KERSHAM MANOR.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

There could be no doubt about it, Sebastian was ill, desperately ill. It was not a case of conventional brain-fever, although the brain was affected.

He would require careful nursing, continual attendance, and complete quiet. The doctor proposed that he should at once be removed to the Infirmary.

Esther stood silent, her hands tight clasped before her, the light of a great resolve, a sudden inspiration, on her face. He had told her to take care of his children; and she would care for them; but how than by helping to save his life to them and the world?

A little pale she turned to the doctor and made her suggestion. "My landlady has rooms to let. The house is very quiet. I am an old friend of Mr. Malet's, and I think that he would rather be here than at the Infirmary. We could get a trained nurse for him, if you think it necessary."

"Decidedly it would be necessary. But—what would the landlady say?"

"I think she would consent, if she were paid."

"And who would bear the expense?" said the doctor, with a shrewd look. He was an old man, and had been a good friend to Esther. "You are suggesting a very expensive way of going to work, Miss Denison I'm not saying that it would not be better for him to stay here than to be removed, for the quieter he is kept the better; but do you think—"

"Mr. Malet is well off," said Esther, coloring. "I know his family. There need be no question about expense."

No, for she had two hundred and fifty pounds safe in the bank. She could use that. She had lived frugally and saved money from her salary; her book had been successful and she had another on the stocks. She could well afford, she thought, to spend the earnings on the man she loved.

She sought out the landlady and told her what she wanted. The good woman needed persuasion, but the promise of liberal payment secured her consent as soon as she was assured the stranger's illness was not likely to be an infectious one, also that a nurse and, if necessary, another servant, should be engaged without expense to herself.

When the details were satisfactorily arranged, Esther turned her thoughts toward the children of whom Sebastian had spoken. Where could they be? The doctor advised her to send or go to the chief hotel of the town, or to the railway station. Mr. Malet had perhaps left them there while he came to seek Esther. He had been, as he said, convinced that he was on the verge of an illness, and had done his best to place his children in careful and tender hands. Esther felt an infinite solace in knowing that he had come to her for help. Certainly he had few other friends on whom to count. Pride kept him from appealing to his uncle; the La Touches were in Germany; Mrs. Drummond, once Phillis Wyatt, was scarcely known to him. He had no other relations, and his long absence from England had diminished the number of his English friends. There was no one whom he could trust as he trusted Esther, and she was resolved to prove herself worthy of his trust.

She sent a messenger to the Queen's Hotel, which was not far from her own residence; and there, as the doctor had predicted, the children were found. Esther went to them as soon as she had seen the nurse installed at Sebastian's bedside. She found them—Rollo and Muriel—in the coffee-room, nearly asleep on a sofa, but steadily refusing to go to bed "until papa came back." It was after nine o'clock when Esther arrived; and the manageress, who had evidently been uneasy, was glad to hear tidings of the children's father, who had left the hotel three hours before. "They must have come by the train that gets in at six o'clock," she remarked to Esther; "and I thought that the gentleman looked very tired and ill, but he would not take anything himself—he ordered a meal for the children, but went out almost immediately, and did not return."

She opened the coffee-room door as she said these words, and let Esther pass.

"Rollo—Muriel—darlings, don't you know me?" said Esther, as she came close to the sofa on which the children were curled up together.

Muriel raised a sleepy head from her brother's shoulder and held out her arms. "Aunt Essie!" she said—it had been the children's name for Esther. "Papa said you would come!" And in a moment she was in her old friend's arms.

Rollo, a fine little fellow, with dark eyes like Sebastian's, struggled down from the sofa, and came silently to put his arms also round Esther's neck. The absence of childish joy, the noiselessness of the boy's movements, struck Esther as unnatural. He looked thin and worn, as his father had done: and little Muriel's tiny form seemed nothing but skin and bone. An indefinably lonely and neglected look hung about the two—the look of motherlessness, which is so vague and yet so unmistakable. Esther's heart yearned over the children. From the way in which they clung to her she divined a whole history of desolation and inevitable neglect.

"Where is father?" said Rollo.

"He is at the house in which I live. He is not at all well."

