

UNDER A CLOUD.

A THRILLING TALE OF HUMAN LIFE.

CHAPTER LI.
AND ALL IN VAIN.

Guest stood looking at his friend for a few moments, half astonished, half annoyed.

"Look here," he said at last, "we can't talk freely in this place. Come out and have a cigar on the sands."

Then, stopping short by the ebbing sea, he drew out his cigar case and offered it; but it was waved aside.

"Quite right," said Guest shortly; "we can't smoke now. Look here, old fellow, I shouldn't be your friend if I did not speak out when you were in the wrong. You must have known we were coming here, and you must see now that you have done as I said, a cruel thing in coming; so give me your word as a man of honor that you will be ready to start with me in the morning first thing."

"I tell you I did not know they were coming here," said Stratton in a deep, solemn tone; "I tell you I did not follow you, and I tell you that I cannot leave here with you in the morning."

"Then how in the world did you come here?"

"I don't know. I suppose it was fate."

"Bosh! Who believes in fate? Don't talk nonsense, man. I am horribly sorry for you, as sorry as I can be for a man who is my friend, but who has never trusted or confided in me; but I stand now toward the admiral and Myra in such a position that I cannot keep aloof and see them insulted—well, I will not say that—see their feelings hurt by the reckless conduct of a man who is in the wrong."

"In the wrong?" said Stratton involuntarily.

"Yes, in the wrong. You have wronged Myra."

Stratton sighed.

"And made her the wreck she is. I don't say you could have made things better by speaking out—that is your secret—but I do say you could make matters better by keeping away."

"Yes, I must go away as soon as possible."

"You will, then?" cried Guest eagerly.

"In the morning?"

"No; yes, if I can get away."

"That's quibbling, man; an excuse to get near and see her," cried Guest angrily.

"I swear it is not," cried Stratton. "You will not believe me even after seeing your letter—which I had forgotten—was unopened."

"I can't, Mal. I wish to goodness I could."

"Never mind. I can say no more."

"You mean that you will say no more," said Guest shortly.

"I mean what I said," replied Stratton.

"Very well. You must take your road; I must take mine."

Stratton was silent, and Guest turned short round on his heel, took a couple of steps away, but turned back.

"Mal, old chap, you make me wild," he cried, holding out his hand. "I know it's hard to bear—I know how you loved her, but sacrifice self for your honor's sake; be a man, and come away. There, I'll walk with you to the post town. You'll come?"

"I cannot yet."

"Why?"

"It is better that I should not tell you," replied Stratton firmly. "Will you trust me?"

"Will you confide in me, and tell me all your reasons for this strange conduct?"

"Some day; not now."

"You will not trust me, and you ask me to trust you. It can't be done, man; you ask too much. Once more, are we to be friends?"

"Yes."

"Then you will go?"

"Yes."

"At once?"

"No."

"Bah!" ejaculated Guest angrily, and he turned and strode away.

"He must think it—he must think it," muttered Stratton as he hurried on, now stumbling over a piece of rock, now slipping on some heap of weed left by the tide.

He was about to try off to the right when all at once he heard voices above his head to the left, and, listening intently, he made out the deep tones of the admiral, and an answer came in Guest's familiar voice.

"Is he telling him that I am here?" thought Stratton. No, for there was a pleasant little laugh—Edie's.

But the next who spoke was the admiral, and his words came distinctly to where, with every nerve strained, Stratton stood rooted to the sands.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Sir Mark, but we've plenty of time. We'll have a sail another day, and a wander about the sands to-morrow. I'll charter a boat at St. Malo, and make her come round. Now, my dears, in with you; it's getting late."

"My dears!" Then Myra was there all the time above where he stood; the cottage must be close at hand, and in a few moments he was opposite the door of the long, low habitation on its little shelf of the cliff.

Everyone had retired; and Stratton hesitated, feeling that he must defer his communication till the morning.

night. I've heard him move and mutter. In heaven's name what is it—the police on the scent?"

"Would that they were waiting to take him off this moment, man," whispered Stratton. "Myra and her father are here."

"You're mad."

"Yes. But they are in the house above."

"They—the newcomers just arrived?"

"Yes. I thought I saw Guest and Edie to-night in the darkness. I was going to tell you, but I felt ashamed, thinking you would say what you did just now. But I have met Guest since, and spoken with him. Five minutes ago I heard Sir Mark speaking."

"Great Heavens!" gasped Brettison again. "Then we have brought him here to place wife and husband face to face?"

"Yes," said Stratton hoarsely.

