

little faint to my mind's eye by that time; but I wrote to my old master for her address, and he sent a postcard saying that Jane Blight had been gone from the "Coach" for six months and he didn't know more'n the dead where she was got to, or what she was doing.

I felt it a good deal for an hour or so, and then I went out and axed a friend of mine at Birmingham what I ought to do in such a case. She was a young person in a tobacconist's shop and I was drawn to her, because she came from Devon—a Devonport woman, born and bred in the Three Towns. We'd seen a good bit of each other, chiefly of a Sunday, and she understood my nature and I understood hers very well, indeed. Aggie Bassett her name was, and she had a nice, stand-off manner and well knew what she owed to herself. She was a quick, rather thin little thing—a sayer—and amazing good at figures. She also liked going to church and learned me to like it; and once there she sang the hymns very sweet indeed and urged me to attempt it also, which I had done to oblige her, with fair success.

We were both homesick, and her hope and prayer, like mine, was to get back to Devon some day.

On the subject of Jane I found Aggie not too helpful. Such was her spirit and religion that she done her very best for Jane, I do believe; but I know, by signs, that she'd got a good bit of feeling for me herself by now, and at the bottom of her heart I do think she'd rather have heard I couldn't find Jane. But, like me, she was the soul of honor, and she knew my word was given in that quarter never to be withdrawn.

I thought to advertise, but remembering that Jane had no use for newspapers and seldom opened such a thing, I doubted if that would not be to throw away good money. And Aggie feared so, too. She reckoned that Jane was probably in Plymouth at her trade, and wondered if I could get a list of the public houses and send a postcard to each of 'em. We was turning over that and other projects for a few weeks, when I made the shameful discovery that I'd pretty near forgot Jane and was now falling in love with Aggie; and then, crushing in upon this, there came the second and greatest adventure of my life.

A letter arrived for me from my old home—North Tawton village, where my father and mother had lived all their days. It was from a lawyer, and it had been sent to "The Coach and Four," and, along of me having written the year previous to ax for news of Jane Blight, my old master knew where I was and sent the letter after me. And I got it.

The lawyer wrote that my father's brother was dead at the Cape of Good Hope in Africa, so my father was wrong after all about where he'd gone to; but the amazing thing followed. Uncle Geoffrey had left my father all his money, and, father and mother being dead, the money was mine. Five thousand pounds he had saved, though whether such a hugeous sum had been honestly come by who shall say. There it was, however, and when I took the news to my friend at the tobacco shop she congratulated me and said that no man ever deserved a fortune better.

"Five thousand pounds is £250 a year at 5 per cent, Noah," she said, "and don't you try to get no more."

"And what shall I do first, I wonder?" I axed her, and, like the Christian woman she was, she made answer.

"Find your Jane, I should think," said Aggie Bassett.

"Twas a frosty reply, in a manner of speaking, and yet I loved her all the better for it.

"You teach me my duty," I said, "though, God forgive me, I could wish it weren't my duty."

She understood very well what I was aiming at.

"Duty's duty, Noah," she answered, "and if you didn't do what's right you'd never forgive yourself and very likely spoil all your future life."

"Duty did ought to be a comfort and a solace," I said. "But 'tis a great mistake, Aggie, to think that the way of duty is always the way of happiness, because I be going damn soon to find it ain't."

"No need to swear about it, anyhow," she said. "What the future have got hid for you no man knows; but what you are called to do looks mighty clear to me; and that is go to Plymouth and work through the Three Towns till you find your sweetheart."

Needless to say the word struck me dumb, for Jane was no more sweetheart of mine, even though the solemn promise remained. The spell was properly broke after all these years, and I didn't want to marry her, nor yet even see her again if I could help it.

Aggie somehow knew, despite all my sad silence, what was moving in my mind.

"You can't tell how you'll feel

about it till you find her," she said. "So like us not when you do, if God wills for you to join her once more, the old feeling may blaze up in you again, Noah, and then you'll see how Providence watches over the sparrow."

"As to what I'll feel," I answered, "I know a plucky sight more about that than you can. And there's times when you catch yourself wishing that Providence would mind its own business and let you mind yours. But, to the bitter end, I'll do my duty. I've saved £50 these last two years, and now I'll give notice and leave the hotel and get west; and since you be taking your own holiday, I don't see no reason why you shouldn't go down to visit your aunt at Devonport, same as you have promised to do. Then we'll travel together, I deserve some reward," I said, "and that will be reward enough."

She didn't think it at all wise, and no doubt it weren't; but I pressed for sharing the journey and at last she consented.

On the way down to Plymouth I asked Aggie how long I did ought to take searching for Jane. I weren't in a very good temper, because the night before I had given

myself in hand and remember that Providence was looking on. Then another week passed by and I met Aggie again and we took tea on the pier and drew out an advertisement offering a reward of £1 to anybody who could give information about Miss Jane Blight, formerly a barmaid at "The Coach and Four" to Yelverton.