"I thought he wasn't well," said the little boy soberly.

"He wants you to sleep here to-night. I will come for you in the morning," Esther went on. "Miss Gregg will be very kind and good to you, and I will stay until you are in bed and asleep."

"Mayn't we go to papa?" said Muriel, pressing the soft baby face close to Esther's cheek.

"Not to-night, darling; he is not well enough to see you, and it is so late. Aren't you very very tired?"

Muriel's only answer was a mingled sigh and yawn; then she again nestled softly into Esther's arms and sank into an instant lumber.

"I'm tired too. We came all the way from Liverpool to-day," said Rollo patiently. "We have been traveling about ever so long—ever since—the shipwreck."

His lip trembled, his forehead wrinkled, as if he were going to cry. The way in which he swallowed down a rising sob betokened heroic but most unchildish self-control. She would not let him try to tell her anything more; she persuaded him, with tender words, to let himself be guided to his room, and she herself carried little Muriel to the bed prepared for her. Rollo was to have shared his father's room, while Muriel occupied an adjoining dressing-room; thus the little brother and sister were near each other; and they had been so long accustomed to the diverse experiences of a wandering life that they did not seem frightened or surprised at finding themselves alone in a strange hotel. As Esther explained to Rollo, when she had seen Muriel fast asleep in her little white bed, she was obliged to go away for the night—"to look after father, who was ill"—but she would come again at breakfast-time and take them away with her.

Rollo was sitting up in bed as he heard this, with his knees up to his chin, and his hands clasped round them.

"You'd better lock the door if you are going away," he said. "Father always locks us in, when we are at hotels, for fear of carpet-baggers."

"I think you will be quite safe," said Esther.

"Oh, and there are not any black waiters here, are there?" was the child's next question. "Because Muriel doesn't like them. There was one at New York who used to grin at her, and she was frightened. She's only a baby you see."

"There are no black men here. You must take care of her," said Esther, stooping to kiss him.

"Of course. I always do. There's father's dressing-bag—do you see it? He carries such a pretty little revolver in it. I can't use it myself, and I don't believe it's loaded," said Rollo sorrowfully, "but if you will put it beside me on the table, I could frighten robbers away with it if they came in."

As she hurried homeward, almost too much absorbed in thought to notice the flood of silver moonlight on the river at her left hand—for this river, on the northern bank of which the town was built, was a perpetual presence in the scenery, seldom out of sight in all the windings of the streets—she was startled by hearing her name spoken by a familar voice.

"Ah, Miss Denison! You are late to-night."

It was Mr. Dryburgh who addressed her. She slackened her pace and allowed him to overtake her.

"I'm on my way home," said the editor. "Early to-night, you see. There was not much going on, so I got away in good time. Shall I escort you?"

"I am glad to have met you," said Esther. "I want to tell you what I have been doing, and to ask you what I shall do." And then she gave him some account of the Malets' arrival.

Mr. Dryburgh's keen, shrewd face showed surprise as she proceeded with her story.

"This Mr. Malet is an old friend of yours; I have often heard you speak of his family," he said slowly, as if weighing the matter, when Esther paused.

"Yes. My father used to teach him. I was at school with his wife. Afterward I used to teach his wife's sisters."

"But there is no claim of kinship. Mr. Malet did rather an odd thing in coming to you, did he not?"

"Certainly not," said Esther, rather indignantly. "We have been friends for so long—I was very fond of the children—I don't know to whom else he would have taken them so easily. He did not know that he was going to be taken ill so suddenly, of course."

Mr. Dryburgh laughed at her tone. "Nor that you would take so much responsibility on yourself? Well, I don't think you have done a very wise thing, but it is undoubtedly a kind one. A little Quixotic, isn't it?"

"The world will perhaps say so," replied Esther, in rather a choked voice.

Mr. Dryburgh turned and looked at her. He was struck by the repressed emotion in her face. "Don't you mind one bit what the world says," he rejoined kindly. "It will not say any thing harsh, you may be sure of that. You have plenty of friends here to stand by you. I'll send my wife up to see you to-morrow, and you can have a long talk with her."