"What is to be done?"

"You must rouse him quietly, and steal out with him. Bring him along under the cliff close up to the inn. While you are getting him there I will go and hire a cart by some means to take us to the next place; failing that, I'll arrange with some fishermen to run us along the coast in their boat to St. Malo. 'You understand?'"

"Yes," said Brettison. "I understand, but it is impossible."

"Perhaps; but this is the time to perform impossibilities. It must be done!"

"I tell you it is impossible," said Brettison slowly. "At the first attempt to rouse him there would be a scene. He would turn obstinate and enraged. He is restless, as I told you. I should have to awaken the people here for I could not force him to leave by the window, and this would precipitate the discovery, perhaps bring Sir Mark and your friend Guest down from the place above."

"I tell you it must be done," said Stratton, but with less conviction.

"You know it cannot be," said Brettison firmly. "I am certain that he would have one of his fits. Think of the consequences then."

"I do," whispered Stratton; "and the thoughts are maddening. What's that?"

"Speak lower. It was Barron moving in his room. Look here; there need be no discovery if we are cool and cautious. It is absurd to attempt anything now. Wait till the morning. Let him get up at his usual time. He will be quiet and manageable then. I will keep him in, and wait till the Jerrolds are gone out—they are sure to go—most likely to sea for a sail—and then join you at the inn, where you can have a carriage or boat waiting. Then we must escape just as we stand; our luggage could be fetched another time. We can be going to take him for a drive."

Stratton was silent.

"It is the only way, I'm sure," whispered Brettison.

"Yes," said Stratton, with a sigh. "I am afraid you are right."

"I am sure I am."

"Yes," said Stratton. "Hist! is that he moving again?"

"And talking in his sleep. But you are sure there is no doubt?"

"Doubt, man? No. Yes, it must be as you say; but, mind, I shall be a prisoner at the inn. I cannot stir out. You must give me warning when you will come."

"And you must not speak or notice him."

"Oh, we must risk all that," said Stratton more loudly. "Our only course is at all risks to get him right away."

"Hush! Be silent. Now go."

Stratton hesitated as he heard a low muttering again in the next room; but Brettison pressed his hand and thrust him away.

"Go," he said, and softly closed the window, while Stratton moved away with a strange foreboding of coming peril.

CHAPTER LII.

THE CULMINATION OF DESPAIR.

Stratton went to his room, put out his light, and threw open the casement to sit and listen to the wash of the coming tide. To sleep was impossible. He did not even think of lying down, but sat there waiting for the first streaks of day with the face of Myra always before him.

"And I sit here," he cried, and started from his seat, "when she is there yonder waiting for me. A word would rouse her from her sleep, if she does sleep. She may be sitting at her window even now, wakeful and wretched as I, and ready to trust me, to let me lead her far away from all this misery and despair. Heaven never could mean us to suffer as we do. It is a natural prompting. She must be waiting for me now."

For hope came with the approach of day, and when at last the first pale dawn appeared in the east, and by degrees there was a delicious opalescent tint on the waves, where a soft breeze was slowly waiting away the mist, it was a calm, grave, thoughtful man, nerved to the day's task, who went forth with the knowledge that the people of the inn were already stirring, for as he stepped out a casement was opened, and the landlady greeted him with the customary bon jour.

Stratton returned the greeting, and told her his requirements—a sailing boat and men to take him and his friends for a good long cruise.

"Ah, yes!" said the landlady; "of course, and monsieur would pay them well"—and at another time there were Jacques, and Jean, and Andre, and many more who would have been so glad—for it was going to be a day superb; look at the light on the water like the silversheen upon a mackerel, to prove her words—but the hands went out last night, and would not return in time from the fishing.

"But was there no one else?"

"Not a soul, monsieur. Why, there was a great nobleman—an old sea admiral—English, at the little chateau who had sent only last night, wanting a boat to sail with the beautiful ladies he had brought, one of whom was a stately old marquise, at least, with hair gray; but no, he could not have a boat for any money. Why could not monsieur take his sick friend for a beautiful long drive?"

Stratton jumped at the proposal.

"Yes; that would do," he said.

"Then Guillaume should have the horse and chaise ready at any time monsieur chose to name."

After a time Stratton was summoned to breakfast and, after swallowing a little bread and coffee hastily, he returned to his room when the landlady appeared to say that a boy was there to deliver a message to him alone, and upon going out a heavy looking peasant announced that he was to go on to the cottage.

Stratton caught up his hat and started, full of anxiety.

