

Sister Genevieve

By EVELINE LEONI

Kitty Vivian had been married nearly a year when her husband fell ill, and the doctors ordered him change of air and scenery. So in the very middle of the London season Kitty was obliged to pack up her pretty dresses, cancel her many engagements...

that she would go with him wherever he wished. He stroked her brown head as it lay for a moment on his breast, and then, bending down, he kissed her very tenderly.

A week later the Vivians embarked at Southampton in a Cape steamer, and at the end of eight days they found themselves landing at Madeira. The hotel at Funchal where they had ordered rooms was bright and sunny and very comfortable. To Herbert it was new life being out all day in the fresh, pure, balmy air after the horrible London fogs which they had left behind.

Kitty soon got tired of exploring and began to look about for some new form of entertainment, but there was none to be had. After a while she began to mope and declared that she would certainly die of the blues if she had to remain any longer in Madeira. About this time she received a letter from her cousin in Yorkshire, telling her that she and her husband and a party of lively friends were going yachting in the Mediterranean, and that if she liked they would call at Madeira and carry her off with them for a fortnight at Monte Carlo.

"It will only be for a fortnight, Bertie," she said, in a tone of apology, "and you will easily be able to take care of yourself while I am away. I will ask Sister Genevieve to keep an eye on you and let me know if anything goes wrong," and with this she signed the voice of conscience which told her she should not leave her husband all alone, and went off to answer her cousin's letter. Ten days later she received a wire to say she might expect the yacht early in the following week, and she was full of good humor and gaiety, doing all she could to make up to Herbert for her impending desertion of him.

Once he went for a drive alone with Madge, as Mrs. Seymour had some more amusing engagements on hand, and the memory of that afternoon lived for a long time in the minds of both. Madge was in a soft, coaxing humor, and she let him hold her hand and fondle the little finger which bore his wedding-ring. Geoffrey wished with all his heart that every drive might be like that one. He and his wife were so happy together she seemed to him to be more like the Madge of the first few months of their married life, simple and affectionate, and quite content to talk to him about the beautiful scenery, the books he had been reading, and other things which interested him. But the other afternoons were not like that, and Geoffrey regretted the Devonshire village with a bitterness which grew deeper every day.

"Years ago," began the Sister, in a voice which trembled ever so slightly, "when you were little more than a baby, two young people fell in love with each other and were married. For two years all went well with them, and they were as happy as the day was long. Then one sad day the young husband fell ill and his doctor sent him to a little village in the South of England to recruit his health. His wife, of course, accompanied him, and at first she was charmed with the free, open-air life, the picturesque old village, and the friendly, weather-beaten fisherfolk who formed the chief society of the place. The invalid used to spend his days lying on the beach watching the fishermen mending their nets, and chatting with them about the sea and its treasures, which was a topic they

