

# UNDER A CLOUD.

## A THRILLING TALE OF HUMAN LIFE.

### CHAPTER VII.—(CONTINUED.)

"Sir Mark, I'm a plain man, and I think by this time you pretty well know my history. I ought to be over in Trinidad supervising the cocoa estate my poor father left me, but I detest the West Indies, and I love European life. It is my misfortune to be too well off. Not rich, but I have a comfortable, modest income. Naturally idle, I suppose."

"Nonsense, sir!" said the admiral gruffly. "One of the most active men I ever met."

"Thank you. Well, idle, according to the accepted ideas of some of the Americans we meet abroad. Dollars—making dollars—their whole conversation chinks of the confounded coin, and their ladies' dresses rustle with greenbacks. I hate money-making, but I like money for my slave, which bears me into good society and among the beauties of nature. Yes, I am an idler—full, perhaps, of dilettantism."

"Rather a long preface, Mr. Barron," said Sir Mark gruffly. "Make headway, please. What is it you wish to say?"

"I think you know, sir," said the other warmly. "I lived to thirty-seven, hardly giving a thought to the other sex, save as agreeable companions. I met you and your niece and daughter over yonder at Macugnaga, and the whole world was changed."

"Humph!"

"I am not a boy, sir. I speak to you as a man of the world, and I tell you plainly that I love her as a strong man only can love."

"Edith?"

"Don't trifle with me, sir!" cried Barron bringing his hand down heavily upon the table, and gazing almost fiercely in the old sailor's eyes.

"Humph! my daughter, then. And you have told her all this?"

"Sir Mark Jerrold! Have I ever given you cause to think I was other than a gentleman?"

"No, no," said the admiral hastily. "I beg your pardon. But this is all very sudden; we are such new acquaintances."

"You might call it friends," said Barron reproachfully.

"No; acquaintances—yet," said the old sailor sturdily.

"Then you do give me some hope?" cried Barron excitedly.

"No, I did not, sir. I'm out of soundings here. No; hang it, I meant to say, sir, in shoal water. Hang it, man, I don't want the child to think about such things for years."

"Sir Mark, your daughter must be twenty."

"Eh? Twenty? Humph! Well, I suppose she is."

"There is no hurry, sir. Let matters go as they are, only let it be an understood thing that you do, in a lateat may, encourage my suit."

"No, sir; I'll bind myself to nothing; I—Oh, hang it all, man, why did you spoil a pleasant trip like this?"

"Spoil it, Sir Mark? Have some compassion for the natural feelings of a man thrown into the society of so sweet a girl as—"

"That will do, sir; that will do," cried the admiral, frowning. "There; I'm not going to quarrel with you, Mr. Barron. I was young once myself. I was a good sailor, I'm told, but this sort of thing is out of my latitude. If my poor wife had lived of my Phew! it's growing hot, isn't it? Thunderstorm, I suppose."

"I'm very sorry, Sir Mark."

"So am I, sir," said the admiral. "There's an end to one trip."

"Sir Mark! Don't talk like that. I'll leave the hotel to-morrow. I would not on any consideration—"

"That will do, Mr. Barron; that will do. I'm a man of few words, and what I say I mean. This can go no further here."

"You don't mean that you will go as fast as Back to England, sir, and home as fast as I can."

"But my proposal, sir?"

"I have a sister there, sir, my counselor in all matters concerning my two girls."

"But you will give me leave to call—in England?"

"Tchah, man! You'll forget it all in a month."

Barron smiled.

"You'll give me leave to call at your house?"

"As a gentleman, sir, I can hardly refuse that."

Barron smiled and bowed.

"I see, sir. I have been too hasty, Admiral Jerrold. I ask you a favor, if you do carry out your hasty decision, to make some inquiries respecting Mr. Barron of Trinidad."

"I shall, sir, of course," said the admiral. "You'll excuse me now; I'm going to join my niece and daughter."

He left the veranda gallery, puffing heavily at his cigar, while Barron stood watching him.

