DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XXVII.

The sun rides high, as Burgoyne issues into the open air, and beats, blinding hot, upon the great stone flags that pave the Florentine streets, and seem to have a peculiar power of absorbing and retaining light and heat. He must have been longer in the Piazza d'Azeglio than he had thought, and the reflection quickens his step as he hurries, regardless of the midsummer blaze—for, indeed, it is more than equivalent to that of our midsummer—back to the Anglo-Americain. As he reaches it, he hears, with annoyance, the clock striking one. He is annoyed, both because the length of his absence seems to argue an indifference to the tidings he is expecting, and also because he knows that it is the Wilsons' luncheon hour, and that he will probably find that they have migrated to the salle-a-manger. In this case he will have to choose between the two equally disagreeable alternatives, of following and watching them at their food, or that of undergoing a tete-a-tete with Sybilla, who, it is needless to say, does not accompany her family to the public dining-room; a tete-a-tete with Sybilla, which is, of all forms of social intercourse, that for which he has the least relish.

But as he apprehensively opens the salon door, he sees that his fears are unfounded. They have not yet gone to luncheon; they are all sitting in much the same attitudes as he had left them, except that Sybilla is eating or drinking something of a soupy nature out of a cup. There are very few hours of the day or night in which Sybilla is not eating something out of a cup. There is that about the entire idleness of the other couple which gives him a fright. Are they too unhappy? Have they heard too bad news to be able to settle to any occupation? Urged by this alarm, his question shoots out, almost before he is inside the door:

"Has not he come yet? Has not the doctor come yet?"

"He has been and gone; you see you have been such a very long time away," replies Cecilia. She has no intention of conveying reproach, either by her words or tone, but to his sore conscience it seems as if both carried it.

"And what did he say?"

"He did not say much."

"Does he—does he think that it is anything—anything serious?"

"He did not say."

"Do you mean to tell me"—indignantly—"that you did not ask him?"

"If you had been here," replies Cecilia, with a not inexcusable resentment, "you might have asked him yourself."

"But did not you ask him?" in too real anxiety to be offended at, or even aware of, her fleer. "Did not he say?"

"I do not think he knew himself."

"But he must have thought—he must have had an opinion!" growing the more uneasy as there seems no tangible object for his fears to lay hold of.

"He says it is impossible to judge at so early a stage; it may be a chill—I told him about that detestable excursion yesterday, and he considered it quite enough to account for anything—it may be measles—they seem to be a good deal about; it may be malaria—there is a good deal of that, too."

"And how soon will he know? How soon will it declare itself?"

"I do not know."

"But has he prescribed? Is there nothing to be done—to be done at once!" asks Jim feverishly, chafing at the idea of this inaction, which seems inevitable, with that helpless feeling which his own entire ignorance of sickness produces.

"Do not you suppose that if there was we should have done it?" cries Cecilia, rendered even more uncomfortable than she was before, by the contagion of his anxiety. "We are to keep her in bed—there is no great difficulty about that, poor soul; she has not the least desire to get up; she seems so odd and heavy!"

"So odd and heavy?"

"Yes; I went in to see her just now, and she scarcely took any notice of me; only when I told her that you had been to inquire after her, she lit up a little. I believe"—with a rather grudging smile—"that if she were dead, and some one mentioned your name, she would light up."

A sudden mountain rises in Jim's throat.

"If she is not better to-morrow, Dr. Coldstream will send a nurse."

"But does he think it will be necessary?"

"He does not know."

Jim writhes. It seems to him as if he were being blindfolded, and having his arms tied to his sides by a hundred strong yet invisible threads.

"Does no one know anything?" he cries miserably.

"I have told you exactly what the doctor said," says Cecilia, with the venial crossness bred of real anxiety. "I suppose you do not wish me to invent something that he did not say?"

"Of course not; but I wish I had been here—I wish I had been here!"—restlessly.

"Why were not you?"

No immediate answer.

"Why were not you?" repeats she, curiosity, for the moment superseding her disquiet. "What prevented you? I thought, when you left us, that you meant to come back at once?"

"So I did, but——"

"But what?"

"I could not; I was with Byng."

"With Byng?" repeats Cecilia, too genuinely astonished to remember even to prefix a "Mr." to Byng's name. "Why, I should have thought that if there were one day of his life on which he could have done without you better than another, it would have been to-day!"

"Were not you rather de trop?" chimes in Sybilla's languid voice from the sofa, "rather a bad third?"

"I was not a third at all."

