

my darling,—look up and give me a kiss, my little Fairy—you are not afraid of papa, are you?"

"Si—Si—don't let him take Cecil!"

Ericson soothed and caressed her, but of course he could not undertake to grant her prayer. He wondered what kind of woman the mother could be who resigned her child to a father who was unkind to it; but perhaps the mother had no choice.

Everybody on board noticed Cecil, but she never left her cavalier's side for more than half a minute, and then she kept watch on him lest he should move away, or made him promise that he would stay till she came back; nothing tempted her to go out of his sight. One pleasant-faced lady asked her to come and speak to her own little girl. Cecil hesitated, and seemed in no mood to accept the invitation.

"Go with the lady, Cecil," said Ericson, laughing up in the lady's face.

The child slipped obediently off his knee, but held up her finger warningly.

"You stay here," she said, with her head on one side.

"Yes; I will stay here!"

So Cecil allowed the lady to lead her away; but when her conductor was about to take her below, the child cried out, and tried to snatch away her hand.

"No, no!" she said, looking back to where she had left Ericson. "No, no!"

"But, my dear," said the lady, "I'm not going to hurt you. My little girl is downstairs."

But Cecil seemed to suspect a conspiracy to separate her from her friend, and she scarcely understood the explanation.

"No, no!" she repeated, passionately, and snatching away her hand, she ran back with all her might to Ericson; and when he caught her up in his arms, she clung about his neck, crying excitedly but not noisily.

He kissed and fondled her, and when he had soothed her into calmness again, explained that the lady would not have taken her away, and there was nothing to fear; but his heart ached while he spoke, for he thought—what would it be when the father came for her, and she must be given up to him?

"I wish I could keep you," he whispered to himself in English. "You have taken my heart by storm, you winsome baby. How I would love you, and make your life all sunshine!"

But that was impossible; in a few hours he must give up his Fairy to a man who seemed to regard her as a nuisance and a burden. A wild idea, too, for a young man of one-and twenty to take upon himself the responsibility of a young child. As to scandal, it was characteristic of Eugene Ericson that he did not take this into consideration.

At ten, Ericson sat next the lady from whom Cecil had fled so rapidly, and apologized for the child's conduct.

"She thought you were going to take her away," he said, "and she hardly understands English, so nothing you could say would reassure her."

"Oh, I saw how it was," the lady answered, smiling. "You have made a complete conquest. I don't know what the poor child will say when her father takes her."

Ericson bit his lip under his moustache and glanced down at Cecil, who of course sat by his side, and then across at her father, who was at the other side of the table, talking to a man next him. He did not concern himself at all about his little one.

After tea a few of the passengers went upon deck again, among them Ericson and his young charge; and by-and-by when it was beginning to grow dark, he asked the child if she was not tired.

"Cecil doesn't want to go to bed," she said, looking frightened.

Heaven knew he did not want to put the little creature away from him.

He smiled.

"You shall go to sleep here, in my arms, he said, "but I must get something warm to put round you."

He carried her down to the lady's cabin, and there easily borrowed a warm shawl, in which to wrap his charge; then he stepped across to the steward's room, and asked the name of Cecil's father.

"Longmore, sir," was the answer, "but it seems more like as if the young lady belonged to you than to him, sir."

Ericson laughed, and went on deck again. He chose a secluded corner, and there sat down—he himself had donned an ulster, for spring nights at sea are cool—and wrapping the shawl well round Cecil, bade her go to sleep.

"You go to sleep too?" she said, wistfully.

"I am not tired; I am grown up, you know. Give me a kiss for good night, and shut your blue eyes, *carissima*."

He bent his head to hers, and the child kissed him several times, and whispered; "*Buona notte, carissimo*," and he kissed her fondly, and said nothing, for his heart was very full just now, and so the violet eyes closed, and the child slept.

CHAPTER V.

"YOU MUST COME WITH ME!"