In his heart, in spite of his reassuring words, he was afraid that Miss Denison, had acted imprudently, and that the world would whisper a good many harsh things concerning the folly of a young unmarried woman who proposed to nurse a man—unconnected with her by ties of blood, through a dangerous sickness. "Friendship is all very well," he said to himself; "but ten to one the girl's in love with him, and every one will see it. I should not have thought she would be so rash." But he himself was a stanch friend, and he liked Esther the better for her rashness. He made up his mind that he would stand up for her through thick and thin. And his friendship and support proved valuable to Esther in after days.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN ESTHER'S ROOM.

It was marvelous to see how quickly the matter was arranged, and how quietly every one slipped into his or her allotted place. Rollo went to visit the Dryburghs; Muriel came to Esther's rooms, where there was plenty of space for her, and where the house was so well built that she could amuse herself without any fear of disturbing her sick father, so long as she kept her own side of the house. Sebastian's rooms were occupied by himself and his nurse; and Esther went about her duties much as usual—writing her book, repairing at stated intervals to the office, doing her newspaper work, and returning home to play with Muriel or to relieve the nurse in Sebastian's sick-room. It was a hard life for her, and it told upon her strength; but she thought very little, just then, of herself or her worldly welfare. She was sublimely unconscious of the world without; she was absorbed in what to her were new and wonderful offices of love.

Sebastian betrayed no surprise when he found that he was under Esther's care. He grew accustomed to her presence while he was too weak to trouble himself about anything. She was the best nurse that he could have had. She learned the details of nursing as an art very quickly from the professional attendant; she was always patient, unwearying, and calm. She had a large share of the protective instinct, the inborn motherliness, which characterizes all truly womanly natures, and the sick man was vaguely soothed by it.

It was not until August that he was able to quit the rooms that he and his attendant had hitherto occupied. The nurse was leaving, but before she went she helped her patient carefully into an apartment which seemed new to him; a large, pleasant room, where a bright fire was burning. Flowers and books stood on the tables, and a well-cushioned couch was drawn into a snug position where no draughts from door or window could be felt. Sebastian looked round him curiously.

"What room is this?" he asked.

"It's Miss Denison's sitting-room, sir. She is out just now, but she left word that she would be home at four o'clock. She thought it would be a change from the other rooms."

It was then half-past three. Sebastian dismissed the woman, and settled himself upon the couch, feeling unaccountably weak and languid after his journey from one room to another. He lay back, letting his eyes dwell contentedly on the flowers on the table at his right hand, idly delighting in their color and perfume. There were grapes and wine beside them, and a new book and a magazine or two. The window had been carefully shaded, and there was a draught-screen behind the sofa. It seemed as if the eye and hand that arranged the room had been guided by a loving heart; no hired service would have procured such small material at command. In every detail his slightest wish had been forestalled, and if he wanted further attendance he had only to pull the cord that was fastened from the head of his sofa to the bell-handle, and (the nurse had told him) the landlady or her servant would immediately appear.

As he lay there thinking the door opened and Esther came in. She had little Muriel by the hand.

When her eyes lighted on Sebastian's face, she knew that she had done well to bring the child. The father's smile, the eager gesture of his hand, told their own story. He did not even look at Esther; the little daughter was everything to him, and with her arms round his neck, and her kisses on his cheek, he forgot all the world beside.

For one moment Esther felt a pang—was it jealousy? call it envy rather—for which she reproached herself immediately afterward with bitter shame.

She sat down, feeling suddenly depressed by the discovery of such wickedness—so she phrased it—in herself; though surely that was not wickedness which was so speedily repressed by her protesting soul.

Meanwhile Sebastian was talking to his child.

"And where have you been while I was ill?"

"Here!" Muriel answered triumphantly. "Living with Aunt Esther. And you never heard me; I never disturbed you one bit, did I, papa?"

"Never, my darling. And where is Rollo?"

"Rollo is at Mrs. Dryburgh's; we have just been to see him, and he sends his love."

Sebastian glanced enquiringly toward Esther.