"Hit or miss?" he muttered. "Hit, I think, and game worth bringing down. She's cold. Well, naturally, I don't think I managed it so badly, after all."

"Oh, here's uncle," said Edie half an hour later as she saw the big, burly figure of the old sailor approaching. "Oh, you dear, good old uncle. Come and sit down here, and you can see the color changing on the ice peaks."

"No, no, no. Come back, girls, and pack up. We're off by the first train to-morrow."

"Where to now, papa?"

"Bourne Square, W., my dear, as soon as we can get there. Come along!"

"Myrry—Mr. Barron passed as we came into the hotel, and he had some misunderstanding over the cards!"

"Perhaps: over the hearts."

"Edie!" cried Myra coloring. "What do you mean?"

"He has been proposing for you, and uncle said no; and now he is going to carry us off home to be safe."

"Proposed for me," said Myra thoughtfully, and in the most unruffled way, as her eyes assumed a dreamy, wondering look.

"Of course you love him dearly, don't you?"

"Oh, no," said Myra calmly.

"What a strange girl she is!" thought Edith that night as she went to bed.

And Myra said to herself again calmly and thoughtfully: "Proposed for me. Perhaps Edie is right. But how strange!"

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### STRATTON'S DECISION.

"Yes, sir, it's done," said Mrs. Brade, looking sadly in at the doorway on the left side of the fire; "and I hope it will turn out all right, but my experience of pipes is that they always busties in the winter, and drowns all your neighbors out on the next floor."

"Well, I hope this will be an exception," said Stratton, laughing.

"I hope so, too, sir, but it's no laughing matter, and for my part—though, of course, gentlemen have a right to do as they like—I think there is nothing like a big, flat zinc bath painted oak out, and white in, set on a piece of oilcloth in a gentleman's bedroom. Then you've your big sponge and a can of water. No trouble about them getting out of order."

"But the trouble, Mrs. Brade," said Stratton. "No filling; no anything."

"No, sir, of course not; but you're always at the mercy of the plumbers; and if these men don't always leave their work so that it'll make another job before long, I'm not a Christian woman."

"Oh, you object to it because it's new-fashioned," said Stratton merrily.

"Which, begging your pardon, I don't sir. What I do object to is your taking up a beautiful closet to make into a bath room; and out of your sitting room, and none too much cupboard room before. If it had been a cupboard in your bedroom I shouldn't have said a word."

"But there was no cupboard, so Mrs. Brade, and that closet fitted exactly, there's no more about it."

"Certainly not, sir, if you don't wish it; and only too glad am I to have got rid of the workmen; though as I lay in bed last night I said to my husband, 'Mark my word, John, if Mr. Brettison don't go having a bath made in his room, for there's the fellow-closet as [matches, Mr. Stratton's exactly.'"

"To be sure, I never thought of that," said Stratton merrily. "I'll give him a hint."

"Mr. Stratton's sir, if you've any respect for me and my rheumatism, don't. The place smells horrid as it is of paint, and French polish, and plumbers, without counting the mess they made, and if you'll be guided by me you'll buy one every day till the smell of workmen's gone."

"Oh, I don't mind the smell, Mrs. Brade. By George, yes, Mr. Brettison ought to have a bath put in his."

"Mr. Stratton, sir, don't, please. He's sure to if you say a word; and if the workmen come again we shall be having the whole place tumbling about our ears."

"I hope not. Oh, the old place is strong enough."

"I don't know, sir," said the pastor's wife, shaking her head. "It's a very old and tumble-down sort of place, and I've heard noises and crackings, and rappings, sometimes, as have made my flesh creep. They do say the place is haunted."

"With rats?"

"Worse, sir. Oh, I'm told there was strange goings on here in the old times, when a Lord Morran lived here. I've heard that your cupboard—"

"Bath room."

"Well, sir, bath room, was once a passage into Mr. Brettison's chambers, and his closet was a passage into yours, and they used to have dinners and feasts; and dancing, and masked balls, at which they used to play dominoes. The gambling and goings on was shameful. But please, sir, don't say a word to Mr. Brettison. I've trouble enough with him now. There never was such a gentleman for objecting to being dusted, and the way those big books of his that he presses his bits of chickweed and groundsel in do hold the dust is awful. If you wished to do him some kindness you'd get him away for a bit, so that I could turn his rooms inside out. Postman, sir."