"Do you mean to say," cries Cecilia, her countenance tinged with the pink of a generous indignation, "that you were four—that Mrs. Le Marchant stayed in the room the whole time? I must say that now that they are really and bonafide engaged, I think she might leave them alone together."

"Mrs. Le Marchant was not there at all." Then, seeing the open-mouthed astonishment depicted on the faces of his audience, he traces his mind to make the inevitable yet dreaded announcement. "I had better explain at once that neither Mrs. nor Miss Le Marchant were there; they are gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes; they left Florence at seven o'clock this morning."

There is a moment of silent stupefaction.

"I suppose," says Cecilia, at last slowly recovering the power of speech, "that they were telegraphed for? Mr. Le Marchant is dead or ill? one of the married sisters? one of the brothers?"

Never in his life has Jim labored under so severe a temptation to tell a lie, were it only the modified falsehood of allowing Cecilia's hypothesis to pass uncontradicted; but even if he were able for once to conquer his constitutional incapacity, he knows that in this case it would be useless. The truth must transpire to-morrow.

"I believe not."

"Gone!" repeats Cecilia, in a still more thunderstruck key than before—"and where are they gone?"

"I do not know."

"Why did they go?"

Jim makes an impatient movement, fidgetting on his chair. "I can only tell you their actions; they told me their motives as little as they did to you."

"Gone! Why, they never said a word about it yesterday."

This being of the nature of an assertion—not an interrogation—Jim feels with relief that it does not demand an answer.

"Gone at seven o'clock in the morning! Why, they could not have had time to pack their things!"

"They left them behind."

The moment that this admission is out of Burgoyne's mouth, he repents having made it; nor does his regret at all diminish under the shower of ejaculations from both sisters that it calls forth.

"Why, it was a regular flit! they must have taken French leave."

There is something so horribly jarring in the semi-jocisity of the last phrase that Jim jumps up from his chair and walks towards the window, where Mr. Wilson is sitting in dismal idleness.

Mr. Wilson has never cared much about the Le Marchants, and is now vice too deep [illegible] Miss F. E. Thurston; Treas., Miss to have [illegible] Hales; Rec. Sec., Miss Frances tive ind[illegible]y; Cor. Sec., A. S. Thurston, topic wi[illegible]sentative to District Executive, Mrs. riveting. [illegible] Thurston.

lousness [illegible] postoffices are being flooded these room is [illegible]ith circulars from brokers endeavor- part of [illegible]sell Cobalt and Larder Lake stocks. fect eas[illegible]rospects are glowing on paper but when C[illegible] should be very careful about sues hir[illegible]ng their small capital in mining "Did [illegible]es of which they know nothing. going?" [illegible]hances to one they will lose their "No." [illegible]The best propositions in that district There[illegible] have to go begging for purchasers "It is [illegible]d out agents to dispose of their stock at says [illegible]cents on the dollar. Cobalt is the never [illegible]t silver district in the world, but much i[illegible] yesterday—there was so little disguise about it, that one was really quite sorry for her—and this morning at cockcrow she decamps and leaves him without a word."

"You are mistaken—she left a note for him."

"Poor dear boy!" sighs Sybilla, "is not he quite prostrated by the blow? I am not apt to pity men generally—they are so coarse-grained—but he is much more delicately strung than the general run."

"I suppose he is frightfully cut up," says Cecilia, with that inquisitiveness as to the details of a great affliction which we are all apt to experience.

For some perverse reason, inexplicable even to himself, Jim would like to be able to answer that his friend is not cut up at all; but truth again asserting its empire, he assents laconically, "frightfully!"

"How did he take it?"

"How do people generally take such things?"

The impatience of the key in which this is uttered, coupled with the implied side-allusion to an acquaintance with sorrows of a somewhat similar nature on her own part, silences the younger and sounder Miss Wilson for a moment, but only for a moment—a moment long enough to be filled by another sighing "Poor dear boy!" from Sybilla.

"You say that she left a note for him?"—with a renewed light of curiosity in her eyes—"have you any idea what was in it?"

Jim hesitates; then, "yes," he replies; "but as it was not addressed to me, I do not think that I have any right to repeat it."

"Of course not!"—reluctantly; "but did it throw no light—absolutely no light at all—upon this extraordinary stampede?"

"No."

"Did not she even tell him where they were going?"

"No."

"Nor whether they were coming back?"

"No."

"Nor ask him to follow her?"

"If she did not tell him where she was going, is it likely that she would ask him to follow her?" cries Jim irritably, deeply annoyed to find that he is, by the series of negatives that is being forced from him, doing the very thing which he had just denied his own right to do.

