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—Mrs. Wiggs

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In This Frank and Gripping Story the Man, as Judge, Sits in Sentence on the Girl Tried for Their Sin.

"Do you call yourself a man, bringing disgrace on your name and family?"

THIS BEGINS THE STORY

Victor Stowell, son of the Deemster or Chief Judge of the Isle of Man, is handsome and of fine nature. He is in love with Fenella Stanley, daughter of the Governor, a beautiful girl and with advanced views on the rights of women. In a moment of mutual passion he has had illicit relations with Bessie Collister, a handsome peasant girl, stepdaughter of Dan Baldromma, a hard firebrand. She is loved by Alick Gell, Victor's chum and fellow attorney. Victor feels he must marry her, especially when he learns she is trying to educate herself. But he is unable to tell his beloved Fenella his sordid secret. Gell tells Victor he wishes to marry Bessie. With the burden of the wrong off him Victor proposes to Fenella. Meanwhile Bessie's mother goes to see Mrs. Gell.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

"IF YOU plaze, ma'am," said Mrs. Collister, huskily.

Isabella Gell, a sour-faced young woman, came into the room and stood behind her mother's chair. Mrs. Collister took the seat that was assigned to her, and fumbled the ribbons of her bonnet to loosen them.

HALL CAINE

"It's about my daughter, ma'am."

"Well?"

"My daughter and your son, ma'am."

"Eh?"

"Caesar Qualtrough, of the Kays, has seen them together. They're living down Castletown way, they're saying."

"Living * * * my son and your daughter?"

"So they're saying, ma'am."

"I don't believe it! I don't believe a word of it!"

"I wish in my heart I could say the same, ma'am. But it's truth enough, I'm fearing."

"And if it is—I don't say it is, but if it is—why have you come to me?"

Then trembling all over Mrs. Collister continued her story. Her poor girl was in trouble. When a girl was in trouble the world could be cruel hard on her. Nobody would think the cruel hard it could be. If a girl did wrong it was because somebody she was fond of had promised to marry her. What else would she do it for? When a young man had behaved like that to a poor girl he ought to keep his word to her. And if he had a mother, and she was a good Christian woman * * *

Mrs. Gell, who was beating her foot on the carpet, broke in impatiently.

"In short, you think my son ought to marry your daughter?"

"It's nothing but right, ma'am."

"And you've come here to ask me to tell him to do so?"

"If you plaze, ma'am."

"Well, I never!" said Isabella.

"She's a mother herself, I was thinking, and if one of her own girls was in the same position * * *"

"The idea!" said Isabella.

"Mrs. Collister," said Mrs. Gell, with a proud lift of her head, "I was sorry when I heard of the trouble your daughter had brought on you, but what you are doing now is a piece of great assurance."

"But Bessie is a good girl, ma'am. And if she married your son you would never have raison to be ashamed of her."

"Good indeed! If a girl isn't ashamed to be living with a young man the less said about her goodness the better."

"Aw well, ma'am," said Mrs. Collister (her faltering tongue had become firmer and her timid eyes had begun to flash), "if she's living with the young man, he's living with her, and the shame is the same for both, I'm thinking."

Mrs. Gell drew herself up in her chair.

"I'm astonished at you, Mrs. Collister! A woman yourself, and not seeing the difference."

"Aw yes, difference enough, ma'am! And when a young man doesn't keep his word it's the woman that's knowing it best by the trouble that's coming on her."

Mrs. Gell, whose anger was rising, lifted her chin again and said, "If your daughter is in trouble, Mrs. Collister, how are we to know that she had not brought it on her own head, just to get Alick to marry her?"

"The creature!" said Isabella.

"And how are we to know that you and your husband have not encouraged the girl in her wickedness just to get our son for your son-in-law?"

"Aw well, ma'am," said Mrs. Collister (she was fumbling at the strings of her bonnet to tighten them), "if you are thinking as bad of me as that * * *"

"You talk of the danger to your daughter if my son doesn't marry her," said Mrs. Gell. "But what of the danger to my son if he does? His life will be ruined. He will never be able to raise his head in the island again. His father will disown him. Marry your daughter indeed! Not only will I not ask him to marry her, but if I see the slightest danger of his doing anything so foolish I will do everything I can to prevent it."

"Aw, well, we'll say no more, ma'am," said Mrs. Collister, and she shuffled to her feet.

But Mrs. Gell was up before her.

"Alexander Gell, son of the Speaker and grandson of Archdeacon Mylechreest, married to the stepdaughter of Dan Baldromma and the nameless offspring of Liza Collister * * *"

"Ma'am!"

Mrs. Collister had hobbled to the door, and was going out, humbled and beaten, when Mrs. Gell's last words cut her to the quick. For more than twenty years she had taken the punishment of her own sin and bowed her head to the lash of it, but at this insult to her child the weak and timid creature turned about, as brave as a lion and as fierce as a fury.

