The Doctor's Dilemma

By Hesba Stretton

CHAPTER I.

I think I was as nearly mad as I could be; nearer madness, I believe, than I shall ever be again. Three weeks of it had driven me to the very verge of desperation. I cannot say here what had brought me to this pass, for I do not know into whose hands these pages may fall; but I had made up my mind to persist in a certain line of conduct which I firmly believed to be right, whilst those who had authority over me were resolutely bent upon making me submit to their will. The conflict had been going on, more or less violently, for months; now I had come very near the end of it. I felt that I must either yield or go mad. There was no chance of my dying; I was too strong for that.

It had been raining all the day long. My eyes had followed the course of solitary drops rolling down the window panes until my head ached. There was nothing within my room less dreary than without. I was in London, but in what part of London I did not know. The house was situated in a highly respectable, though not altogether fashionable quarter; as I judged by the gloomy, monotonous rows of buildings which I could see from my windows. The people who passed up and down the streets on fine days were well-to-do persons, who could afford to wear good and handsome clothes. The rooms on the third floor—my rooms, which I had not been allowed to leave since we entered the house, three weeks before—were very badly furnished. The carpet was nearly threadbare, and the curtains of dark red moreen were very dingy. My bedroom opened upon a dismal back yard, where a dog in a kennel howled dejectedly from time to time, and rattled his chain as if to remind me that I was a prisoner like himself. I had no books, no work, no music. It was a dreary place to pass a dreary time in; and my only resource was to pace to and fro—to and fro from one end to another of those wretched rooms.

A very slight sound grated on my ear; it was the hateful click of the key turning in the lock. A servant entered, carrying in a tray, upon which were a lamp and my tea—such a meal as might be prepared for a school girl in disgrace. She came up to me, as if to draw down the blinds.

"Leave them," I said; "I will do it myself by and by."

"He's not coming home to-night," said a woman's voice behind me, in a scolding tone.

I could see her in the mirror without turning round. A handsome woman, with bold black eyes, and a rouged face, which showed coarsely in the ugly looking glass. She was extravagantly dressed, and not many years older than myself. I took no notice whatever of her, but continued to gaze out steadily at the lamp-lit streets and stormy sky.

"It will be no better for you when he is at home," she said fiercely. "He hates you; he swears so a hundred times a day, and he is determined to break your proud spirit. We shall force you to knock under sooner or later. What friends have you got anywhere to take your side? If you'd made friends with me, my fine lady, you'd have found it good for yourself; but you've chosen to make me your enemy, and I'll make him your enemy."

I set my teeth together and gave no indication that I had heard one word of her taunting speech. My silence served to fan her fury.

"Upon my soul, madam," she almost shrieked, "you are enough to drive me to murder! I could beat you. Ay! and I would, but for him. So then three weeks of this hasn't broken you down yet! We shall try other means to-morrow."

She came up to where I stood, shook her clenched hand in my face and flung herself out of the room, pulling the door violently after her. I turned my head round. A thin, fine streak of light, no thicker than a thread, shone for an instant. My heart stood still, and then beat like a hammer. I stole very softly to the door, and discovered that the bolt had slipped beyond the hoop of the lock. The door was open for me!

I had been on the alert for such a chance ever since my imprisonment began. My sealskin hat and jacket lay ready to my hand in a drawer. I had not time to put on thicker boots; and it was perhaps essential to the success of my flight to steal down the stairs in the soft velvet slippers I was wearing. I stepped as lightly as I could. I crept past the drawing room door. The heavy house door opened with a grating of the hinges; but I stood outside it in the shelter of the portico—free, but with the rain and wind of a stormy night in October beating against me.

I darted straight across the muddy road and then turned sharply round a corner. On I fled breathlessly. As I drew nearer to shop windows an omnibus driver, seeing me run toward him, pulled up his horses in expectation of a passenger. I sprang in, caring very little where it might carry me, so that I could get quickly enough and far enough out of the reach of my pursuers. There had been no time to lose, and none was lost. The omnibus drove on again quickly, and no trace of me was left.