"Mrs. Dryburgh is a great friend of mine—the wife of the editor of the Dunross Chronicle," she explained, "and she asked Rollo to spend a little time at her house with her children. There is not much room for him here, and he is quite happy and safe."

"He wanted so much to come and see you," Muriel broke in; "but the doctor said 'one at a time,' didn't he, Aunt Esther? And so he is to come to-morrow."

"And by that time," said Esther, "you will have a sitting room of your own as well as this one. Now that the nurse is gone Mrs. MacEwen is going to transform the room that she occupied; you will hardly know it again to-morrow morning."

"Esther," said Sebastian, letting Muriel slip out of his embrace, as she turned to play with the great Persian cat that had followed her into the room, "who arranged all these matters for me? I remember nothing after my arrival at the hotel. How did I come here?"

Esther colored vividly. She had hardly thought that he would forget so much.

"Do you not remember that you left the children at the hotel and came here—to this very room?"

He shook his head. "I remember leaving the hotel with a vague intention of seeking you. Of course that was why I came to Dunross at all. It was a presumptuous idea—but I fancied that I was going to be ill, and that you would take charge of the children for me. I must have been half-delirious at the time."

"I am glad you thought of bringing the children to me; I think it a great honor to be trusted with them," said Esther simply. "You came straight to this room; and you told me just what you have told me now—that you were ill, and wished that I would take care of the children. And then you became insensible, and I sent for the doctor," she concluded with a smile.

"And so, instead of taking care of the children, you took care of me!"

"Oh, but I took care of the children too," she said, purposely misunderstanding him. "I kept Muriel here with me, and sent Rollo to Mrs. Dryburgh's. They have been very well looked after, I assure you. And here comes our afternoon tea; you would like a cup, would you not? Then we will leave you here in peace and quietness until you are tired, and want to go back to your own room."

"I would rather you stayed," said Sebastian, as he watched her fingers busy with the cups and saucers, which the maid had placed on a table at her side.

"I will leave Muriel to take care of you. I have a little business to do which will occupy me for a short time."

When Esther came back it was to take Muriel away, partly because Rollo and one of the small Dryburghs were outside, asking for her to play with them in the garden.

She had read aloud many times before, Sebastian was in a state of languor which hardly permitted him to grasp the sense of the words she read; but to read to him now seemed a different matter.

Esther's book was The Earthly Paradise. He listened silently for a time to the musical lines; but at last he stretched out his hand. She lifted her eyes to see what he wanted, and put down her book.

"Thank you. I always enjoy your reading," said Sebastian, "but I am going to use the privileges of a man who has been ill and ask you to stop for a minute or two. There is something I must say."

"Yes?" she said looking at him with a smile. "What is it? What can I do for you?"

"You can let me thank you for all that you have already done."

"Is that all? I think I will go on reading!

"No, no," he said, more earnestly still. "Not before I tell you what I have been thinking. I have been very stupid not to see it before, but I suppose that my mind was dulled by illness. I must have seemed very ungrateful."

"You have nothing to be grateful for," said Esther, her color rising. "I did only what any one of common humanity would have done. Mrs. MacEwen's rooms were vacant at the time, and I knew that she was honest and kind. The best thing was to move you into those rooms and send for a doctor and nurse."

"That is not the only thing that you did. You might have washed your hands of me after that. Instead of which, you have been giving me time and care and thought in a thousand ways. The nurse did not do for me half what you have done. And you have taken care of Muriel too!"

"That has been a pleasure," said Esther eagerly. "You do not know what a joy it has been to think that she would be here to welcome me when I came back from the office every day. Oh, it has been no trouble to me to take care of Muriel; I can not tell you how glad I have been to have her with me."

"And all that you have done for me—"

"That has been a pleasure too. I have not done much—scarcely anything, indeed; but if I had an opportunity of rendering you any service, I was glad to do it." She looked at him straight in the face with her serious, earnest eyes. "I was glad," she said gravely, "for Nina's sake."

Sebastian experienced a curious sense of relief when she mentioned Nina's name. It was as impossible for him as for Esther to sweep the past away and give it no tender backward look.

