

Bide A Wee.

"Laddie, wi' the foot-fall light,
A d' the glancing ray,
Dinna gauz see awfully by,
Laddie, bide a wee."
"Stay me na'; I canna bide,
Be ye fo' or fren';
I am boun' to seek the doer
Down yon leafy glen."
"Dinna fricht the timid doe
Frae her rest to flee;
Dinna wile her 'lifa' sa',—
Laddie, bide a wee."
"Gloaming' flush is in the sky,
Shadows oan my fa';
Sto' p'astie and let me gae,
I'm nae haste awa'."
"Laddie, by the haunted spring,
'Neath the ro' and tree,
Saw I stray a mill-white fawn,—
Laddie, bide a wee."
"Hae ye seen my honny fawn,
Pure as new fa' in snow;
Stan' i' awa', and say ye nae not;
Hand me nae mair fro'."
"Laddie, wad ye keep your tryet,
Speir within and see
Gin ye wad brak a t'usting heart,—
Laddie, bide a wee."

MR. L'ESTRANGE.

CHAPTER IV.—(CONCLUSION.)


Expire to the strong air of the ocean began to make me drowsy; I went down to my cabin to get a little sleep. The unhappy boy was very ill, and looked so dependent that he took all thoughts of sleep away from me. I was more grieved by his sufferings than by his folly, and exerted myself to the utmost to comfort him. After leaving him again, I stood at the port hole, breathing the soft air. A gentle touch upon the arm roused me from my contemplation. I turned, and saw one of the stewards with a letter in his hand for me. Greatly surprised, I opened the envelope, and found the contents ran thus: "L'Estrange has your money. He is a professional gambler, working with confederates. Go to him; declare that you know him and his associates; and that if he does not restore your money, you will bring the police to your assistance, when you reach New York. Be firm, and fear not; for though he is a man of desperate courage, he will not dare to harm you while on this ship. If you cannot force him to yield by such arguments as suggest themselves to you, use the words "Henry Evans."

dark eyes as he said: You may thank my self-command, young man, for not kicking you out of this, as I would a whining hound. For your brother's sake, I will not do you any harm. But if I had you ashore, I would give you a lesson that would teach you to behave like a gentleman. Do not provoke me any more. Leave my cabin."
"I will never leave it till you have given me the money; or if you go out, I will follow you, and before all the passengers, I will repeat what I have said. I care not for your scowls, for your hatred, for any harm your vile ingenuity can devise against me."
"Then as you declare war to the knife, you mad fool, you shall have it," cried L'Estrange with a burst of imprecations. "I am known on the ship to many gentlemen and to the captain. I shall claim protection from a scoundrel who seeks to fasten a quarrel upon me, to extort a large sum of money; and when we get into the Hudson, I will put the constables on you. If it costs me a thousand dollars, I will shut you up in jail for the next few years."
I laughed, a scornful, stinging laugh of contempt.
L'Estrange was nonplussed.
"I accept your war to the knife," I said. "Come, let us place the matter before the captain and the saloon passengers. I have only made a formal demand for my money so far. I thought that you would see the wisdom of returning your plunder, when you discovered that I knew you and your profession. I do not want the trouble of prosecuting you when we land at New York. I have urgent business to attend to elsewhere, and I would prefer that other hands than mine put you under the jailer's key. However, since you decide to play the innocent and the respectable, I must join in your comedy. It certainly will be the best for society. You and your confederates on this ship are at my mercy. War to the knife, it shall be." I turned to unfasten the door.
"Stop!" said L'Estrange uneasily.
"Are you going to restore the money?"
"Sit down, and let us talk the matter over. I have a hasty temper, and your request has made me very angry. Let us be friends. I really am a greater victim than your brother; I have lost quite a heap of money. Why did he think I was a professional gambler? Why has he acted so unjustly towards me? I am no pretender to respectability, I assure you. Here is my card. When you reach New York, you will find in ten minutes that I am what I say I am."
"Pray, do not continue this sort of fiction. I know all about you, Mr. L'Estrange. Neither your bluster nor your hypocrisy will turn me from my point. You have only one argument that can prevail with me—that is, to put four hundred and fifteen pounds in unmistakable currency into my hands."
He glared at me like a ferocious animal in a trap. Then he assumed an amused smile, saying: "Well, I have had a pretty fair experience of human nature; but I tell you, sir, you are the toughest opponent I have met so far."
"I am a desperate man, Mr. L'Estrange. You and your gang have ruined me, and blasted my brother's career at the start. If I had thought that an appeal to your pity would have caused a restoration of all we have in the world, that appeal would have been made. But the professional gambler has no heart and no conscience, except that which is roused by the policeman. Yet, why am I bandying words with you? Give me the money."
"Upon my honour as a gentleman, I am very sorry about this affair. I will see what I can do to get the money from Mr. Barker and the others who have cleaned your brother's pockets. I give you my promise," L'Estrange rose, as if to end the interview, and looked at me with a reassuring smile.
"I do not take promissory notes in such transactions as ours," I said sternly. "The money!"
"You shall have it before ten o'clock to-night," quoth L'Estrange, putting out his hand to ratify the pledged words.
"I will not wait ten seconds. The money!"
"I cannot give it to you; I swear I cannot; I have lost all my ready cash. But since you will not treat me as one gentleman does another, I will give you a draft upon my firm, to be paid upon arrival. I am sick and tired of this absurd row. Go into the saloon; I will write the draft, and follow you."
"I take no draft from a man of your stamp, Mr. L'Estrange; all your subterfuges are useless."
"If I had you ashore, I would take the talk out of you," exclaimed the man, relapsing into a fury. "Take my draft, or go out of this."
"Henry Evans!—your last game is played!"
I uttered the words very quietly. I had exhausted all other means to get back my own, and followed the advice of the writer of the letter in my extremity. They struck the gambler with utter dismay. His face became pale and distorted, and he reeled to and fro, as though a storm had suddenly burst upon the sunny sea.
"Who are you?" he asked in a low voice, after he had somewhat recovered.
"That is my concern, I know who you are."
L'Estrange looked at me in a puzzled, expectant manner, as if waiting for me to do something.
As I simply continued to return his stare, he at length said doggedly: "What do you mean to do?"
"To take four hundred and fifteen pounds out of this place."
He fixed his eyes upon me like a rat upon its captor: "And afterwards?"
"Take care that you do not get hold of it again." My answer completely confounded him.
Again he looked wonderingly, suspiciously at me. "Look here," he said. "Are you going to hand me over at New York, if I give you the money?"
"No."
"Will you promise? Will you swear it?"
"I will swear nothing; I will make no compact with a man of your character. I say simply, that if you give me my money, I leave you to be punished by other hands than mine."
His eyes dropped to the floor, and he sat thinking awhile. Suddenly he rose up, and said half-menacingly: "I accept your terms." Putting his hand into his breast-pocket, he pulled out a large leather case; from this he took a sheaf of bank of England notes, and counted four hundred and fifteen pounds upon the sofa beside me.
"Count it for yourself," he said. "You may test them as you like," he added, as I