never grew tired of. He was quite happy and contented, for he never cared very much for society, and as long as he had his wife near him it was all he asked. The soft, pure air did him a world of good, and his cough grew less frequent. After the first few weeks, however, his young wife, who had always been accustomed to a life of gaiety, began to find the simple enjoyment of the little village extremely monotonous. She complained of the tiny rooms, the homely food, and finally declared that she would certainly go mad if she had to remain there much longer. Poor Geoffrey was terribly upset when he heard her talking in this strain, and did all he could to make her more contented with her lot. He sent to London for books and pictures to brighten the rooms, he took her for long drives to all the places of interest in the neighborhood, but Madge was still dissatisfied. Nothing pleased her, she wearied of everything, and cried a great deal when she was alone to Geoffrey's infinite distress. At last matters reached a climax. A sister of Madge's was spending the winter on the Riviera, and she sent long and glowing descriptions of the lovely scenery, the flowers, the sunshine, and above all, of the charming people she had met. Madge pined to join her, and when Mrs. Seymour wrote and said that Monte Carlo would do her husband a great deal more good than the Devonshire village, Madge determined that she would make him go out there. She read the letter to him, and at last, after a long argument, Geoffrey resigned himself to the inevitable. A week later he found himself in a large hotel at Monte Carlo, which was filled with smart, healthy people, and he, in his weak state of health, felt himself very much out of everything that was going on around him. Mrs. Seymour, Madge's sister, was a robust, loud-dressed widow, always beautifully dressed, and with plenty of money at her disposal. She considered that Geoffrey wanted stirring up, and was telling Madge to make him go out and enjoy himself like other people, instead of moping in the hotel or sitting alone in the sunshine, watching the sea with that far-away look in his eyes. Unfortunately, Madge entertained a profound respect for Mrs. Seymour's opinion, and poor Geoffrey suffered in consequence. He always tried to appear bright and gay when his sister-in-law was anywhere near, but the sound of her voice and the aggressive rustle of her silk-lined garments approaching used to set his teeth on edge and make him shiver. They often took him for drives, which he would have enjoyed very much if he had been alone with Madge, but Mrs. Seymour almost invariably accompanied them, and the result was that he was longing all the time to get home as quickly as possible. He hated the gossip and scandal with which Madge's sister beguiled the hours, and could not bear to see the delight and interest his wife used to take in hearing of a recent divorce case or a suicide at Monte Carlo. Once he went for a drive alone with Madge, as Mrs. Seymour had some more amusing engagements on hand, and the memory of that afternoon lived for a long time in the minds of both. Madge was in a soft, coaxing humor, and she let him hold her hand and fondle the little finger which bore his wedding-ring. Geoffrey wished with all his heart that every drive might be like that one. He and his wife were so happy together she seemed to him to be more like the Madge of the first few months of their married life, simple and affectionate, and quite content to talk to him about the beautiful scenery, the books he had been reading, and other things which interested him. But the other afternoons were not like that, and Geoffrey regretted the Devonshire village with a bitterness which grew deeper every day.

He felt himself so weak and ill, so utterly unfit to take care of his vain, impulsive, pretty little wife, with her passionate love of life and gaiety. Soon he might require care and nursing, but he knew that he must not now expect them from Madge. Some demon of selfishness seemed to have taken possession of her, and her thoughts were all for herself and her own amusements. He was sitting in the same position when his wife returned home from the Casino. She had lost a good deal of money and was angry in consequence. At Geoffrey's first gentle remonstrance she broke into a torrent of passionate irritable words. He grew angry also for once in his life, and a quarrel ensued. For the first time since they had been married they exchanged no good-night kiss. The following morning the doctor was hastily summoned to visit Geoffrey who had become very much worse. Madge was thoroughly frightened, and for a few days was a devoted nurse. She sat in the sick room all day attending to the patient's slightest wishes. Then Geoffrey got a little better, and the former state of things began again. Madge plunged into the vortex of gaiety with renewed vigor, as though she wished to make up for the time she had lost. Mrs. Seymour backed her up in every way, and the two sisters spent all their days together in a perpetual round of amusement. Geoffrey gave up saying anything. It did no good and only irritated Madge. His cough grew worse, but he never complained. After a while he gave up going out any more, and would lie all day, for the most part quite alone. Madge went to the Casino every day. Sometimes she would go both afternoon and evening. If she was lucky she would return home smiling, and be full of tenderness towards her husband and of compassion for his suffering and loneliness. If she lost she was sullen and silent, and was only longing to be off again to win her money back. She knew that Geoffrey hated her gambling, and that the mere thought of it made him miserable, but she was utterly callous to the pain she caused him, and lived only for herself and her triumphs and enjoyments. She met with a great deal of admiration amongst her sister's many friends and acquaintances, and her head was completely turned between it all. One afternoon Geoffrey was feeling worse than usual, and he asked his wife to stay with him just for once. She saw how ill he looked, and hesitated, and he noticed the wavering in her face. "Only just this once, Madge," he pleaded, looking up at her wistfully, "I feel so strange this afternoon and I have a dreadful pain here," and he pressed his hand to his side.

"Poor Geoffrey," she whispered tenderly, bending over him to kiss his thin flushed face. "I promised Alice to go with her to the Casino this afternoon, but I won't stay long. I shall be back in an hour, and you won't mind being left alone for such a short time, will you, dear?" Geoffrey did not answer. He did mind it very much, but he knew it was no use saying so.

"You won't stay longer than an hour, will you, Madge?" he whispered, brokenly, for his poor heart was aching even more than his side. At that moment Mrs. Seymour's voice was heard at the door calling to Madge to make haste. "All right, Alice, I am coming," cried the girl. "Good-bye, Geoffrey," and she was gone without another glance at her husband.