We parted, with more warnings to me not to be so hopeful, and I was to see Aggie again the next day, being Sunday, because on Monday her holiday would come to an end and she had to go back to Birmingham.

And then it was, just about lighting up time, that my great trial and temptation fell upon me, for half way to the office of the newspaper to hand in the advertisement about Jane I comed across the woman herself!

I see a great, big creature, built much like a pouter pigeon, looking into a shop where they sold women's stays; and I couldn't help feeling with her generous build, no doubt stays interested her so much as anything. And then she turned and I saw Jane Blight.

'Twas the Jane I'd known, yet

she put her great hands on my shoulders and said:

"You're Noah Scobhill, or else his ghost."

"The living man, Jane. And I've been looking for you a fortnight, and I was going to advertise in the paper for you next Monday. It's in my pocket this moment. You've given me a lot of work you never did ought to have given me, Jane, and a mystery where there was none. However, we must let bygones be bygones."

She looked me over and I looked her over, and she saw a silver watch chain and a hard hat and a silk tie and other signs of prosperity; and I saw something strange about her, too—a sort of trim, nautical cut, you might say. She wore a serge skirt and jacket and a seafaring cap over her mass of blazing red hair.

"You wanted me, then? You still wanted me, Noah?" she asked, and tears come in her eyes when she done so.

"Duty's duty and a promise is a promise—when I make it, Jane," I replied. "The truth lies in a nut shell. I've come into a bit of money—very near 300 a year, I

Well, I had my good manners, though she'd lost hers to the British Channel seemingly. But I let it be a bit of satire, I'm afraid.

"I don't feel conscious of having shrunk, Jane," I answered, "and I'm afraid I can't return the compliment anyway. The ocean appears to suit you very well."

"It do," she replied, brightening up. "I'm a born sailor, Noah."

"So did I ought to be, with a name like mine," I answered, striking a light note, though I didn't feel it. "but I hate the deep and was never on it but once, going round Portland Bill; and never again for me."

She thought a moment and then got an idea.

"If we go down to the 'Sextant' on the Barbican you can give me a glass of sherry wine," she said, "and we can talk."

I followed her and she went pretty fast and said but little on the way. What was to come I did not know, but so far I couldn't disguise from myself that Jane had a good bit on her mind besides me. And I wondered why she'd chose the "Sextant," which was merely a sailors' public house somewhere down on the quay.

"You don't seem too pleased about our money, Jane," I said—just to break the silence, which was growing a bit unnatural between lovers joined again after three years and more.

"I'm very pleased indeed about it," she answered. "And never a man deserved a bit of luck better; and I shall be terrible interested to hear how you came by such a dollop of cash—an unluckey sort of chap like you."

"You're leaving Providence out," I said. "It was my Uncle Geoffrey, who left it to my father, and father and mother being dead, I got the lot—5,000 of the best, by all accounts."

"Fancy! Somehow I never thought your Uncle Geoffrey was a real man," replied Jane.

I said no more.

The "Sextant" was a small house on the Barbican, and Jane appeared to be well known there. We went into a little sitting room off the private bar—her lead ing—and then I ordered a glass of sherry wine and a biscuit for her and a half of stout for myself. She said a word to the maiden that served us and I overheard it, though she didn't mean for me to do so.

"Has Mr. K. Been in?" she asked, and the girl shook her head.

With that we sat down and she took off her white thread gloves and cooled her face with a handkerchief.

"You've given me a turn, Noah," she confessed. "They talk about the wonders of the deep, but I reckon the sea's tame compared to the shore."

"And when do you sail next, if I may ask?" inquired.

"Monday night at half after nine," she answered.

"What if I forb'd it, Jane?" She finished her sherry wine at a gulp.

"I'll have one more," she said, "and you can't forb'd it—me going to sea. I'm under orders and have signed on."

"How soon can you sign off, then?" I asked, and rang the bell. Jane began to shake again and decided for a small brandy when the maiden answered me.

"I'm a wicked woman," she began, when we was alone again.

"Since when?" I axed.

"To think of you, so patient and faithful, and never forgetting me! To think all that time you could remember a poor soul like me! And now, shameful though it may sound to you, my dear man—"

What she was going to say I can't be certain, but she didn't say it, for at that moment a lumping, great seafaring chap blew in smoking a pipe. He was by way of being some sort of officer from his rig, and he knew Jane. In fact, 'twas clear he expected her, but equally clear he didn't expect me.

"Hallo, Jane!" he said. "Who the hell—?"

She introduced us.

"This is Mr. Sam Kitchen, Noah, the second engineer on the 'Lady Bird,' and this be Mr. Noah Scobhill, Sam—hullo—you remember."