But he felt the next moment that it was folly to bring a wheeled vehicle down upon that heavy sand, and keeping a sharp lookout for those he wished to avoid, and taking advantage of every sheltering rock, he at length reached the cottage, at whose door he was met by the fisherman.

"Where is my friend?" said Stratton sharply.

"In his chamber, monsieur, exceedingly ill."

Stratton hurried in, to find Brettison in bed looking pinched of cheek, his eyes sunken and blue beneath the lids, and perfectly insensible.

"What does this mean?" cried Stratton.

"We did not hear the gentleman moving this morning, but my husband heard him stirring in the night, sir, oh, yes; and when I went to call him he answered so strangely that I entered and gave a cry, for he looked as if he was going to the death, monsieur."

"I wanted to send for you, but he forbade me. He said he would be better soon, and I made him tea, and gave him some cognac, and he grew better, then worse, then better again. It is something bad with his throat, monsieur. Look, it is all worse, quite blue."

Stratton gazed at the livid marks in horror.

"Where is Mr. Cousin, our invalid?" he said, beginning to tremble now.

"Oh, he, monsieur, he insisted upon going out on the sands with his attendant Margot."

"Which way?" gasped Stratton.

"Yonder, monsieur," said the woman, pointing to the southeast.

"Here, get cognac; bathe his face," panted Stratton, half wild now with horror "and send someone for the nearest doctor. Quick. I shall be back soon—if I live, he muttered as he rushed off through the deep, loose sand to find and bring back their charge before he encountered the Jerrolds on the beach.

His toil had been in vain, and a jealous, maddening pang shot through him.

There, some forty yards away, sat Barron upon a huge boulder, his back propped against a rock, and his attendant knitting a short distance back, while Miss Jerrold sat on the sands reading beneath a great sunshade. The admiral was smoking his cigar, looking down at Barron; Edie and Guest were together; and Myra, pale, gentle, and with a smile upon her lip, was offering the invalid a bunch of grapes, which he was gently taking from her hand.

"The past condoned," said Stratton to himself; "future—well, he is her husband, after all. Great Heavens, am I really mad, or is all this a waking dream?"

He staggered back and nearly fell, so terrible was the rush of horror through his brain, but he could not draw away his eyes, and he saw that Barron was speaking and holding out his hand—that Myra responded by laying hers within his palm, and the fingers closed upon it—fingers that not many hours back must have held Brettison's throat in a deadly grip.

CHAPTER LIII.

JULES IS FROM HOME.

"And that is the woman who told me that she loved me!" said Stratton.

It was the thought of Brettison that saved him just as the blood was rushing to his head and a stroke was imminent.

He had left his friend apparently dying, and had rushed off to save Myra.

"While I was wanted there," he muttered in a weak, piteous way. "Ah, it has all been a dream, and now I am awake. Poor Brettison, my best friend after all."

For a few moments the blood flushed to his temples in his resentment against Myra, and then against Guest.

"Another slave to a woman's charms!" he said, with a bitter laugh. "Poor old Percy! how can I blame him after what I have done myself for a weak, contemptible woman's sake?"

He stopped short, grinding his teeth together in resentment against himself.

"It is not true," he cried; "it is not true. She could not help herself. They have driven her to it, or else—No, no, I cannot think."

He moved on toward the cottage, threading his way more by instinct than sight among the rocks, but only to stop short again, horrified by the thought that now assailed him.

His old friend's eyes were opened, and he looked wildly at Stratton as he entered, and feebly raised one hand.

"Dale!" he whispered as he clung to Stratton.

"Hush! don't talk."

"I—must," he said feebly. "Mind that he does not leave the place. To-night you must get help and take him away."

"I am right, then—he did attack you?"

"Yes, not long after you had gone. I was asleep, when I was awakened with a start, thinking you had returned, but I was borne back directly. He had me by the throat. Malcolm, lad, I thought it was all over. I struggled, but he was too strong. I remembered thinking of your words, and then all was blank till I saw a light in the room, and found these people attending me. I had awakened them with my groans. They do not grasp the truth. Don't tell them. Let them think it is an affection of the throat, but we must never trust him again."

"There will be no need," said Stratton bitterly.

"What do you mean?"

"He has gone."

"You have let him escape? No; you have handed him over to the police. Oh, my dear boy, you shouldn't have done that. The man is mad."

"I told you I should not do so," said Stratton coldly. "You are wrong."

"But you stand there. Good Heavens, man! Those two may meet. Don't mind me. I am better now. Go at once."

"No, I shall not leave you until you are fit to move."