examined the water-marks and then the "touch" of the notes. "They are genuine."
"Yes, they are not forged, I perceive. Now I take my leave."
"Before we part," said L'Estrange with suppressed passion—"before we part, let me say that if you deal fair and square with me until we get ashore, I will let bygones be bygones. Remember this, however, that I have many friends, and that, if you put me to the necessity to find you, I will have you killed, even if I am in the fastest prison in the world. Even if you are the chief detective of England, you will not escape them that will find you." There was no mistaking the fierce, revengeful nature of the man; evidently, he was capable of plotting the deadliest mischief.
"If you will just suppose that I have no further interest in you, that you are practically non-existent for me, then you will understand that your threats are waste of breath. Allow me to pass out." With these words I quitted the cabin; and thus terminated the most remarkable interview of my life.
I was hurrying to tell Theodore of the astounding recovery of the money, and to remove the awful misery of the boy, when the thought occurred to me, that such a revelation might not be prudent. Theodore never could keep a secret, and he would, in spite of my cautioning, divulge the character of L'Estrange; and this might lead to unknown troubles and delays when we got to New York. Instead of going to our cabin, I returned to the deck, and walked for a considerable time, planning a method of telling the story after we had got well on the way to California.
Having settled the matter to my satisfaction, I stood calmly watching the sun, poised over the western waters, for it was now evening. The placid ocean heaved in soft rolls, as if it were changed from water to oil. Upon them the effulgence glowed so marvelously that I held my breath in an ecstasy of delight. The world seemed almost too sublime for humanity, with all its baseness and mean contentions. A prayer of thanks and adoration burst from my lips. It was the first perfect sunset at sea that I had witnessed. In the full fervour of my emotion, a female form passed across the deck before me and eclipsed the sun. The incident annoyed me. Slowly the form passed, and the glowing orange fires fell dazzling upon my eyes again. But the charm of the scene was gone. The spell of nature's magic was not to be recovered by wishing. Again the female form eclipsed the sun. I turned to leave the deck. The figure advanced towards me. We had almost met, when I recognised the lady with whom I had formed the only acquaintance out of all the passengers. I was about to address her, when she passed me, as if totally oblivious of my presence. Wondering what I had done to deserve this slight, I turned to look at her, and almost collided with L'Estrange. He was pale as only extreme passion can blanch a man of full habit and sanguineous temperament. I thought he was irritated at meeting me; but beyond a darkening frown, he did not recognise me, and passed on.
Dinner had been served for some time, so that the deck was almost bare of passengers. Not wishing to be sighted again by the lady, I went to the cabin entrance and sat down. A few minutes afterwards, the lady appeared; she threw an imploring glance upon me from her dark and sunken eyes, and descended the companion-stairs with a swiftness that was extraordinary for one so wasted by disease. Still more amazed by this behaviour than by the other, I stared after the retreating figure, when the burly body of L'Estrange blocked out the light from the doorway; for the fraction of an instant he seemed to hesitate; or, rather, I read the impulse that shot through him as he saw me. But he did not stop; like one following a beckoning hand, he disappeared.
I was astonished at the intensity of the emotion which these simple events caused. What was less uncommon than for an invalid lady to desire to have a few minutes' promenade at a quiet interval? If she "could" a very distant and chance acquaintance, surely she had the right to do so. Besides, many people behave eccentrically on board ship. But what did her terrified looks mean? Had her illness produced delirium? As for L'Estrange, nothing was more natural than that he should need a walk upon deck, after his excitement and discomfiture. Yet I could not get rid of the shadowy feeling that slowly grew upon me, that some dark link connected the man and woman who had passed from me, like living ghosts. Against the feeling, however, were the facts that I recalled. Did not L'Estrange say, when he and Theodore had broken in upon my conversation with the lady, that he did not know French? and both he and the lady appeared to be absolute strangers to each other. I continued to ponder over the conflict of our intuitions and the realities, which seemed to destroy their significance, until the throng of people ascending from the dining-table ended my metaphysical occupation.
I went to see how Theodore was getting on. It was now dusk, and the lamps were being lit in the corridors. Stewards and other ships' servants were bustling about; passengers were moving towards their cabins and up the stairs. For a little while I could not make my way through the press; while thus fixed, I felt something placed in my hand. In the imperfect light and amid so many people, it was impossible to know who the giver was; and beyond the feeling that the object was a piece of paper, I was ignorant of what I had received. Having got free, I went to my cabin as fast as possible. I had had one mysterious and fateful misadventure before that day; and my natural cautiousness bade me wait until I was clear of observers, before examining the paper I held.
Theodore was sleeping in that heavy manner which follows great exhaustion of bodily and mental powers. I was greatly relieved. Gradually I raised the flame of the lamp and turned my eyes on the piece of paper. It was crumpled and damp by the hand that had conveyed it to me. The contents were as follows: "Do not hold any conversation with your fellow-passengers for the rest of the voyage. Stay in your cabin as much as possible. When you reach New York, take the first train for the West. Dangerous men surround you. Keep your brother under your eyes constantly. Do not reveal what has taken place to-day. Burn this, now that you have read it."
The last injunction was the most difficult of all. I did not dare to strike a match. I tore the paper in the smallest fragments, and finding the port-hole of the little corridor still open, I threw the scraps away at short intervals.