But when he had uttered a few halting, difficult sentences about her, and about the storm and terrible shipwreck on the American coast, Esther stopped him gently but decidedly.

"You must not talk of that to-night," she said. "Wait until you are a little stronger. It is too much for you. You will tell me all about it—another day."

"Now that Mrs. Grey has gone," she said, alluding to the nurse who had that day left them, "I consider myself in command of your movements until you are quite strong again. Mrs. Grey left me all manner of orders about you. The chief one was that you were to do exactly as you pleased, unless you wanted something distinctly hurtful to you, and she said that you were 'such a reasonable gentleman' that you would never want that."

"I'm afraid no man is very reasonable during illness."

"You made a very good patient. But you will find 'getting better' a tedious process, and I shall not be at all surprised if you are what nurses call 'fractious' now and then." She looked at him very kindly as she spoke, kindly and softly, although she kept up her lively tone. "The crosser you are, the more certain we shall be that you are getting well, you know. And we want you to be quite strong before the winter comes."

"Oh, I shall be well long before winter," said Sebastian, with the cheerful optimism of a man who has hitherto known nothing of illness in his own person.

"We shall see. If you are careful, I hope you will be. You will have two sitting-rooms henceforward, your own and this one, whenever you like to use it. You will find supper ready for you now—or dinner if you like to call it so—in the other room; and I think it is time that you had something."

"You must come with me then."

"Yes, I will come and carve your chicken and pour out your wine for you," said Esther, almost merrily, "but Muriel and I will have something to eat in this room by-and-by; for this is where we take our meals, you know."

Sebastian seemed dismayed. "But you don't mean to condemn me to perpetual loneliness now that I am getting better?" he said. "Am I to dine in one room and you in another? Is not that rather absurd?"

"You will have the children by-and-by."

"And then you will be alone? But perhaps you like being alone best? Perhaps"—jealously—"you find us in your way? You can not do your work with so many of us to interrupt you? You can not receive your friends—"

Esther thought that there was a little of the predicted "fractiousness" of the convalescent in his speech. She laughed as she replied—

"On the contrary, I am only too glad of your society. I am a very sociable person by nature. I don't know what I shall do when you take Muriel away."

Sebastian had to restrain an impulse to say that he never would take Muriel away; but he refrained, and contented himself with begging her to take pity upon him and not let him dine alone. And Esther acknowledged, as she gave him her arm across the hall to his own rooms, that he was not yet fit to be left entirely to himself.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Keeping London Streets Clear of Snow

After a heavy snowstorm during the night the city man comes to his place of business and finds that in the principal thoroughfares nearly all traces of the snow have disappeared. The preparations for the coming winter are begun early in the autumn. For the extra labor required reliance has to be placed in the "unemployed." Work is found each winter for some 2,000 or 3,000 men out of employment. Snow first made its apearance in London late on Tuesday night and it continued to fall until 6 o'clock on Wednesday morning. Some 200 extra men were taken on, and by 10 or 11 o'clock the city streets were cleared, the snow being carted away, and, for the most part, shot over the bridges into the Thames. There was a heavier fall on Wednesday night, beginning about 6 o'clock and continuing with more or less severity throughout the night. Men were at work all night salting and clearing the streets for traffic, while early on Thursday morning some 300 "unemployed" men were engaged to help in the work of clearance. On Thursday night and on Friday between 500 or 600 more men were engaged. The extra men are paid at the rate of 6d an hour, and although several consecutive hours' work could often be found for large numbers of them, it is found that in many instances they desire to "knock off" after an hour or two's labor. This they are allowed to do, and they are paid according to the time which they have worked.—[London City Press.

BREATHING AT GREAT ALTITUDES.

Experience of Those Who Have Gone up in Balloons and Ascended High Mountains.

The respiratory or breathing mechanism of man, as well as the whole body, is adapted to work with the air of a certain composition and at a certain pressure, though it can adapt itself within certain limits to variations of this composition and pressure. A too sudden diminution of pressure would cause asphyxia and death. If the pressure be gradually diminished, as in ascending a mountain, no effect, even at considerable heights, is experienced beyond a feeling of distress, often accompanied by

BLEEDING AT THE NOSE.