"I'm not your quality, I know that, ma'am," she said, breathing quickly, "but a day is coming, and maybe it's near, when we'll be standing together where we'll both be equal. Just two old mothers, and nothing else between us. If you've loved your son, I've loved my daughter, whatever she is, ma'am. And when the One who reads all hearts is after asking me what I did for my child in the day of her trouble, I'll be telling Him I came here to beg you on my knees to save her from a life of sin and shame, and you wouldn't, because your worldly pride prevented. And then it's Himself, ma'am, will be judging between us!"

II

There had been a sitting of the Keys that day, and when the Speaker returned home he found his wife on the sofa with a damp handkerchief over her forehead and a bottle of smelling salts in her hand. She told him what had happened.

"Well, well," he said, "so that's what it means. But there's no knowing what hedge the hare will jump from."

His figure was less burly than before, his head was more bald and his full beard was whiter, but his eyes flashed with the same ungovernable fire.

"That girl must be a thoroughly bad one," said Mrs. Gell. "It's not the first time she has got our Alick into trouble, remember. We must save our son from the designing young hussy."

"Tut! It's not the girl I'm troubling about."

"Who else, then?"

"The man! I might have expected as much, though!"

Coming home in the train he had had some talk with Kerruish, his advocate and agent.

Dan Baldromma, who was back with his rent, was refusing to pay, and saying, "Let the Spaker fetch me to Coort, and I'll tell him the raison."

"Then can't you settle with the man, Archie?"

"Settle with Dan? I'll settle with Alick first, Bella, and if he has given that scoundrel the whiphand of me I'll break every bone in his body."

"But it may not be true. It cannot be true. Unless Alick tells me so himself, I'll never believe a word of it."

They were at tea in the dining room, country fashion, the Speaker at the head of the table with a plate of fish before him, and his wife and daughters at either side, when Alick entered.

"Hellos!" he cried, with a forced gayety. But only his mother responded to his greeting and made room for him by her side. She saw that he was paler and thinner, and that his hand trembled when he took his cup.

The Speaker, who had turned his rough shoulder to his son, tried to restrain himself from breaking out on him until the meal would be over and he could take him into his own room, but before long his impatience overcame him.

"What's this we're hearing about you—that you are carrying on with a girl?"

"Do you mean Bessie Collister, sir?" said Alick.

"Certainly I mean Bessie Collister. And I thought you gave me your word that you would see no more of her."

"But that was the promise of a boy, sir. Did you expect it to bind the man also?"

"The man? The man!" said the Speaker, mimicking his son's voice in a mincing treble. "Do you call yourself a man, bringing disgrace on your name and family."

"What disgrace, sir?"

"What disgrace? All the island seems to have heard of it. Is it necessary to tell you? Living secret, so they say, with a woman who isn't fit company for your mother and sisters."

"If anybody told you that, sir," said Alick (his lower lip was trembling), "he told you a lie—a damned lie, sir!"

"There!" cried Mrs. Gell, turning to her husband. "What did I say? It isn't true, you see."

"Of course it isn't true, mother; and the best proof that I'm not behaving dishonorably to Bessie Collister is that I intend to marry her."

It was a sickening moment for Mrs. Gell, and the Speaker, for an instant, was dumfounded.

"Eh? What? You intend to marry. * * *"

"Yes, sir; and that's why I'm here today—to bring you the news, and to ask you to restore the allowance you cut down in the spring, you know."

"That * * * that * * * that girl—* * *"

"Archie!" cried Mrs. Gell, indicating their daughters.

"Bessie is a good girl, father," said Alick. "What happened before she was born wasn't her fault, sir."

"So you've come to bring us the news and to ask me to double your allowance?"

"If you please, sir. You couldn't wish your son and his wife * * *"

"His wife! There you are, Bella! That's what I've been working day and night thirty years for—to see my son throw half my earnings—all that I can't will away from him—into the hands of a man like Dan Baldromma!"

"But Alick will be reasonable," said Mrs. Gell. "He'll give the girl up."

"He'll have to do that, and quick, too, or I'll cut off his allowance altogether."

"Do you mean it, sir?" said Alick—he was pushing his chair back.

"Do I mean it? Certainly I mean it. You'll give the girl up or never another penny of mine shall you see as long as I live!"

"All right," said Alick, rising from the table, "I'll earn my own living."

The Speaker broke into a peal of scornful laughter. "You earn your living! That's rich!"

"Give her up?" cried Alick. "I'll break stones on the highway or porter on the pier before I'll give up her little finger!"

"You fool! You confounded fool! But no fear! She'll give you up when she finds you've lost your income."

"Will she? I'll trust her for that, sir."

"Then get away back to her—you'll not be the first by a long way."

Alick, who had been trying to laugh, stopped his laughter suddenly, and said, "What do you mean by that, sir?"

"Mean? Do you want me to tell you what I mean?"

"Archie," cried Mrs. Gell, and again she indicated their daughters.

"Get out of this, will you?" cried the Speaker to the girls, who had been sitting with their noses in their teacups.

The girls fled from the room, but stood outside to listen.

"Father," said Alick, "you must tell me what you mean."

"Mean! Mean! Don't stand there cross-examining your own father.

"You know what I mean! If half they say about the young brat * * * is true she's fit enough for it, anyway."