It was three o'clock when he went out and the clocks were striking seven when she opened the bedroom door on her return. A strange stillness seemed to pervade the room as she entered. Her face was wreathed in smiles and carried a bag of gold pieces in her hand. "I have won, Geoffrey, I have won," she cried, as she advanced towards her husband's sofa, but no answer came from the still, quiet figure lying there. A cry of terror broke from the girl as she bent over him. He lay upon his side, his eyes wide open and fixed upon the doorway, as though he expected someone to enter by it. His mouth was contorted, and there was blood on the white linen front of his shirt. "Geoffrey! Geoffrey!" cried the young wife, falling on her knees beside him. "Speak to me! Look at me, Geoffrey! I am here! I am here!"

But there was still no answer, nothing but silence reigned. In horror she glanced towards the door. Who had been watching for when the grim messenger of death had come to take him. She knew well it was for the wife who had promised to love and to cherish him always, in sickness and in health, until death should part him from her. And now death had come and she was too late, too late. She knew that he had called her name when he felt the end drawing near, struggling with all his might to live until she returned, to look once more upon her face which he had loved so dearly. He died alone and unaided, without a human creature near him. Oh! false wife, false friend! Was it thus she had kept her marriage vows. "Geoffrey! Geoffrey!" she wailed in her agony, "I will be good!" But her husband could not hear her; what mattered now if she were good or bad. A book lay open on the floor beside him. Madge's eyes fell upon one line; it, too, was marked with a crimson stain: "In My Father's house there were many mansions; if it were not so—" She could read no farther. With a cry of anguish she fell senseless across her husband's body. There was a dead silence for some moments when Sister Genevieve had finished speaking. Kitty

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Vivian was sobbing quietly, her face hidden in her hands. She looked up presently. "Sister," she whispered through her tears, "who was it?" "It was myself," replied the nun gently, "the story is the story of my life."

"Thank you, Sister," said Kitty, very softly, and without another word she rose and walked with a firm step to the spot where her husband sat, gazing sadly at the blue waters, which was to carry his wife away from him on the morrow. Heedless of who might see her, Kitty fell on her knees beside him, and, taking his thin hands in hers, she covered them with kisses. "Forgive me, Bertie, forgive me," she sobbed, "Oh, how could I ever have thought of leaving you, my darling."

Herbert gathered his wife into his arms with a beating heart. He did not understand what it all meant, but a strange flood of happiness came suddenly over him. "Tell me what you mean, Kitty," he whispered eagerly, "tell me what has happened?"

Then with his arms about her, she told him Sister Genevieve's story, and in the long silence which followed, it seemed to them both that a new life was opening out before them, a life in which all would be peace and love and happiness.

The following morning the yacht arrived as expected, and Herbert and Kitty went down to the harbor to see it come in. They found a very lively party on board, and almost every one was already well known to Kitty.

"Well, Kit, I hope you are packed and ready," cried her cousin as they met, "for we cannot stay here more than a few hours. It is a dull place, and you are very wise to leave it for a bit."

"I had better tell you at once," said Kitty quietly, "that I have changed my mind, and that I do not mean to leave Madeira after all."

"Oh, Kitty, why?" cried a chorus of surprised voices. "Because I would rather stay here with Herbert," she replied simply; "I am very sorry to have brought all on such a wild-goose chase, but I only made up my mind last night too late to put you off."

Her friends surrounded her then, trying to induce her to think better of her decision and to go with them after all. But Kitty was firm.

"It's awfully nice of you all to want me," she said merrily, "but to tell you the truth, my ideas of enjoyment have changed a good deal since you saw me last; so there is no use in trying to persuade me, because nothing will make me change. And now come along to the hotel and we will show you the beauties of Funchal, and when you are tired of it you can go off again as fast as you like."

That same evening the yacht got up steam again, and just as the sun was beginning to set the party embarked, and half an hour later they were steaming slowly out of the harbor. Kitty and her husband stood on the pier and watched them till the yacht became a mere speck on the vast waters.

"Oh, Herbert," whispered the little wife, as she nestled close to him, "how can I ever be grateful enough to Sister Genevieve? Only for her I should be in the yacht at this very moment, being carried further and further away from you. I can't think how I can ever have contemplated leaving you. Oh, how wicked and selfish I was, and you never said one word of anger to me all the time!"

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