Who was this strange correspondent that knew my affairs so intimately, and who was so eager to befriend me? I could not fix upon any one on the ship save the lady, with whom I had had two conversations only. If she was playing the part of guardian angel, why? Further, if she had written the two notes—and they were in the same handwriting—she must be connected with the desperadoes she warned me against! Could that poor, suffering, almost dying woman be one of the vilest pests of the human race? The mere idea seemed an insult to one so refined, so gentle, so compassionate. Undiscoverable, however, as the correspondence might be, I determined to follow the counsel I had received, and to the letter in thirty or more hours we should be at New York; and under any circumstances I must keep Theodore constantly under my eye, until we were clear of those who had so many reasons to fear and to hate him, as well as myself.
But the unhappy boy had no wish to leave the cabin, or indeed his berth. Remorse devoured him with relentless tooth. He grew pale and haggard, as if in a rapid consumption. His grief was indeed terrible; and if I had dared, I would have told him all. Only the certainty, that in a few hours I could give relief to the anguish that he deemed hopeless, stayed me from saying: "Sorrow no more, dear boy; the lost is found."
At last we reached New York. I shall say nothing of my anxiety regarding Theodore, who had been carried from the ship to a cab, so prostrate and despairing was he. I will only relate the concluding incident of our most momentous voyage, which cleared up the mystery of my unknown friend. It was a final note, hastily given to me as I took my seat beside my brother on leaving the steamship wharf. It was written in French, and ran thus:
"The language in which I bid you adieu for ever will enlighten you as to who I am. Through you, I have been able to do one good deed before going from this world, in which I have done so many evil ones. I thank heaven for the opportunity. I know that I only reach America to die. But I shall leave behind me one, who, though lost in sin and devoted to the injury of his fellow-creatures, will yet have to die also. L'Estrange is that one—my husband. Now, I pray you, as I have been good to you, not to take any steps against him; I wish him to be with me in my last moments; perhaps then I may, by God's mercy, induce him to return to honour and honesty. He once was good and kind, though now a desperately wicked man. But, as I still possess some slight influence over him he has promised me not to harm you. He knows that I revealed his real position to you; for the steward who gave you my first note told him afterwards. L'Estrange will not harm you; he has sworn it, upon what is sacred to him.
Have, therefore, no fears, and proceed to your destination calmly and in peace. If you ever recall my memory, pray for my peace beyond the grave. Adieu."
It was many months before Theodore recovered from the illness which followed his escape on the Atlantic. Though matters had taken so providential a turn, and though I lavished upon him all my tenderness, he could not forgive himself. The bright, self-confident, self-assertive boy that left England was gone, and a grave, silent, gentle man had taken his place. But he is slowly gaining cheerfulness, as we prosper; and when my mother and sisters join us, I hope he will again be gay, for their dear sakes.
(THE END.)

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