This is due to a derangement of the vascular system, the walls being constructed to meet a certain external pressure. If only the respiratory interchange of gases were concerned, the total external pressure might be reduced from 760 mm. to 300 mm., corresponding to an altitude of about 3½ miles, before the combination of oxygen with hæmoglobin, at the temperature of the blood, would be seriously affected. In various parts of the world there are people living at an altitude of 11,000 feet. When the pressure is still further reduced, the difficulty of breathing the attenuated air increases rapidly. Few persons, comparatively, can ascend to a greater height than between three and four miles with any degree of comfort, and in the majority of cases

THE DIFFICULTY OF BREATHING

at that height compels them at once to descend. The greatest height ever attained by any human beings was about seven miles in a balloon ascent of Mr. Glaisher and Mr. Coxwell in September, 1862; but it very nearly cost them their lives. Mr. Glaisher became insensible at a height of six miles, and Mr. Coxwell found himself fast losing strength as the balloon continued to ascend. He lost power to use his hands and, had he not succeeded in pulling the valve string with his teeth, both would have perished. The greatest height attained by a mountain climber was the height of 23,700 feet, which was accomplished by a Mr. Graham in the Himalayas. He states that he did not find any difficulty in breathing, nor did he experience nausea, bleeding at the nose, &c. The motion of his heart was, however, much affected, as its beating became audible and its rate was decidedly increased.

He Can Feel No Pain.

A Mobile, Ala., special says:—A correspondent was present the other day at some experiments made by three reputable physicians on the person of a man named Lartado, a native of Trinidad. This man seemingly is a wonder. He appears to be utterly oblivious of the sensations of heat and cold and in fact experiences no feeling of pain, even when undergoing treatment that would cause an ordinary man untold agony. He is 24 years old, is 5 feet 7 inches in height, weighs 100 pounds, and is perfectly sound mentally and physically. His father was a Spaniard and his mother an English woman.

Your correspondent witnessed the man run through his neck down to and grazing the trachea a piece of steel wire one-eighth of an inch in diameter, to which a most powerful galvanic battery was attached and shifted from one current to the other without any preceptible pain, but with considerable acceleration of pulse. He passed another large steel wire into his mouth and through his cheek, in all directions, and no blood flowed. Another large wire was passed through and through the large muscles of the calf of the leg and between the biceps muscle, in line with the brachial artery, and through the arm above the wrist, between the two bones of the arm and other like experiments in different parts of the body, all of which with seemingly no pain and no bleeding from any place but a drop from the neck. In fact, each of the openings made by the instrument closed up as bloodless and as easily as if the man was constructed of India rubber. The physicians present declared that it was the most wonderful exhibition of freedom from all pain they had ever witnessed. The man never flinched during any of the experiments, while the instruments were jabbed into him with no more consideration than if he had been a watermelon.

A WOMAN'S OPINION OF MAN.

And It is Not a Very Flattering One at That.

Man is naturally selfish, domineering and mean.

Man's love is like the moon's phases—changing daily.

When a man vows he loves you only, it maybe that he has another woman's picture in his pocket.

Men think women are fools—women know men are.

Man is devotion before marriage and indifference afterward.

No man ever tells his wife her maid is good-looking.

Men are misers to their wives.

The men make marriage a lottery—there are so many blanks among them.

No man can define love. Woman lives it.

You cannot recognize the lover six months after he is married.

Man talks about his honor—there is little of it in evidence in his treatment of woman.

Marriage is to man a partnership in which he assigns his wife the harder work and the less pay.

The best way to manage a man is to let him alone.

Men always expect more from women than they are willing women should expect from them.

A man's heart is cheaper than a woman's.

"How are you getting along learning to operate your typewriter?" "First rate. I can almost read some of the things I write."

He—"Do you believe in such a thing as love at first sight?" She—"Certainly. A hasty glance does not discover imperfections."

To-day I bought her a robe of fur,
And praising it now I hear her.
She was dear to me when I courted her,
But, by Jove, as a wife, she's dearer.