FIVE A. M.; a dull, misty dawn, when the "Cygnets" hove to alongside St. Katharine's Wharf, and in about ten minutes the custom-house officers came aboard; but Ericson was an experienced traveller and did not hurry himself. He was not going to wake Cecil before it was necessary, and he wanted to keep her with him as long as he could. Now that the actual hour of parting was come, it cost him more than he could have thought possible to give the child up. He dreaded every moment to hear her father's step, her father's voice; he could not think calmly of the child's piteous wail, her pretty hands stretched out to him in vain. He strained the little sleeper closer to his breast, and bent over the peaceful little face, and often his lip pressed the white brow; but there was no help for it; he must give her up when the time came.

But he must wake her now; the baggage was being examined; he must restore the shawl to the lady who had lent it, and find Mr. Longmore. So he gently woke Cecil. She sat up and rubbed her eyes, and then looked up at him, inquiringly.

"We are in London, Cecil," he said, gently, "and papa will want his little one."

She seemed bewildered for an instant, and then burst into passionate weeping, clinging to him, and beseeching him not to let papa take her, and he had to soothe her as best he could, his own heart sorely aching, promising her that he would ask papa to let her come and see him. That, at any rate, was some comfort; but when he rose up to carry her down below, the poor child nearly burst out afresh, and pressed her wet cheek to his as if in a last appeal; the infinite pathos of the act almost broke down the young man's self-command; he could not speak, but went quickly down the companion-way, restored the shawl to its owner, and asked the stewardess if Mr. Longmore had been inquiring for the child.

"No, sir," she said, "no one has asked for her, and there's nothing here of hers, but this," bringing forth a pretty velvet cap. "Shall I put it on her, sir?"

"Please."

He put Cecil to the ground, and the cap was set on her chestnut curls.

"He's a queer fellow, anyhow," remarked Ericson. "I suppose he is outside. Have any passengers gone ashore yet?"

"Five or six, I believe, sir; we hadn't many aboard, you see."

Ericson went for his own valise, and came out on the lower deck. There were only three passengers there; two ladies and a very young man. Ericson's valise was not opened; he left it in safe custody, and began to make inquiries for Mr. Longmore. The steward "fancied he had gone ashore, thought he saw him—more than half an hour ago;" the mate and the captain had not noticed anyone in particular, the boat was searched, but there was no trace of Mr. Longmore; all the passengers had left; Eugene Ericson was the last; he entered the saloon and saw the under-steward there.

"Mr. Longmore?" he said, "was that the gentleman as come aboard with this little lady?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm almost as sure, sir, as I can be of anything, that he was among the first to go ashore. I noticed little missy when he came aboard with her, as she's such a beauty; and when I see him going ashore I says to a porter as was near, 'That gentleman had a little girl with him, I s'pose that good-looking chap I see her with 'll bring her along,' those were my very words, sir. I thought you might know him, you see."

"Thanks, very much."

Ericson looked down at the little form beside him; involuntarily his hand closed more tightly over hers, a curious feeling was creeping into his heart—was it exultation?—a sense of possession?—and yet he was strangely perplexed too. Was it possible that this man Longmore—a gentleman he certainly was—could have deliberately abandoned his child?

"It's odd, sir," said the under-steward. "Couldn't be a mistake, neither."

"No," Ericson said, "it couldn't be a mistake."

He turned away and sat down, lifting the child to his knee; the under-steward went out, wondering very much what the "young swell" meant to do with the child.

Whatever the future might bring, there was only one course clear to Ericson now; he must take the little one home with him. But what if she were never claimed? What if she were left on his hands?

Perhaps for a minute he did hesitate; a man must be thoughtless indeed who does not feel a sense of responsibility in being answerable for the moral well-being of a human creature; and was he, Eugene Ericson, fit to be the protector of this young child?

But there was no time for such thoughts now, and they were useless. The thing was that Cecil was in his care now, abandoned deliberately by her father—he recalled now with a strange thrill Longmore's look at him—and he could not leave her—had no wish to do