"It is not an illness but an injury, which will soon pass off. Go at once. Man, do you not see that he may find her, after all!"

"He has found her," said Stratton slowly, and speaking in a strangely mechanical way.

"What!"

"Or they have found him." And he told the old man all he had seen.

Brettison heard him to the end, and then faintly, but with conviction in his tones, he cried:

"Impossible! It cannot be true."

Stratton looked at him wistfully, and shook his head.

"No he said drawing a deep breath; 'it cannot be true.'"

Brettison, whose breathing was painful, lay back watching his companion with dilated eyes, and then turned to the woman who had drawn back from the bed and waited while her visitor talked to his friend.

"Madame," he said in French, "M. Cousins?"

She turned from the window where she had been watching.

"Out on the sands, monsieur," she said in a startled way. "My good man says he is sitting with the new company who have come since yesterday to the house above."

"Where is my husband?"

"Out, sir. He—he was obliged to go to the village."

"And still it is impossible," said Stratton slowly as he looked appealingly in the old man's eyes. "It cannot be true. Brettison, tell me that my mind is wandering; all this is more than I can bear."

"Shall I wait, monsieur?" asked the woman, who was trembling visibly.

"No, I am better now," said Brettison. "Leave me with my friend"—and as soon as they were alone—"I shall not want a doctor now. There is some mystery here, Malcolm, lad, far more than we know."

"Thank God!" said Stratton.

"Stratton," cried the old man fiercely, "is it a time to give up weakly like that?"

The stricken man started to his feet, and threw back his head as if his friend's words had suddenly galvanized him into life and action.

"That man is not to be trusted for an hour. You know it, and yet you stand there leaving her in his hands. Even if it were possible that her father has condoned the past, he does not know what is familiar to us. But he has not. Boy, I tell you there is some mistake."

"What shall I do?" said Stratton hoarsely.

"Go tell them at once. Tell them of his attack upon me."

"They have forgotten the past, and will say it is the invention of a jealous enemy."

"Then I will go myself," cried the old man; and, feeble though he was, he insisted upon dressing for his self-imposed task.

"They will believe me," he said; "and though I can hardly think there is danger to anyone but us, whom Barron seems instinctively to associate with his injury, Sir Mark must know the facts."

"Yes," said Stratton gravely; "he must know. I will go with you now. He cannot doubt you."

The old man tottered a little, but his strong will supplied the strength, and, taking his stick, they moved toward the door.

"We have done wrong, Stratton," he said; "the man should have been denounced. I ought to have acted more wisely, but at first my only thought was to save you from the consequences of your misfortune, and keep all I knew from ever reaching Myra's ears. Our sin has found us out and there is nothing for it but to make a clean breast now."

Stratton hesitated for a few moments.

"You are too feeble," he said.

"Oh, yes," cried the woman, who came forward. "Monsieur is too ill to go out. It is horrible that he should be so bad at our poor house."

"You say your husband is out?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur. I begged him not to go, but he said that he must go."

"Not to fetch a doctor?"

"N—no, monsieur," faltered the woman hysterically. "It is not my fault, monsieur; I begged him not to go—and—O Ciel! that it should have happened."

"No one blames you, my good woman," said Stratton as she burst into a hysterical fit of sobbing, while Brettison looked at her strangely. "If he had been here he could have helped my friend down to the sands."

"And monsieur will forgive us," sobbed the woman; "we are poor, honest people, and it is so terrible for your good friend to be like that."

"Quick!" said Brettison. "I am strong enough. Let's get it over before something happens."

He clung to Stratton's arm, and, supporting himself with his stick, he made a brave effort, and, gaining strength out in the soft sea air, he walked slowly but pretty firmly along by the foot of the cliff.

"If Jules would only return," sobbed the woman hysterically. "Oh, that such a misfortune should come upon our home! Poor gentleman! and he bears it like a lamb."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Making Himself Agreeable.

The happy father was exhibiting his first-born to a friend possessing piscatorial proclivities.

How much does it weigh? inquired the victim, after desperately casting about for something more complimentary to say.

Seven pounds and two ounces, replied the happy father.

Dressed—er—I mean stripped? asked the friend anxiously.

Of course, the surprised father answered.

We'll begin the friend, doubtfully, that isn't very much for a baby, is it? But—er—er—, brightening up, it would be a good deal for a trout.

Positively Impressed.

He—And so you saw Niagara Falls in their winter glory? How grand, how awful, how sublime is the picture? The swiftly flowing river, the great ice cakes tossing about like so many devoted craft, the terrible plunge, the churning waters, the rush, the roar, the—

She—Yes, it was awfully cute.

