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# THE MASTER OF MAN :-: By Sir Hall Caine

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*Is Man's Law Too Hard for the Woman in the Case? Is Conscience Enough Punishment for Him, While She Pays the Legal Penalty?*

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

Gell sat on a low stool at Bessie's feet, and began to pour out his story

*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 harsh 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 marry Bessie. With the burden of the wrong off him Victor proposes to Fenella. Alick is driven from home by his choleric father.*

*AND HERE IT CONTINUES*

AFTER that there could be no disguise between them. Bessie felt no shame, and it never occurred to her that she had been guilty of treason. But Gell talked about disloyalty and said he would never be at ease until he made a clean breast of it to Stowell.

HALL CAINE

"Then go and tell him we couldn't help loving each other," she said.

When he was gone she was very happy. Mr. Stowell would give her up. Of course he would. What had happened between them was dead and buried. Whatever else he was, Victor Stowell was a gentleman. He would say nothing to Alick.

Then came a shock. On the following morning she felt unwell. She had often felt unwell since she came to Derby Haven, and the Misses Brown, simple old maids, seeing no cause except the change in the girl's way of life, wanted to send for a doctor. But doctors were associated in Bessie's mind with death. If you saw a doctor going into a farmhouse one day you saw a coffin going in the next.

Chemists were not open to the same objection. Often on market days, after she had sold out her basket of butter and eggs, she had called at the chemist's at Ramsey for medicine for her mother. So, saying nothing to her housemates, she slipped round to the chemist's at Castletown and asked for a bottle of mixture.

The chemist, an elderly man, with a fatherly face, smiled at her and said:

"But what is it for, miss?"

Bessie described her symptoms, and then the smiling face was grave.

"Are you a married woman, ma'am?" asked the chemist.

Bessie caught her breath, stared at the man for a moment with eyes full of fear, and then turned and fled out of the shop.

All that day she felt dizzy and deaf. The earth seemed to be slipping from under her. Memories of what she had heard from older women came springing to the surface of her mind, and she asked herself why she had not thought of this before. For a long time she struggled to persuade herself that the chemist was wrong, but conviction forced itself upon her at last.

Then she asked herself what she was to do, and remembering what she had learned as a child at home of her mother's miserable life before her marriage, she found only one answer to that question. She must ask Mr. Stowell to marry her. The thought of parting from Alick was heartbreaking. But the most terrible thing was that she found herself hoping that Stowell would refuse to release her.

It had been a wretched day, dark and cheerless, with driving mist and drizzling rain. Toward nightfall the old maids lighted a fire for her in the sitting room, which was full of quaint knicknacks and old glass and china. The tide, which was at the bottom of the ebb, was sobbing against the unseen breakwater, and the gulls on the cobbles of the shore were calling continually.

Bessie was crouching over the fire with her chin in her hand when she heard the sneck of the garden gate, a quick step on the gravel, a light knock at the front door, a familiar voice in the lobby, and then old Miss Ethel saying behind her:

"A gentleman to see you, Bessie."

Her heart did not leap up as before, and she did not rise with her former alacrity, but Alick Gell came into the room like a rush of wind.

"What's this—unwell?" he cried.

"It's nothing! I shall be better in the morning," she said.

"Of course you will."

And then, after a kiss, Gell sat on a low stool at Bessie's feet, stretched his long legs toward the fire, and began to pour out his story.

He had seen Stowell and the matter had turned out just as she had expected. Splendid fellow! Best chap in the world, bar none!

"But what do you think, Bess? The most extraordinary coincidence! Dear old Vic, he has been busy falling in love, too! Fact! Fenella Stanley, daughter of the Governor! Magnificent girl, and Vic is madly in love with her! So there's to be no heartbreaking on either side, and that's the best of it. Makes one think there must be something in Providence, doesn't it?"

He was laughing so loud that the china in the room rang, but Bessie was turning cold with terror.

"And * * * what about your father?" she faltered.

"My father?

"Well * * * to tell you the truth there was a bit of a breeze there," he said, and then followed the story of the scene at the Speaker's.

"But no matter! I'm not without money, so we can be married at once, and the sooner the better."

"But Alick," she said (she was stroking his hand and she was trying to draw it away), "do you think it's best?"

"Best? Why, of course I think it's best. Don't you?"

She did not reply.

"Don't you?" he said again, and then, getting no answer, he became aware that she, who had been so eager for their marriage before he went to Ballamoar, was now holding back.

"Bessie," he said, "has anything happened while I've been away?"

"No! Oh no!"

"You're * * you're not thinking of the loss of the income, are you?"

"No, no; 'deed, no!"

"I knew you wouldn't. When my father taunted me with that, saying you would give me up as soon as you knew my allowance was gone, I said, 'Not Bessie! I'll trust her for that, sir.'"

Bessie began to cry. Alick was bewildered.

"What is it, then? Tell me! Are you * * * are you thinking of Stowell?"

At that name she was seized by the mad impulse which comes to people on dizzy heights when they wish to throw themselves over—she wanted to blurt out the truth, to confess everything. But before she could speak Alick was saying:

"I shouldn't blame you if you were. I'm not his equal—I know that, Bessie. But even if he were free I shouldn't give you up to him now. No, by God, not to him or to any one."

