

TRUE TO HIS WORD.

A NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE SMOKING-CARRIAGE.

In a quarter of an hour the mid-day express will leave the terminus at Paddington for the west, and the platform is beginning to fill. Paterfamilias, with his mountains of luggage and oceans of children, is already there.

"Well, you see, old fellow, with a game-arm" (his left arm in a sling) "and a game-leg" (he has limped across the platform with the aid of his friend, and also of a crutch), "one feels a little helpless; and busy and bustle are to a poor cripple like myself."

"My dear fellow," interrupts the other effusively, his comely face blushing to the roots of his brown beard, "don't say another word; I am ashamed of myself for having forgotten your misfortune even for an instant. I ought to have four legs myself—to be such a brute."

He leans across and pats the knee of the uninjured leg of his companion, an affectionate impulse strange to behold in one of his muscular and manly appearance, and which evidences, one would say, a very tender heart. He has not been thoughtful in his acts, in spite of that little verbal slip, for he has not only seen to everything, but taken as much care to make the other comfortable as though he were a sick child.

"By Jupiter, there she is!" cried he excitedly, and beckoning with eager joy to someone in the passing throng.

"What!" exclaims his companion, in a tone of astonishment; "surely not you!" "Yes, it's Lotty," interrupts the other, in a tone which has triumph in it as well as pleasure.

she had been a slave, and he a prince, nay, if she had been a Russian serf, and he the Czar, her king and priest in one, it could not have expressed a more devoted and submissive admiration. An instant before, she had been moving with stately dignity, and that consciousness of superiority to those about her, consciousness of having more of style, that is, and being better dressed—of which women are so demonstrative, and now—having suddenly darted through the crowd like a boy after a dropped apple—she is standing by the carriage-door, flushed, palpitating and speechless, with her right hand clasped in his, as though defying steam-power to part them.

"That's only Litton, my dear," explained the captain assuringly; "you've often heard me speak of Walter Litton." "O yes, indeed," said she, with a sweet smile, as she disengaged her hand from Selwyn's grasp, and offered it to his friend; "his name is very familiar to me—and welcome."

"Walter is modest, and you overcome him," said the captain pleasantly. Then he whispered in her bent-down ear: "How I wish, my darling, you were coming with me to-day, instead of bidding me good-by for Heaven knows how long."

"This lady is coming with us," exclaimed the captain quickly; and before a word of remonstrance could pass her lips, the door was opened, the official handed her deftly in, and the train glided softly past the lingering crowd of those who had come to say "good-by," and to which she herself had a moment before belonged.

"You mean you like to see others smoke," observed the captain, laughingly. "Well, you shall see me. Litton had only a pipe—the contents of which were, moreover, almost exhausted—but it really would be a sacrifice to throw away a cigar like this."

"One of them has got the best of everything," whispered the captain—"at least so far as Reading."

"The people always do stare," was the contemptuous rejoinder; "but I never heard of their thinking."

less have invited and pressed a young lady to do. In his own mind, he blamed the captain very much, but he was not so bold as to say so; he felt that would be much more dangerous than to blame Lotty herself.

No more questions of conscience were put for his decision, and he hid himself at once behind the broad sheet of his newspaper, and left the lovers to themselves. It was a somewhat wearisome situation for one with so delicate a sense of what was due to his fellow-creatures; for when he had read one sheet, he had still to keep it up before him, for the sake of appearances, or rather in order to ignore them. He did not dare turn the paper over; the "liberty of the press" was denied to him.

"Now, in a friend, this might be overlooked; indeed, it was so in Selwyn's case. His friends, and Litton above all, did not grudge him the arm chair, though he always got it; but in a husband this was not a promising trait. Half an hour before Walter would have been ashamed to have found himself dwelling on "dear old Selwyn's" little weakness; but that was before he had seen Lotty, his sister (you see), as he was supposing her; and, without doubt, Selwyn had behaved very selfishly in getting her to come to Reading.

"That is a pretty plan to impute to your old friend," here interpolated the voice of conscience. "Why, if this girl had not been so uncommonly good-looking, and taken your precious 'artistic' fancy, Master Walter Litton, you would never have attained this lofty elevation of ideas: you might have gone up a little way, I don't deny, but not so high as this. Moreover, it is a sheer assumption that anything like an elopement was contemplated. How could Reginald Selwyn know that this young lady would come to the platform to see him off to Cornwall? The whole affair was evidently the work of a moment; and yet you were about to attribute a design—and a very mean one—to the lad who, when you were schoolboys together, often stood between you and harm, and used his three years of seniority, and the superior strength that went with them, to your advantage and succour; to your old chum at college; to the man who went down into the Valley of Death among those heroic Six Hundred, and whose wounds should be mouths to speak for him to the heart of every fellow-countryman. For shame, Master Walter!"