Mrs. Brade hurried to the outer door and fetched a letter just dropped into the box, and upon this being eagerly taken, and opened, she saw that there was no further chance of being allowed to gossip, and saying "Good morning, sir," she went out, and down to the porter's lodge.

Malcolm Stratton's hands trembled as he turned the letter over and hesitated to open it.

"What a manly hand the old lady writes, and how fond she is of sporting their arms," he continued, as he held up the great blot of red wax carefully sealed over the adhesive flap of the envelope.

Then tearing it open he read:

WESTBOURNE TERRACE, Thursday.

MY DEAR MR. STRATTON:

Thank you for your note and its news. Accept my congratulations. You certainly deserved to gain the post; the work will be most congenial, and it will give you an opportunity for carrying on your studies, besides placing you in the independent position for which you have worked so long and hard. I wish my dear old friend and schoolfellow, your mother, had lived to see her boy's success. You must go on now with renewed confidence, and double that success.

Very sincerely yours,

REBECCA JERROLD.

Malcolm Stratton, Esq.

P.S.—I shall be at home to-morrow evening. Come and see me, and bring your friend. Nobody will be here but the girls, who are going to give me a little music, as my brother dines out.

Stratton's face flushed warmly, and he stood staring before him at the window.

"I could not go there now," he muttered, "without seeing the old man first. It would not be honorable. I meant to wait, but—I must speak at once."

He re-read the letter, and his eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"And I asked her point blank, and she does not even refer to it. Then it was her doing. God bless her! She has been using her interest and working for me. It's her work, and she must approve of it."

He hurriedly thrust the letter into his breast as a double rap came at his door, and, upon opening it, Percy Guest came in.

"Got your wire, old chap, and came on at once. Something the matter?"

"Yes; something serious."

"My dear old man, I'm so sorry. Want help—money? Don't keep me in suspense."

"No, old fellow," cried Stratton proudly; "the news came this morning, and I telegraphed to you directly."

"Yes, I am the successor of poor old Professor Raymond—the new curator of the Heady Museum."

"Hurray!" cried Guest, snatching up a great bird-skin by the beak and waving it round his head till he wrung its neck right off. "Oh, bother! Three cheers for Professor Stratton! Bravo! Why, you'll be an awful scientific swell. Malcolm, old chap, I am glad," he continued, flinging the choice and valuable specimen upon a bookcase, and grasping his friend's hand, "You shall dine with me to-night, and we'll pour out champagne libations to the gods."

"Sit down and be quiet," said Stratton gravely. "No old fellow, I can't dine with you to-night; I've something particular to do."

"Come and have a big lunch, then; we must go mad somehow. Why, its glorious, old man! They've had big, scientific, bald-headed old buffers there before—regular old dry-as-dusts. Come on; you can't and I can't work to-day."

"Sit down, I tell you, and be serious. I want to talk to you."

"All right—I may smoke?"

"Smoke? Yes."

"But are you sure you can't come?" said Guest, taking out a pipe.

"Quite. I have made up my mind to go to Bourne Square to-night."

"To the admiral's?" cried Guest, starting, and changing color a little.

"Yes; there is an invitation just come for me to go to Miss Jerrold's to-morrow night and take you."

"Indeed!" said Guest eagerly.

"She says in a postscript that the ladies will be there."

"Well?" said Guest uneasily, and beginning to smoke very hard.

"Don't you understand?"

"Eh? No."

"Then I must speak plainly; old fellow. For a year before they went out to Switzerland we were there a great deal, and met them after."

Guest nodded and his pipe did not seem to draw.

"We have met them often during these three months that they have been back."

Guest laughed and struck a match. His pipe was out.

"Well, have you not seen anything?"

"Yes," said Guest huskily.