The omnibus drove into a station yard, and every passenger, inside and out, prepared to alight. I lingered till the last. The wind drove across the open space in a strong gust as I stepped down upon the pavement. A man had just descended from the roof, and was paying the conductor; a tall, burly man, wearing a thick waterproof coat, and a seaman's hat of oilskin, with a long flap lying over the back of his neck. His face was brown and weather beaten, but he had kindly looking eyes.

"Going down to Southampton?" said the conductor to him.

"Ay, and beyond Southampton," he answered.

"You'll have a rough night of it," said the conductor. "Sixpence, if you please, miss."

I offered an Australian sovereign, a pocket piece, which he turned over curiously, asking me if I had no smaller change. He grumbled when I answered no, and the stranger who had not passed on, turned pleasantly to me.

"You have no change, mam'zelle?" he asked slowly, as if English was not his ordinary speech. "Very well! are you going to Southampton?"

"Yes, by the next train," I answered, deciding upon that course without hesitation.

"So am I, mam'zelle," he said, raising hand to his oilskin cap; "I will pay this sixpence, and you can give it me again when you buy your ticket in the office."

I smiled gladly but gravely. I passed on into the station. At the ticket office they changed my Australian gold piece and I sought out my seaman friend to return the sixpence he had paid for me. I thanked him heartily.

He put me into a compartment where there were only two ladies, touched his hat and ran away to a second-class carriage.

In about two hours or more my fellow-passengers alighted at a large, half-deserted station. A porter came up to me as I leaned my head through the window.

"Going on, miss?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!" I answered, shrinking back into my corner seat. He remained on the step whilst the train moved on at a slackened pace, and then pulled up. Before me lay a dim, dark scene, with little specks of light twinkling here and there, but whether on sea or shore I could not tell. Immediately opposite the train stood the black hulls and masts and funnels of two steamers, with a glimmer of lanterns on their decks. The porter opened the door for me.

"You've only to go on board, miss," he said, "your luggage will be seen to all right." And he hurried away to open the doors of other carriages.

I stood still, utterly bewildered, with the wind tossing my hair about, and the rain beating in sharp stinging drops upon my face and hands. It must have been close upon midnight. Every one was hurrying past me. I began almost to repent of the desperate step I had taken. At the gangways of the two vessels there were men shouting hoarsely, "This way for the Channel Islands!" "This way for Havre and Paris!" To which boat should I trust myself and my fate?

A mere accident decided it. Near the fore part of the train I saw the broad, tall figure of my new friend, the seaman, making his way across to the boat for the Channel Islands; and I made up my mind to go on board the same steamer, for I had an instinctive feeling that he would prove a real friend. I went down immediately into the ladies' cabin, which was almost empty, and chose a berth for myself in the darkest corner. It was not far from the door, and presently two other ladies came down, with a gentleman and the captain, and held an anxious parley close to me.

"Is there any danger?" asked one of the ladies.

"Well, I cannot say positively there will be no danger," answered the captain; "there's not danger enough to keep me and the crew in port; but it will be a very dirty night in the Channel. Of course we shall use extra caution, and all that sort of thing. No; I cannot say I expect any great danger."

"But it will be awfully rough?" said the gentleman.

It was very stormy and dismal as soon as we were out of Southampton water, and in the rush and swirl of the Channel. It did not alarm me so much as it distracted my thoughts. My hasty escape had been so unexpected, so unhoped for, that it had bewildered me, and it was almost a pleasure to lie still and listen to the din and uproar of the sea. Was I myself or no? Was this nothing more than a very vivid dream, from which I should awaken by and by to find myself a prisoner still, a creature as wretched and friendless as any that the streets of London contained?

I watched the dawn break through a little porthole opening upon my berth, which had been washed and beaten by the water all the night long. The stewardess had gone away early in the night. So I was alone, with the blending light of the early dawn and that of the lamp burning feebly from the ceiling. I sat up in my berth and cautiously unstitched the lining of my jacket. Here, months ago, when I first began to foresee this emergency, and whilst I was still allowed the use of my money, I had concealed one by one a few five-pound notes. I counted them over, eight of them; forty pounds in all, my sole fortune, my only means of living. True, I had a diamond ring and a watch and chain, but how difficult and dangerous it would be for me to sell either of them! Practically my means were limited to the eight notes of five pounds each.