At last, as the train shot through a station, with a whirr like the rising of some enormous pheasant, the captain observed aloud: "Why, that's Twyford, isn't it?" "Yes," answered Litton: "the next station, I believe, is Reading."

"The only thing to be done," said Walter, moved by Lotty's white and frightened face, "is for us two to get out also, and keep this young lady company; our time is no object, or, at least, none in comparison with her staying at the station for so long alone."

"Oh, I don't mind that," interrupted Lotty, in terrified tones; "but what am I to do about papa? I shall not be back in London till eight o'clock. He will be certain to find it all out—O dear, O dear!" "He will be quite certain, Lotty," said Selwyn, with earnest gravity; "and this necessitates the step to which I have been trying to persuade you all along. This mischance may be turned into the happiest stroke of fortune, if you will only take my advice; and such an opportunity will assuredly never happen again."

"Your wife?" exclaimed Litton. "You must not do anything rash, Selwyn." "Rash! no, quite the reverse, my good fellow. This young lady has promised to marry me sooner or later; that has been settled long ago, but her father will not consent to it. He says 'never'; so it is no more disobedient in her to marry me now than it would be in ten years hence. By this lucky piece of imprudence, she will have already offended him beyond measure; her life will henceforth be made a burden to her under his roof. She can't possibly get back, you see, without the most tremendous row; and after that there would be the other row, when we were married. Now, why shouldn't we have the two rows in one, and get it over for good and all! When the knot is once tied, the old gentleman, perceiving it is of no use to anathematize us, is all the more likely to listen to reason."

"But really, Selwyn, this is a most serious step." "Of course it is, my dear Litton," interrupted the captain; "it's the most important step in the world just now, but only to two people in it—to her and to me. Lotty is of age, and can judge for herself."

"Not foolish, darling, only so fond," whispered the captain. "You acted as your heart dictated, and that is a guide to which it is always safe to trust. So far from regretting your position, you should rejoice that it has placed the happiness within our grasp which sooner or later we had promised ourselves. Life is too short for such procrastination."

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"Can we not telegraph to her?" inquired Litton eagerly.

"Lotty thinks of everything," said the captain laughing; "he ought to be a courier to a large family travelling on the continent."

"Yes, but not home, Reginald. Lily will not be at home until five o'clock; and some one else might open it; and no one must tell poor papa, but Lily. She will be at the drawing-class in George street, you know."

"The message had been written while the train was slackening speed, and now they had reached the platform. Litton sprang out at once upon his mission, which he had but just time to accomplish ere the engine began to snort again.

"Some fellows wanted to get in here while you were away," observed the captain, on his return to the carriage, "so I have got the guard to stick an engaged board over the window. It combines utility and truth, you see, for it keeps us private, and exactly describes the mutual relation of Lotty and myself. Don't it Lotty?"

CHAPTER II. THE DAUNTLESS THREE.

"Where is Penaddon?" asked Litton, when the train was once more on its way. "I mean, how far is it from Falmouth?" "Oh, well, a good step; when I said a few miles I rather underrated the distance. I should think it was twenty miles. It is on the south coast of Cornwall, near the Lizard."

"No; but it is a goodish road, though hilly; and with four horses we shall spin along in a couple of hours."

"Our chapter is always right, Lotty; he shall telegraph at Swindon," said the captain comfortingly, for the news that they were to be so long on their way seemed to have come on the poor girl quite unexpectedly, and once more she had dissolved in tears.

"What will your aunt think of my coming down like this, Reggie?"

"There is something wrong about Selwyn's aunt," thought Walter. "Sheldon, Sheldon! surely I have heard that name before; and presently he remembered where he had heard it. Mrs. Sheldon might have made a runaway match, but that was not the incident in her married life which occurred to his memory. He recollected her name in connection with some law case in which there had been circumstances, he did not remember what, but which had made a vague impression on him, not to her advantage. It was too late, however, to make any objections now, even if one could ever have been made on such a ground.

"The rest of the journey was melancholy indeed; it rained unrelentingly too, for the first hour, so that, though the moon was at her full, there was little to be seen from the windows of the carriage. At last there fell upon their ears that sound, which has no other like to it in nature, the roaring of an angry sea; and the captain let down the window and bade Lotty look out. Around them and before them, for they were on a high-set promontory, spread the moonlit sea, wild and white with wrath as far as the eye could reach, and beneath them a spectral ruin.

"That is Penaddon Castle, Lotty, in which, as you may observe for yourself, no county family resides at present. The light down yonder is from the Hall, which shows that hospitable preparation has been made for your reception. The scene looks a little ghastly by this light; but, to-morrow, you will own that you never saw a prettier place, or one, I hope, in which you were so happy."

(To be Continued.)