"I felt that you must have seen it, old fellow. I have no secrets from you. I have loved her from the first time I saw her at Miss Jerrold's, and it has gone on growing till at times I have been almost in despair. For how could I speak, poor and hard up as I was—just a student, earning two or three hundred a year?"

"Always seemed attentive enough," said Guest, looking away as his friend paced the room with growing excitement.

"Perhaps; but I have schooled myself to hide it all, and to act as a gentleman should toward Sir Mark. It would have been dishonorable to act otherwise than as an ordinary friend of the family."

"I suppose so," said Guest dismally.

"And now?"

"My position is changed. Poverty does not bar the way, and, feeling this, I cannot trust myself. I cannot go and meet her to-morrow evening at her aunt's without seeing the admiral first, and speaking out to him like a man."

"Old—and—you really—care for her so much, and still in trouble with his pipe, which refused to draw."

"Care for her—so much!" exclaimed Stratton, flushing.

"How can I tell? I can only hope. I think she—no, it sounds presumptuous, but I must tempt my fate."

"And if the lady—"

"Refuses me—the admiral does not approve?"

"Yes. What then?"

"I must try and bear it like a man."

There was a few minutes' silence, though it only seemed a moment, when Guest spoke again in a curiously changed tone of voice.

"But about that Mr. Barron, Stratton?"

"Yes; what about him?"

"He is a good deal at Sir Mark's, isn't he?"

"Yes; a friend the old gentlemen picked up abroad—yachting, I think."

"You don't think that he has any intentions?"

"That Mr. Barron? No; such an idea never crossed my mind. Absurd! He is quite a middle-aged man, I hear; I've not seen him. He is no favorite either of old Miss Jerrold. But what's the matter? Going?"

"Eh? Yes, I'm going now. You won't come out, old fellow, and I thought we'd put off the congratulatory dinner till another day."

"Yes, we will. I'm awfully sorry, Percy; don't take it ill of me."

"No, no; of course not."

"And—and I'll communicate with you about to-morrow night. [Though, if I don't go, that is no reason why you should not.]"

"That is no reason—that is—" faltered Guest, looking at his friend strangely.

"Good-by, old fellow. You are going to the admiral's to-night?"

"No, I'll go this afternoon. He may be off to dinner. Wish me luck, old fellow."

"Yes," said Guest slowly, "I wish you luck. I was afraid so," he said slowly, as he descended the stairs, looking careworn and wretched. "I ought to have known better. They were always together, and she likes him. Oh! I could break his neck. No, I couldn't. I'm only a fool, I suppose, for liking him. I've always been as if I was her dog. One's own and only friend to come between. Oh! what a crooked world it is! Round? Bosh! It's no shape at all,

or it would have been evenly balanced and fair. Good-by, little Edie; you'll jump at him, of course. He's worth half a dozen of such poor, weak-minded beggars as I am but I loved you very dearly indeed, indeed. I shan't go and make a hole in the water, little one, all the same. I wonder, though, whether an enterprising young barrister would have any chance in Fiji or the Caroline Isles? I'll ask someone who knows."

Percy Guest went back to his chambers in Gray's Inn and about half-past three a cab set down Malcolm Stratton at the admiral's door.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## British and Foreign.

In nine consecutive passages the Lucania has averaged 21½ knots an hour this year.

During the nine weeks that the cholera lasted at St. Petersburg the number of cases was 3,713, and of deaths 2,043; that is, every other patient died.

An Indian carpet, weighing three tons, and made by the prisoners in the Agra gaol for Queen Victoria, has just been received at Windsor Castle.

A black Canadian shilling stamp, damaged, brought \$150 at a recent sale in London, a double Geneva \$125, an 1851 Madrid two reals \$85, and a Transvaal shilling red and green \$100.

Earl Grey, who died recently at 92, war the oldest living peer and the last survivor of Lord Melbourne's Cabinet, the Cabinets which held office when Queen Victoria ascended the throne.

Dean Macartney of Melbourne, Australia, has just died in his 96th year. He had held the deanship forty-two years, having gone to Australia with Bishop Perry, the first Bishop of Melbourne.