"If any other man had said that," said Alick, quivering, "I should have knocked him down, sir."

"What's that? You threaten me?" cried the Speaker. His voice was like the scream of a sea-gull, and making a step toward Alick, he lifted his clenched fist to him.

Mrs. Gell intervened, and Alick retreated a pace or two.

"Take care, sir," he said. "You can't treat me like that now. I'm not a child any longer."

"Then get away to your woman * * * and to hell, if you want to."

"There was no need to tell me twice, sir. I'm going. And as God is my witness, I'll never set foot in this house again."

At the next moment the peacocks were screaming outside, and the Speaker, who had thrown up the window, was shouting through it in a broken roar:

"Alick! Alick Gell! Come back, you damned scoundrel! Alick! Alexander * * *."

They had to carry him upstairs and send for Dr. Clucas. It had been another of his paralyzing brain-storms. It was not to be expected that he could bear many more of them.

CHAPTER XVII

The Burning Boat

Two days later, Gell was stepping into the train for Castletown on his way to Derby Haven.

"Give me up because my income is gone? Not Bessie! Not Bessie Collister!"

But Bessie had gone through deep waters since he had seen her last.

From the first Victor Stowell had disappointed her. To live in the dark—hidden away, unrecognized, suppressed—it had not been according to her expectations. Her pride, too, had been wounded by being sent back to school. It was true that without being asked, Mr. Stowell had promised to marry her at some future time, but perhaps that was only because he was the son of the Deemster and therefore afraid of her stepfather and of the cry there would be all over the island if anything became known.

If it had only been Alick. Alick would not have been ashamed of her. He would have taken her just as she was and never seen any shortcomings.

After the first days at Derby Haven she had found herself looking forward to Alick's visits. When she knew he was coming everything brightened up in her eyes and even her tiresome lessons become delightful. Before long she felt her heart leap up whenever the Misses Brown called, "Bessie, a gentleman to see you!"

It is easy to kindle a fire on a warm hearth. Alick had been Bessie's first sweetheart, perhaps her only one. Suddenly a wonderful thing happened to her. She found herself in love. She had thought she had always been in love with somebody, but now she realized that she had never been in love before. She was in love with Alick Gell. And she wished to become his wife.

That altered everything. She began to see how ignorant she was compared with Alick, and how much she was beneath him. She remembered his three tall sisters who held their heads so high at anniversaries and bazaars, and thought what a shocking thing it would be if they were able to look down on her. How she worked to be worthy of him!

She had no qualms about Stowell. Her only anxiety was about Alick. She was certain that he loved her, yet what a fight she had for him! He was always talking about Stowell, and praising him up to her. When he excused his friend for not coming to see her she was quite sure it was all nonsense. And when he gave her persents and said they were from Stowell she knew where they came from.

One day he brought a wrist-watch with the usual message, and after he had put it on (how his hands were trembling!) she tried to thank him, but didn't know how to do so.

At last an idea occurred to her. They were walking on the Langness, just by the ruin of a windmill, whose walls and roof had been carried away by a gale.

"Alick," she said, "I wonder if my new watch is right by the clock at Castle Rushen?

Alick put his hands to his eyes like blinkers (for the sun was setting) and looked across the key. While he did so, Bessie slipped off on tiptoe and hid behind the walls of the windmill. As soon as she was missed there was a laugh and a shout and then a chase. Bessie dodged and Alick doubled, Bessie dodged again, but at length she slipped into a hole, and at the next moment Alick caught her up and kissed her.

"Now, what have you done?" she said, and her face was suffused with blushes.

To be continued tomorrow

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Little Benny's Notebook

By Lee Pape

Last nite ma stopped darning holes out of socks and sed to pop, O by the way, Willyum, Mr. Lions called you up before you got home.

Mr. who? sed pop.

Mr. Lions, sed ma, and pop sed, You must meen Mr. Larsen.

No I mussent, wy must I? sed ma.

Because I dont know eny Lions, sed pop.

Is that my fault? sed ma, and pop sed, No, of corse not, its nobody fault, its jest one of lifes little ironies, I sippose. Wat did Mr. Larsen say?

I gess I know Lions wen I heer it, sed ma; and pop sed, Do you wunt to bet on it, wat will you bet? and ma sed, I never gambel but I bet you 5 dollers.

Rite, its a bet, now Ill jest get Larsen on the fone and see if he called me up, sed pop. And he called up a number, saying, Is Mr. Larsen home, is that you, Larsen, did you call me up this evening, O did you, wut time? O, about 6, heh? Sure I will, Ill drop in at your office tomorro.

And he hung up and sed to ma, 5 bones, please, and ma sed, Dont be silly, I was rite.

Yee gods and little income taxes, how do you make that out? sed pop, and ma sed, Because he pernounced his name as if it sounded like Lions.

Well suffering logick, is that the same thing as his name axuilly being Lions? sed ma.

Certeny it is, it is as far as Im concerned, sed ma.

Benny, never bet a woman enything about enything, sed pop.

Wich maybe I wont.

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