His voice was breaking. She looked at him. There were tears in his eyes. She could bear up no longer. With the cry of a drowning soul she flung her arms about him and sobbed on his breast.

An hour later, having comforted and quieted her, Gell was going off with swinging strides through the mist to catch the last train back to Douglas.

"She was thinking of me—that was it," he was telling himself. "Thought I would come to regret the sacrifice and wanted to save me from being cut off by my family. So unselfish! Never thinking of herself, bless her!"

And Bessie, in her bedroom, was saying to herself: "He's that fond of me that he'll forgive me, whatever happens."

She lay a long time awake, with her arms under her head, looking up at the ceiling.

"Yes, Alick will forgive me, whatever happens," she thought.

And then she blew out her candle, buried her head in her pillow, and fell asleep.

II

When Gell reached the railway station he found the carriages waiting at the platform, half-full of impatient passengers. A trial, which was going on in the Castle, was nearing its close, and the station-master had received orders that the last train to town was to be kept back for the Judges and advocates.

"The Peel fisherman," thought Gell. And, remembering that this was the case in which Stowell was to represent the Attorney General, he walked over to the courthouse, whose lantern-light was showing like a hazy white cloud above the Castle walls.

The little place was thick with sea mist, hot with the acid odor of perspiration, and densely crowded but breathlessly silent. The trial was over, the prisoner had been found guilty, and the Deemster (it was Deemster Taubman, sitting with the Clerk of the Rolls as Acting Governor) was beginning to pronounce sentence:

"Prisoner at the bar, it will be my duty to communicate to the proper quarter the jury's recommendation to mercy, but I can hold out no hope that it will be of any avail. You have been found guilty of the willful murder of your wife, therefore I bid you prepare * * *."

And then followed those dread words in that dread stillness, which bring thoughts of the day of doom.

Gell caught one glimpse of the prisoner, as he stood in the dock, in his fisherman's guernsey, looking steadfastly into the face of his Judge, and another glimpse as a way was cleared through the spectators and he walked with a strong step to the door leading to the cells.

Then the courthouse cleared to a low rumble that was like the muffled murmuring that is heard after a funeral.

Gell asked for Stowell, and was told that his friend had gone down to the Deemster's room with one of the advocates for the defense to draw up the terms of the recommendation. Therefore he returned to the station with a group of his fellow advocates, and on the way back he heard the story of the trial—little knowing how close it was to come to him.

The prisoner (his name was Morrison) had married the murdered woman in the winter. She had been a comely girl who had always borne a good character. On their wedding morning they had received many presents, one of them being a fishing boat. This had been the gift of a distant relation of the bride's, a middle-aged man who had since married a rich widow.

At Easter, Morrison had gone off with the fleet to the mackerel fishing at Kinsale, and while there he had received an anonymous letter. It told him that his young wife had given birth, less than six months after their marriage, to a still-born child.

Morrison had said nothing about the letter, but he had made inquiries about the man who had given him the boat, and been told that he had borne a bad reputation.

At the end of the mackerel season Morrison had returned to the island with the rest of the fleet, and for everybody else there had been the usual joyful homecoming.

It had been late at night on the first of June, when the stars were out and the moon was in its first quarter. As soon as the boats had been sighted outside the Castle Rock the sound signal had gone up from the Rocket House, and within five minutes the fishermen's wives had come flying down to the quay, with their little shawls thrown over their heads and pinned under their chins.

Then, as the boats had come gliding into the harbor, there had been the shrill questions of the women ashore and the deep-toned answers of the men afloat:

"Are you there, Bill?" "Is it yourself, Nancy?"

Some of the younger women, who had had babies born while their husbands had been away, had brought them down with them, and one young wife, holding up her little one for her man to see, by the light of the moon and the harbor-master's lantern, had cried:

"Here he is, boy! What do you think of him?"

Almost before the boats could be brought to their moorings the fishermen had leaped ashore in their long boots and gone off home with their wives, laughing and talking.

Morrison had not gone. His wife had not been down to meet him. Somebody had shouted from the quay that she was still keeping her bed and was waiting at home for him. But he had been in no hurry to go to her. When everything was quiet he had shouldered his boat to the top of the harbor, unstepped her mast and run her ashore on the dry bank above the bridge.

Then going back to the quay, which was now deserted, he had broken the padlock of an open yard for ship's stores, taken possession of a barrel of pitch, rolled it down to the bank by the bridge, fixed it under his boat, pulled out its plug, applied a match to it, and then waited until both barrel and boat were afire and burning fiercely.

After that he had walked home through the little sleeping town to his house in the middle of a cobweb of streets at the back of the beach. Opening the door (it had been left on the latch for him) he had bolted it on the inside, and then going to the bedroom and finding his young wife in bed, with a frightened look under a timid smile, he had charged her with her unchastity, compelled her to confess to it, and then strangled her to death with his big hands—the marks of his broad thumbs, black with tar, being on her throat and bosom.

In the middle of the night the fishermen who lived in the streets nearest to the harbor, awakened by a red glow in their bedrooms, had said to their wives:

"What for are they burning the gorse on Peel hill at this time of the year?"

But others, who were neighbors of Morrison's, having heard cries from his house in the night, had gathered in front of his door in the morning, and, getting no answer to their knocking, had burst it open and found the woman lying dead on the bed and the man huddled up on the floor at the foot of it.

**To be continued tomorrow**

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