As the light grew I left my berth and ventured to climb the cabin steps. The fresh air smote upon me almost painfully. The sea was growing brighter, and glittered here and there in spots where the sunlight fell upon it. I stayed on deck in the biting wind, leaning over the wet bulwarks and gazing across the desolate sea till my spirits sank like lead. I was cold, and hungry, and miserable. How lonely I was! how poor! with neither a home nor a friend in the world!—a mere castaway upon the waves of this troublous life!

"Mam'zelle is a brave sailor," said a voice behind me, which I recognized as my seaman of the night before; "but we shall be in port soon."

"What port?" I asked.

"St. Peter-port," he answered. "Mam'zelle, then, does not know our islands?"

"No," I said. "Where is St. Peter-port?"

"In Guernsey," he replied. "If you were going to land at St. Peter-port I might be of some service to you."

I looked at him steadily. His voice was a very pleasant one, full of tones that went straight to my heart. His face was bronzed and weather-beaten, but his deep-set eyes had a steadfast, quiet power in them, and his mouth had a pleasant curve about it. He looked a middle-aged man to me. He raised his cap as my eyes looked straight into his, and a faint smile flitted across his grave face.

"I want," I said suddenly, "to find a place where I can live very cheaply. I have not much money, and I must make it last a long time. Can you tell me of such a place?"

"You would want a place fit for a lady?" he said.

"No," I answered. "I would do all my own work. What sort of a place do you and your wife live in?"

"My poor little wife is dead," he answered. "We live in Sark, my mother and I. I am a fisherman, but I have also a little farm. It is true we have one room to spare, which might do for mam'zelle; but the island is far away, and in the winter Sark is too mournful."

"It will be just the place I want," I said quickly; "it would suit me exactly. Can you let me go there at once? Will you take me with you?"

"Mam'-zelle," he replied, smiling, "the room must be made ready for you, and I must speak to my mother. If God sends us fair weather I will come back to St. Peter-port for you in three days. My name is Tardif. You can ask the people in Peter-port what sort of a man Tardif of the Havre Gosselin is."

"I do not want any one to tell me what sort of a man you are," I said, holding out my hand. He took it with an air of friendly protection.

"What is your name, mam'zelle?" he inquired.

"Oh! my name is Olivia," I said.

I went below, inexpressibly satisfied and comforted. What it was in this man that won my complete, unquestioning confidence, I did not know; but his very presence, and the sight of his good, trustworthy face, gave me a sense of security such as I have never felt before or since. Surely God had sent him to me in my great extremity.

"SHOOK HER CLENCHED HAND IN MY FACE.

CHAPTER II.

Looking back upon that time, now it is past, and has "rounded itself into that perfect star I saw not when I dwelt therein," it would be untrue to represent myself as in any way unhappy. At times I wished earnestly that I had been born among the people with whom I had now come to live.

Tardif led a somewhat solitary life himself, even in this solitary island, with its scanty population. There was an ugly church, but Tardif and his mother did not frequent it. They belonged to a little knot of dissenters, who met for worship in a small room, when Tardif generally took the lead. For this reason a sort of coldness existed between him and the larger portion of his fellow islanders.

But there was a second and more important cause of estrangement. He had married an Englishwoman many years ago, much to the disappointment of his neighbors; and since her death he had held himself aloof from all the good women who would have been glad enough to undertake the task of consoling him for her loss. Tardif, therefore, was left very much to himself in his isolated cottage; and his mother's deafness caused her also to be no very great favorite with any of the gossips of the island.

I learned afterwards that Tardif had said my name was Ollivier, and they jumped to the conclusion that I belonged to a family of that name in Guernsey; this shielded me from curiosity. I was nobody but a poor woman who was lodging in the spare room of Tardif's cottage. I set myself to grow used to their mode of life, and if possible to become so useful to them that when my money was all spent they might be willing to keep me with them. As the long, dismal nights of winter set in, with the wind sweeping across the island for several days together with a dreary, monotonous moan which never ceased, I generally sat by their fire; for I had nobody but Tardif to talk to, and now and then there arose an urgent need within me to listen to some friendly voice, and to hear my own in reply.