Mrs. Oliphant, the novelist, has just lost her last surviving son. Though a chronic invalid he held the place of sub-librarian at Windsor Castle, and wrote for the Spectator and other literary papers.

A string bean with a blue pod was the sensation of the recent Crystal Palace fruit show. The first plant was obtained by accident from a lot of French seed, but the grower has now fixed the type and can reproduce it regularly.

Lord Petre's title dates back to 1603. Lord Petre himself undertook to drive a cab through the London streets the other day, and ran into another cab, for which he was fined twenty shillings and costs in the Police Court.

In August, 1894, there were 5,735 steamers flying the British flag, 810 the German, 510 the Norwegian, 503 the French, 462 the Swedish, 430 the American, 359 the Spanish, 213 the Italian, and 1,382 the flags of other nations.

Though the salaries of all the French Ambassadors are the same, \$8,000 a year, they receive large sums in addition for expenses. At St. Petersburg the Ambassador is allowed \$34,000 a year, at London \$32,000, at Vienna \$25,000, at Berlin \$20,000, at Constantinople \$18,000, at Madrid, \$16,000, and at Washington \$10,000.

The experiment of cooking dinner for 7,500 men belonging to the Guards in a single field kitchen at the Muncheberg Station, near Berlin, took place the other day just before those troops left for their headquarters. The affair was completely successful. Thirty-five hundred weight of beef and 1,500 weight of hams were cooked in eight iron kettles, with a capacity of 640 litres each. Four tons of coal were used.

The Vienna newspapers are famous for the amusing character of their advertisements. Here is a literal translation of an extraordinary advertisement which has been appearing recently: "A young prince, the owner of a lordly estate of great value, has the intention to marry. He seeks a handsome and intelligent girl of about 20 years of age, of good family, and with a dowry of not less than 3,000,000 gulden (£250,000.—Apply," etc.

At Radicea, in Calabria, a statue of the Virgin, which had stood quietly for a hundred years in the village church, suddenly began to move its eyes on the 9th of September last. The miracle was seen by all the inhabitants, who took the statue out that night and carried it about in procession, when a strange halo in the shape of the cross was seen around the moon. From that day the Church of the Madonna of the Mountain has been crowded day and night, pilgrimages to her are being organized, gifts are pouring in, and already 50,000 francs in money have been received. The syndic of the town asserts that the miracle really happened, and a deputation has started for Rome to lay the facts before the Pope.

## FAVORABLE NEWS.

**Danger in the Condition of the Czar— Danger Averted for the Present.**

A despatch from St. Petersburg says:— It is considered that for the present the danger of a fatal ending to the Czar's illness is over. It is probable that the doctors will succeed in prolonging His Majesty's life for some weeks. The oedema of the legs causes less anxiety than general organ ic weakness, and the diminution of the heart's activity. These symptoms constitute the real danger as it is possible that these conditions may lead to sudden death. The mental state of His Majesty, on which much depends, has improved since he has seen all the members of his family and Princess Alix assembled and preparations made for the marriage of the Czarewitch. The regular publication of bulletins of a slightly more favorable nature has had the effect of quieting the people of St. Petersburg. The general impression here is that the end is inevitable, but that it will not occur for some time. The public is thus gradually preparing for the calamity, the shock of which, when it does come, will be materially lessened.

**Electric Roads to Hamilton.**

A despatch from Hamilton says:—The Hamilton Electric Radial Railway Company has completed the purchase of the Niagara Central railway for the sum of \$400,000. The road is 13 miles in length, extending from Niagara Falls St. Catharines. The Company proposes to build the road on to Hamilton and operate it as a steam road. From here electric radial roads will be constructed to Gueph, Port Dover, Woodstock and other points. The portion of the steam road from St. Catharines to Hamilton has already been bonused by the Government to the extent of \$3,200 a mile. The Company has also an application in to the City Council for a bonus of \$125,000.

**An Unsatisfactory Season.**

Dora—"Were men so very scarce at the resorts this year?"

Clara—"Awfully. Every man I accepted was engaged to a dozen others."