No Light on the Matter.

As to the cause of this phenomenon, said the man in the moon during the total eclipse, I am entirely in the dark.

WHERE IT IS VERY CHILL.

NORTHERN SIBERIA IS THE COLDEST SPOT ON EARTH.

Weather That Makes a Canadian Winter Seem Like a Southern Spring—Ground Freezes Forty-Five Feet Deep—Lakes Solid to Bottom.

Naturally with the arrival of spring the thoughtful mind recurs to the rigors of the winter. Captain Temski, a member of the Russian topographical corps, says the little settlement of Nova Jaroslaw is in the centre of the most frigid section of the earth. The town is situated on the River Kalakinska, a tributary of the Lena.

As early as the middle of September the Kalakinska River begins to run with drift ice, formed in the icy uplands that border the river system of the Lena in the east, and about the end of October no skate need entertain a doubt about the solidity of the ice fields. A chain of lakes, some twenty miles north of the Kalakinska, freezes to the bottom about that time. Swarms of gray crows, as hardy as polar petrels, can be seen flocking off to their southern winter quarters. In the wooded valleys of the Altair Range these birds will sport about their roosting trees in a temperature of 30 degrees below zero, as noisy as Spanish jackdaws, and apparently as happy, but the zephyrs of Nova Jaroslaw are too much for them. During the last week in October Captain Temski's cook had to draw his water supply from an ice hole more than six feet deep, and a chicken that made its escape from the basement of the house and insisted on passing the night in a cedar thicket was found dead the next morning.

IT WAS BRACING WEATHER.

In 1893 Temski and a party of gold-seekers, exploring the Kalakinska valley, discovered a bed of coal—a sort of lignite, inferior to bituminous coal, but cropping out so abundantly that the quantity can be made to compensate the grade of the quality. With this coal and a liberal admixture of resinous wood the captain's servants kept up two roaring fires, one in the open fireplace and the other in a big coal stove, placed near the centre of the room, which at the same time served as a kitchen and a dormitory. When the storm got more than usually severe heavy woolen blankets were hung up before the wind-side windows and along the most exposed walls, though the logs used in the construction of the building were about a foot in diameter and covered with overlapping boards. Rugs were spread on the floor, and the door of the room was rarely opened before the porch doors had been carefully closed. A double-ceiled log cabin is really much warmer than a brick house, yet in spite of the massive architecture and all the above-named precautions water would freeze in the neighborhood of the window, while the stove (only three steps away) was red hot and the chimney fire in full blaze.

In the coolest corner of the 18 by 20 room the thermometer often registered 20 degrees below freezing, i. e., 12 above zero, when the dinner was getting ready and the big stove vibrating like a superheated boiler. Vinegar, mustard, milk and tea could be preserved for weeks together in the ink of ice chips of various colors. Glass inkstands burst, and writing would have been next to impossible if the captain had not had a large assortment of lead pencils and of heavy paper that could be warmed near the stove to lessen the discomfort of bringing the hand in contact with a smooth, ice-cold surface.

On the 22nd day of December a blinding blizzard set in, obliterating roads and ravines, but during the third night the sky cleared under the influence of an intense frost, and on the morning before Christmas the thermometers registered 75 degrees below zero. "I had a fur mantle lined with soft flannel," says Captain Temski, "and wide enough to go over two ordinary great coats. Into that triple stratum of dry goods I could retire as into a warm bed, but on the morning of Dec. 24 it barely kept me from shivering while I was crouching under a stack of blankets near enough our large stove to make the wool smoke."

IT BECAME BALMY.

In the afternoon the thermometer rose to 68 degrees (below zero), but a slight breeze having sprung up the air felt colder than during the dead calm of the icy morning. Owing to a slight change in the direction of the wind the next night was a little less murderously cold, but the frost had penetrated the building, and the next morning Captain Temski found that his whiskers had frozen to the sleeve of the overcoat that served him as a pillow. About an hour before noon two Yakoots, the hardy aborigines of that neighborhood, arrived with an assortment of "Christmas presents," of rather articles for barter, since they were somewhat fastidious in the selection of counter presents. They had come three English miles afoot, from the neighborhood of the coal mines, and chatted as pleasantly as if they had just enjoyed a Thanksgiving ramble in the bracing air of a November morning. "Foreign travelers," says the captain, "have often admired the stoicism of these savages, who keep their temper in an ice storm that makes a