and dug and dug, he never came upon that crock of gold.

The ragweed, no doubt, would laugh at such a trick, for he is the fairy's horse. He looks only a brown weed in the daytime, but if you were to see him under the moon when the fairy rings form on the grass and all the fairy riders come down from the rath, you would never know him—clumping and neighing and shaking his buckles of gold. He is surely a most lucky mortal who can see the dainty fairy fold and escape unscathed, for often they hold as close communion as Freemasons and tolerate no spying on their domain and punish severe those who intrude.

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