

HIDDEN DEPTHS.

(BY PERMISSION.)

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

"No," he said, striking his clenched fist on the table beside him; "I won't have her called so? She was told what she had to expect if she ever disgraced herself, and she knew I would never go back from my word. I gave my children a good home, and brought them up respectable. I taught them their duty, and took them to church, and stunted myself that they might have the best of schooling, and they knew that so long as they did well they'd share every bit I'd got; but I told them, ay, and swore it to them, times on times, that so surely as they took to evil ways, and brought disgrace on themselves and me, they'd have to tramp for it, and they might seek a home and a father where the pleased, for they'd find none in my house never no more. So I said then, and so I says now to these children here," he added, stretching out his hand towards two pretty little fair-haired girls, "the same as I said to them as is gone, and I'll keep my word to one and the whole of them, they may depend on it."

"You have just reason to be angry," said Ernestine, "but the fault was not all Lois's. She was deceived and cruelly deserted; the treatment she met with drove her to her dreadful death."

"No doubt," said Brook grimly, "and the fine gentleman as ruined her will have to pay for it in kingdom come, if all is true as the parsons tell us. But that is no excuse for Lois. I taught her her place, and she knew she had no business to go looking after any grand gentleman, or to let him come swaggering here to play with an honest girl's good name when her father's back was turned. I told her what stuff such as he were made of, and what fine sport it is to them to take a decent man's daughter and make her only fit, as they think, to be trampled under their feet, and then flung away to die in a ditch. Yes, yes, I know, and I warned Lois of them; what she did, she did with her eyes open, and she must e'en abide by it."

"She must indeed," said Ernestine; "for we can neither help the dead, nor speak forgiveness to them, however sorely they may need it. But I only mention Lois, because I wished to tell you what her last desire and prayer in this world were."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Brook's wife; "but were you with the poor wench when she died?"

"Oh, no," said Ernestine sadly; "God alone saw her last agony."

"Stupid! how could she be," said Brook angrily, "when you know the girl went and drowned herself in the night?" And Ernestine could see that there was strong agitation working under his apparent harshness.

"But if I guesses right, ma'am," he continued, turning to Ernestine, "you are the lady that put her in the ground, and saved her a work'us funeral?"

"Yes," said Ernestine; "it was the only thing I could do for her, and I was very pleased to do it."

"And I thank you for it, I will say that; bad as Lois has behaved to me, I am glad that she who was once known as my daughter was not buried like a work'us tramp. I do thank you for that, ma'am; and I am bound to listen to anything you may have to say, though what's the good of talking or thinking of such a black business, I can't tell, I'm sure," and he writhed uneasily from side to side as he spoke.

"But it is of the living, not the dead, I have come to speak to you now," said Ernestine. "Lois left a letter, which fell into my hands, in which she made the most earnest entreaty that her sister Annie might be sought for and saved from such a fate as hers had been."

Brook started at the name, and clenched his fist violently.

"Annie!" he thundered. "She is as dead to me as the other is, and more so; for the grave where Lois lies can tell no tales, but while Annie lives, her sham would fall back on me if I still owned her for my child. I would not so much as hear her name from any but yourself, ma'am, and it is not a bit of good your talking of her; better not, far better not." There was an appealing look under all the fierce anger of his eyes, as he turned them on Ernestine, which convinced her that this child had a firmer hold on his heart than ever Lois had, and that the struggle with his own feelings obliged him to take refuge in greater violence.

"Just let me tell you what I have to say, and I will trouble no more," said Ernestine gently. "I resolved, when I read the heart-breaking letter poor Lois wrote on behalf of her sister, that I would never rest till I had fulfilled her last dying wish, and rescued Annie from a life of sin, and a death of misery. I gave her my promise that I would do so, as I held her cold hand in mine, and I will keep my word, though it was given to a silent corpse. Let it cost me what it may, I will never cease my efforts for your poor lost child till I have brought her back, if I can, to her Father in heaven, with whom is all mercy and forgiveness. It is for this purpose I have come to you. I thought I might have found her here, or that you might know where she is."

"Here!" exclaimed Brook. "She shall never enter this house till I am carried out of it feet foremost. I know nothing of her, nor I don't want to."

"Oh!" do not say so," exclaimed Ernestine. "If only I can find her and bring her back to penitence, where should she come but to her father's house? And indeed, from all I have heard, I feel sure she was far less to blame than Lois was: she quite believed her sister was married when she went to her, and had no idea of the evils and temptations that awaited her."

"Then she believed Lois's false words more than my true ones," said Brook. "I told her plain enough what Lois was, and she knew I had disowned her, and would serve her the same if she followed in her sister's steps. She knew this well, and she left my house unbeknown to me and without my leave, and went to her worthless sister; and now she has made her bed, so she may lie on it."

"I do not mean to excuse her," said Ernestine; "but she was young and unsuspecting, and her sister, whom she loved so much, persuaded her to come. At all events, whatever may have been her fault in the past, don't say you will refuse to take her in, if I can bring her back to you repentant."

"But I do say it, and I will," he replied, smiting the table fiercely. "Find her if you can, and do your best with her. It is good of you to trouble yourself for such a one as she is, and I won't say but what I am thankful to you for it; but never let me hear her name, or see her with the sight of my eyes inside of this house. She shall not come while I am alive to bar the door against her."

"Your own child!" said Ernestine. "Will you not show mercy, as you hope for it yourself? What would become of any one of us if our Father in heaven so took vengeance on our sins?"

"I have other children to consider besides her," said Brook doggedly.

"But they are so young they could not suffer any harm from intercourse with her."

"They are not too young to suffer the loss of their home and their livelihood, and that is what it would come to if I brought a fallen woman into this house, be she twenty times my daughter."

"How is that possible?" exclaimed Ernestine. "Who could have the right to prevent you doing as you like in your own house, and with your own child?"

"Those to whom the house belongs, and whose money buys my children's bread," said Brook. "I must do what pleases my lord and my lady, or leave the house and the