March came in with all the strength and sweetness of spring. I went out frequently to the field near the church. I was sitting there one morning. Tardif was going to fish, and I had helped him to pack his basket. I could see him getting out of the harbor, and he had caught a glimpse of me, and stood up in his boat, bare headed, bidding me good by. I began to sing before he was quite out of hearing, for he paused upon his oars listening, and had given me a joyous shout and waved his hat round his head, when he was sure it was I who was singing.

By 12 o'clock I knew my dinner would be ready, and I had been out in the fresh air long enough to be quite ready for it. Old Mrs. Tardif would be looking out for me impatiently, that she might get the meal over, and the things cleared away, and order restored in her dwelling.

(To be continued.)

His Mania Is for Clocks.

One of the most ingenious mechanics in the world is a Frenchman named Le Boullat, living at La Coutaness, who has made himself famous for the curious clocks he manufactures. He can make a clock out of almost any conceivable material. Straw and paper are among the raw materials he uses. For twenty years he has been manufacturing freak clocks and most Frenchmen who want something out of the common in that line apply to Le Boullat.

A while ago he turned a lot of newspapers into pulp, mixed it with hardening substance and carved the clock out of the compound. Even the wheels and all the machinery of the clock were made of this material. Naturally this curious clock does not keep very correct time, but the wonder is that it goes at all. The newspaper clock is one of Mr. Le Boullat's latest triumphs.

Another of his designs appears to be merely a collection of large and small sticks held together by wires. It is only upon close inspection that one sees that it is a clock constructed on excellent principles. It keeps very fair time, never varying more than two minutes in a week.

Now and then the clockmaker receives commissions from wealthy Frenchmen for clocks of unique design in silver or gold, decorated with precious stones. Some of these clocks are entirely made of gold, with diamond-tipped hands, and rubies, garnets, pearls, opals and emeralds to represent the figures on the dial. Some of his clocks are beautiful works of art and a few of the most interesting specimens are among the smallest of timepieces.

Her Father Was Not a Liar.

There is a little girl in Detroit whose passion for the truth under all circumstances embarrassed her father very much the other day. Not long ago he lost a high-salaried place in a business house because of its absorption by a trust, and in the evening denounced all persons connected with trusts as thieves and robbers. But the trust found that it needed him, and he was soon holding his old place, in addition to a good block of stock. It was noticed that the little girl was deeply impressed with the incident, and looked at her father doubtingly when he was home. One evening there was company at the house, and the host became involved in a heated political debate with a peppery guest. The former made a statement which the latter flatly denied.

"Why, my dear man," laughed the host, "you don't mean to call me a liar?"

"No, he don't," declared the little one, as she sprang in front of the visitor and glared at him with flaming eyes, "and I won't have it. My papa is a robber and a thief, but he is no liar!"

The explanation was soon secured from the child, and the hilarity following the expose was the joy of the evening.—New York Tribune.

Air Torpedo.

The Swedish government has given 5,069 kroner ($1,340) to Major W. T. Unge for the purpose of making further experiments with the air torpedo invented by him. Major Unge's invention is patented under the name of "the flying torpedo," is intended to convey through the air large explosive charges for considerable distances, and looks like an elongated cannon shell. It is propelled through the air in the same manner as a rocket. In a separate compartment the torpedo contains some kind of slow-burning chemical composition, the propelling charge, which generates gases in large quantities. In the base of the shell is a turbine through which these gases escape, thus furnishing the motive power and causing the shell to rotate around its axis.

Ingenious.

The most recent triumph of the French postal administration is an ingenious little machine which not only automatically weighs letters and samples, but records on an indicator at the side the amount required for stamps. When the article deposited on the balance exceeds the regulation weight, the indicator promptly hoists the sign, "Too heavy."

America's First White Child.

The first white child born on United States soil was the granddaughter of White, the governor of Roanoke Island. She was christened Virginia Dare, and her birthday was on Aug. 18, 1587.

Slow but Not Sure.

"They are not engaged yet? I suppose he is slow and sure."

"Well, he's slow, but she isn't at all sure."—Brooklyn Life.

Water for Plants.

Plants need a good deal more water as the days grow longer and warmer than they do in midwinter.

Woman may be at the bottom of all man's troubles, yet without her life would not be worth living.

ATTIRE FOR AUTUMN.

RINGING CHANGES ON BOLERO AND ETON.

Novelty Depends Upon the Garment's Embellishment—Some Up-to-Date Examples—Vogue of Princess and Polonaise Gowns—Gotham Fashions.