"It is the most incomprehensible thing I ever heard in my life. I wonder"—with an air of even alerter interest than before—"what Mr. Greenock will say? Perhaps he will now tell what he knows about them; if they are gone, there will no longer be any need to conceal it. I am afraid this looks rather as if there was something!"

For the second time in one day the mention of an amiable flaneur's name makes Jim vault to his feet.

"Well, I will not keep you any longer from your luncheon," he cries hastily. "I will call in again later."

"Are you going?" asks Mr. Wilson, dully lifting his head from his chest, upon which it is sunk. "Well, you are about right; we are not much good to any one when our mainspring is gone."

The phrase strikes cold on Jim's heart.

"Are you going back to the poor dear boy?" inquires Sybilla as he passes her. "By-the-bye, if it is not too much trouble, would you mind tucking the Austrian blanket a little closer in on the left side?" and as he stoops to perform the asked-for service, she adds: "Let him know how sincerely I sympathize with him; and if he wants anything quieting for his nerves, tell him that there is nothing that I can more conscientiously recommend than——"

But what Sybilla can conscientiously recommend is shut into the closing door. Outside that door Jim finds that Cecilia has joined him. Anxiety has quite banished the not altogether disagreeable curiosity of five minutes ago, from the troubled face she lifts to his.

"You will come back, will not you?" she asks. "You are not of much use, I suppose; but still, one feels that you are there, and we are all so much at sea. You have not an idea how much we are at sea—without her."

"I think that I have a very good idea," he answers mournfully. "Tell me, Cis; do you think she is really very ill?"

As he puts the question, he feels its irrationality. He knows that the person to whom he is making his futile appeal has already given him all the scanty tidings she has to give; yet he cannot help indulging a faint hope that her response to this last query of his may perhaps set Amelia's condition in a slightly more favorable light. A look of helpless distress clouds Cecilia's already cloudy face.

"I tell you I do not know; I am no judge; I have seen so little real illness. Sybilla would kill me if she heard me say so, would not she?"—with a slight parenthetical smile—"but I have seen so little real illness, that I do not know what it means that she should be so heavy and stupid. As I told you before, the only time that she roused up at all was when I mentioned your——"

He stops her, breaking rudely into her sentence. He cannot bear to hear that it is only at the magic of his name that his poor faithful love lifts her sick head.

"Yes, yes; I remember."

"Chicag[illegible]ne ought to sit up with her, I killed [illegible] pursues Cecilia, still with that Mr. Y[illegible]air of disquiet; "she ought not our res[illegible] alone all night; but who? I the lat[illegible] more than willing to do it; and un[illegible]w that I should fall asleep in widowe[illegible]lles, and I am such a heavy more th[illegible]at, when once I am off, there leaves [illegible]sibility of waking me. I am a few we[illegible] bad sick-nurse; father can warden[illegible]r to have me near him when Gilray [illegible] gout."

ceased [illegible]e is too well aware of the per- [illegible] of this last statement to at- [illegible] contradiction of it.

Mrs. [illegible] has always been the one to of age, l[illegible]en any one was ill," continues ampton [illegible]ly; "and even now, by a stu- o'clock, [illegible]sion of ideas, I catch myself neighbo[illegible] thinking, 'Oh, Amelia will sit up with her!' before I can realize that her is Amelia herself."

Jim can well sympathize with this same confusion, when, several times during his walk back to the Piazza d'Azeglio, a muddled thought of comfort, in the idea that he will go and tell Amelia what a terrible day of anxiety about some one he has been having, taps at the door of his brain. The portals of No. 12 are once again opened to him by Annunziata, who indicates to him, by a series of compassionate gestures and liquid Tuscan sentences, that the povero is still within, and the Padrona, who this time also appears on the scene, and who is possessed of somewhat more English than her handmaid, intimates, albeit with a good deal of sympathy for his sufferings, yet with still more of determination, that it would be no bad thing were he to be removed since, whether the sun shines or the rain falls, people must live, and the apartment has to be prepared for new occupants.

Anything that speaks less intention of removing than Byng's pose, when his friend rejoins him, it would be difficult to imagine. He is stretched upon the parquet floor, with his head lying on the small footstool that has been wont to support Elizabeth's feet; her rifled work-basket stands on the floor beside him, while her bit of embroidery half shrouds his distorted face. The needle, still sticking in it, may prick his eyes out for all he cares; the book she last read is open at the page where she has put her mark of a skein of pale silk; and the yellow anemones, that he must have plucked for her yesterday in drenched Vallombrosa, are crushed under his hot cheek. But outwardly he is quite quiet. Jim puts his hand on his shoulder.