"By jakes!" said the second engineer. "And what do he want down in these parts?"

"He wants me," said Jane, freely enough, but not as if I gave her any great pleasure to mention it.

Mr. Kitchen was a six foot man, with muscle and bone to match, and you could see that he breathed in a good bit of oil along of his profession. A big creation every way—big face, big heart, big voice.

"I'm hearing things," he said. "Perhaps you'll throw a ray of light, Jane."

But, of course, so far as I was concerned, a rather hopeful ray of light had been thrown already. I rang the bell and asked Mr. Kitchen to give it a name; and when he'd got the drop of unswatened, for which he didn't thank me, he turned to Jane again and asked her to time up.

"It's like this, Sam," she said.

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"Aggie changed trains for her aunt at Devonport and I went on."

a bit of a send-off party to my men friends to celebrate my leaving Birmingham, and I'd got the headache along of doing so.

"I can't go on hunting the earth for the woman forever," I said, "and you must always remember, please, that 'twas her stopped writing first, not me. And when she changed her address, proper feeling should have let me know."

Aggie Bassett considered.

"I should say if you was to search honest for six weeks your conscience would be clear, Noah," she assured me, "because by that time your duty will be done; and if she don't turn up then it's tolerable certain that Providence have got other views for you."

"Yes," I said, "and I hope Providence have got my own view; and what that is nobody knows better than you."

"I won't pretend I don't," she answered, "but we needn't think so far ahead. Something tells me as you'll find Jane, if you honestly look for her; and if you wasn't honest about it then no doubt your sin would find you out."

"Sin is too big a word," I told her; "but, be it as it will, I shall seek around sharp as a needle for a fortnight, and if we don't meet, then I'll advertise in the Western Morning News, and, though she'll never see it, for she's no scholar, somebody that knows her may perhaps do so. And even that's going too far, in my opinion."

We left it so, and when we got to North Road station, Aggie changed for her aunt at Devonport and I went on. I knew her address and she granted me permission to come to tea after I'd hunted for a week.

I drew a bland and told her so; but she saw my spirit had rose according, so she begged me to keep

changed and grown from bud to blossom, you might say. She'd drawn the beam at 11 stone 6 when we kept company; but now, to my eye, she looked every ounce of 13 stone, if not more. The fat had rose up to her face also and her high color hadn't got no fainter and her hair fairly jumped at you. Late to some men, no doubt, such a woman, but death to me.

I fell back for a moment and my legs twitched to fly from her, while a perspiration broke out like dew upon my forehead and the back of my neck. But there it was—Providence—and I knew myself so well that I felt there was only one thing for me to do. Another man might have slipped her and thanked his stars for the chance to do so, and never felt nothing about it after, more than gratitude for his luck; but with a conscience like mine if I'd bolted it would have been out of the frying pan into the fire, as they say, and I should never have had no more peaceful moments without her than now I must endure with her. Well-doing often lands you in a mess like that, and the one hope is to feel your reward is sure, though it can only come on the other side of the grave.

"My God! To live with that mountainous woman!" I thought; and then I put everything but duty away from me and overlooked her.

"You'll be Miss Jane Blight," I said, lifting my hat to her; for a moment she didn't see who 'twas, and then she did, and stood still. Her face turned several shades paler and she put her hand to her heart and heaved, like a jelly, down to her boots. For a moment I thought she was going to faint and make a scene and block the sidewalk; but she gave a deep breath and it steadied her a bit. Then

shouldn't wonder—and I remember my solemn word to you, though you have forgot yours to me seemingly; and, when I heard from 'The Coach' as you was gone and nobody could tell where, I thought that 50 to 1 you was in Plymouth, at your old business and looking after your mother as before. And I was right, I suppose."

"My mother's dead," she answered, "and I ain't looking after nobody but myself. And my home, so to call it, be the sea nowadays. I'm a stewardess on the Weston-Smerdon packet boat 'Lady Bird,' that trades across from Plymouth to Havre."

"That accounts for your marine appearance, then," I said.

"Yes, it do," she answered.

"You was always very given to the sea," I reminded her.

"Yes," she said, "I always was."

She still quivered a bit from the saddest upward, and her great eyes rolled about in a very helpless fashion. She'd made a hole in her manners also, for she never whispered so much as a word of pleasure and gladness on my account after hearing about the fortune. Instead she seemed to be full up with what was in her own mind.

"Fancy you remembering me all these donkey's years!" she said.

And then I got a thought nipped with the woman.

"And be I to understand you'd forgot me, Jane Blight?" I asked, for no honest man is short of his proper pride.

"Forgot you? No—God's my judge I haven't," she answered. "You was always a kind and true friend, and we saw a good bit alike long ago. I mind you well enough, Noah, though to my eye you look a good few sizes smaller than when you was at 'The Coach.'"