New York correspondence:

RINGING changes on bolero and eton are to continue, and the eton especially is to come in for much fall favor. Suits of black cloth, with jaunty little etons, are to be very popular. The skirts are trimmed with stitched bands of black taffeta, or are appliqued with bands of the silk. They are made circular and show the Spanish flounce in some form or other. The jackets are cutaway in front, the edges at the sides finished with a band of white cloth or satin embroidered in black or Oriental colors and finished with rows of fancy gilt or cut steel buttons.

AS BOLEROS ARE TO BE SHAPED AND FINISHED.

Some of the jackets are made to blouse and are finished with a belt of gold passementerie, the bishop sleeves having cuffs of the same. Those trimmed with the Persian embroidery look very fine, their buttons showing the Persian colors.

In dressy get-ups there is little uniformity about boleros. Once a type can be recognized in one of these little jackets or effects, its stylishness lessens much, so great is the demand for originality in them. Nowadays the novelty of the bolero depends chiefly upon its embellishment rather than upon its cut, the latter point having been about exhausted long ago. Nor are many new ways discovered of employing familiar trimmings. In consequence the bolero becomes a field for displaying the latest excruciation in trimming, and the fall rule indorses a-plenty of it even when its appearance is rather striking. Four up-to-date boleros appear in the first two of the accompanying pictures. First is shown a bright red canvas cloth trimmed with black silk passementerie and gilt buttons, and made with waistcoat fronts of white cloth. Then at the left, in the next picture, comes a black taffeta, finished with Oriental embroidery. A sleeved bolero of ivory lace is next, this being worn with a gown of old rose silk figured with white. The material of the last example was white satin foulard figured with red dots. Applied black and gold lace trimmed it handsomely. Oriental embroideries will be used a great deal as bolero trimming. The abundance of such garments will probably make innocuous the very conspicuous trimmings of this sort that are to be had.

With nearly every change of season comes an attempt to popularize the princess gown. This fall's essay doubtless will have as much of success as had the others—it will secure the favorable attention only of those women whose figures are sufficiently shapely to carry off the trying cut successfully. This fall's bid on behalf of the princess gown will be by means of trimming both skirt and bodice portions with bands of black mechlin insertion, and by having the deep yoke and sleeves of cream all over lace over white satin or silk, or of smocked and gathered white chiffon. The light shades of broadcloth will be used for these gowns. Handsome two-toned taffeta petticoats, with corsets combined, are worn with them. The petticoat is finished with numerous lace ruffles.

Far more numerous than princess gowns will be polonaise arrangements, which promise to be a striking feature of the fall fashions. As yet they are confined to costly fabrics or elaborate costumes, anad women may not indorse them so generally as to bring them into simple rigs. Yet the chances are in favor of their multiplying rapidly. One is sketched in the concluding picture. It was of white foulard figured with black, its front of tucked black chiffon over pale yellow. Heavy cream and gold lace and black velvet trimmed it. Silks in large figures are used almost exclusively for the polonaise so far, and it is gathered to hang full. This front was an exception to the rule that calls for a white front. Showy fronts will appear in many gowns not made in one. The second dress of this group is an example of this fashion, which verges on the conspicuous only because of the front's striking increase of width at the foot. As it often is of contrasting material, the result not infrequently is staggering. Here the front was accordeon-pleated yellow louisine silk, the dress goods being a light-brown broadcloth.

At least a pretense of lightness and airiness in dressy gowns is to be made till snow flies. Materials will change with the seasons, and the trimmings naturally will be the latest to be put forward, but in the making will be not a suggestion of cold weather. Thus the light and semi-transparent cloths of summer and the many tricks of airy trimming will be prolonged. It will be a fine notion for stylish dressmakers, whose fall output hardly can be used in winter, and she who wants to get more wear out of her summer dress may not find the idea amiss, yet stylish as it is, it is backed only by the basis on which senseless fads are built. Still not a few of the dresses are very pretty. One remains in this picture, a pearl gray etamine applied with cream maltese lace bands.

THREE TYPES OF FALL ATTIRE.

Fine lace effects in silk or lisle still continue the style in hosiery. Gaudy figures or striking ideas are abjured.