"Come away, there is no use in your staying here any longer."

(To be continued).

Doctor's fees are the reward for well-doing.

ESTIMATES and RESULTS.

When the Great-West Life commenced business in 1892, participating rates were issued calling for dividends in 15 and 20 years, and also with the "Quinquennial" or 5 year dividend period.

Life Policies issued in 1892 on the five year dividend plan received their first dividend of the full estimated bonus of $50.00 per $1,000.00; their second dividend in 1902 of 50 per cent. over the estimated dividend; and this year, 1907, are receiving their third dividend of just double the first dividend and estimate.

Every Policyholder has expressed his gratification with these dividends, which are paid at the option of the Policyholder as fully paid bonus additions, the equivalent in cash, or in reduction of future premiums.

The distribution is on the English basis of an equal percentage of the sum assured, and not on the American so-called "contribution" system, and the eminent English Actuaries, R. P. Hardy, F.I.A., and George King, F.I.A., F.F.A., reported recently to the New Zealand Government "that as a working system it has marked advantages over the contribution plan, because it gives more uniform results."

Our 15 year Deferred Dividend Policies issued in 1892 mature this year, and our Actuary has reported that they have earned, and are entitled to be paid, the full amount of the profits estimated at the time.

Our Non-Participating rates are, and always have been, very low, but the results of our fifteen years' experience prove that the cost of Participating Insurance has been very much less than these low non-participating rates, because of our high interest earnings.

The applications for the first quarter of 1907 are over a million dollars in excess of the same period of 1906, every Province of the Dominion having contributed its quota to these magnificent figures in appreciation of the unprecedented results accomplished by this representative Canadian Company.

No attempt of faddy foreign actuaries, disgruntled newspapers that fail to get the advertising they expect, or legislative committees, well described by D. P. Fackler, the well-known ex-President of the Actuarial Society of America, as "absolutely innocent of any life insurance knowledge," must be allowed to "knock" the Canadian business of Life Insurance.

For fuller particulars, send for a copy of the Great-West Life Report for 1906.

The Great-West Life Assurance Company

HEAD OFFICE—WINNIPEG.

BRANCH OFFICES—Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal, Toronto, Halifax, St. John, N.B.

The Mutual Life Assurance Co. OF CANADA

1906 shows large gains over 1905. New business amounts to $5,503,547 in 3,026 policies, of this $46,000 was written in Newfoundland and the balance entirely within the Dominion. The following are some interest-facts from the Company's 37th Annual Statement.

INCOME.	
Premiums, less reassurance	$ 1,604,581.74
Interest and rents	464,646.98
Profit from sale of Real Estate	3,194.41
	$ 2,072,423.13

DISBURSEMENTS.	
Death Claims	$ 327,975.50
Matured Endowments	168,486.00
Purchased Policies	88,607.47
Surplus	83,947.55
Annuities	10,645.68
Expenses, Taxes, etc.	338,717.40
Balance	1,054,042.53
	$2,072,423.13

ASSETS.	
Mortgages	$ 5,013,647.45
Debentures and Bonds	3,420,025.49
Loans on Policies	1,129,517.25
Premium Obligations	25,786.38
Real Estate	900.26
" " Company's Head Office	30,875.79
Cash in Banks	267,552.05
Cash at Head Office	3,540.53
Due and Deferred Premiums (net)	276,981.81
Interest and rents due and accrued	197,712.83
	$10,385,539.84

LIABILITIES.	
Reserve, 4, 3½ and 3 per cent.	$ 9,055,333.18
Reserve on lapsed policies liable to revive or surrender	3,001.96
Death Claims unadjusted	43,683.00
Matured Endowments unadjusted	3,000.00
Present Value of Death Claims payable in instalments	45,338.06
Premiums paid in advance	13,781.50
Amount due for medical fees	6,482.00
Accrued rents	805.00
Credit ledger balances	10,397.50
Sundry current accounts	2,370.06
Surplus on Company's Valuation Standard	1,203,378.58
	$10,385,539.84

The Company has a surplus on Government standard of valuation of $1,552,364.26. The following are some striking gains made in 1906. In Income, $115,904.22; In Assets, $1,089,447.69; In Surplus (Company's Standard) $251,377.46; In Insurance in Force, $2,712,453.00.

Send to Head Office, Waterloo, Canada, for booklet giving Annual Report and proceedings of Annual Meeting.

Robert Melvin, President — A. Hoskin, K.C. } Vice-Pres.
Geo. Wegenast, Manager — Hon. Justice Britton }
W. H. Riddell, Secretary