

# THE MASTER OF MAN—By Sir Hall Caine

An Outspoken and Moving Study of a Deep Sex Problem by the Noted Author of "The Manxman," "The Deemster," "The Eternal City," "The Woman Thou Gavest Me," Etc.

### PERSONS OF THE STORY

**VICTOR STOWELL**—A brilliant young advocate, appointed despite his youth Deemster, in which position he sits in judgment on a fellow-sinner. He is high principled and likable, though in a moment of mutual passion he is guilty of a later preference over the secret sin, had official relations with.

**BESSIE COLLISTER**—A handsome but illiterate peasant girl. She has a child which is her only treasure. She is arrested for murdering her babe. Bessie really loves.

**ALICK GELL**—Agreeable but somewhat weak, he persuades Bessie to betray the secret sin, and in the opposition of his father.

**SPEAKER GELL**—The rich and tyrannical head of the Manx Parliament.

**GENERAL STANLEY**—A great-hearted and beautiful girl with advanced ideas on woman's rights who is in love with her father.

**GENERAL STANLEY**—Governor of the Isle of Man.

**DAN BALDRAMA**—A brutal father, stepfather of Bessie, and who tries to use her trouble, for which he thinks Gell is responsible, as a lever to advance his own fortune.



And then, burying her face in Fenella's lap, Bessie told her story.

### Chapter XXIX.

#### Two Women—The Two Men

ON BEING taken back to her cell Bessie had burst in a fit of hysteria. "The Deemster! They're only trying to catch me out! They may kill me. Why don't they do it then? Why don't they finish me? This waiting is the worst."

Her face was blue with rage, her voice was coarse and husky, her mouth was full of ugly and vulgar words—all the traces of her common upbringing coming uppermost.

"Get up, out of breath and exhausted, she broke into sobs. This quieted her and after a while she asked what had become of her mother. The woman who was alone with her (the woman warder having gone home ill), answered that some good women had carried her mother away and were going to take care of her."

"Mr. Gell? Upstairs. He sent me down to speak to you."

"I won't speak to any one. They're all alike. They're only trying to get me."

Fenella reproved the girl tenderly. Could she not see that the Deemster himself was trying to help her? He had adjourned the court to give her another chance and she could only obtain away the evidence of the scarf.

"I won't explain anything. Why can't you leave me alone?"

"Bessie! Tell the truth: the whole truth: it will be best for you; best for everybody."

After that Bessie became calmer, and Fenella (little knowing what she was doing for herself) pleaded with the girl to confess.

"I think I understand," she said, "sometimes a girl goes in so much that she can't deny him anything. Thousands and thousands of women have been like that. Not the worst women either. But the dark hour comes when the man's hand is on her neck, she cannot—and then she tries to cover up everything. And that's your case, isn't it?"

"Don't ask me. I can't tell you," cried Bessie.

Fenella tried again, still more tenderly.

"And sometimes a girl who has done wrong tries to shield somebody else—somebody who is as guilty as herself, perhaps. Thousands of women have done that, too, ever since the world began. They shouldn't, though. A bad man counts on a woman's sin, and she should stand out no matter what she may be shamed, and that's what you are going to do, aren't you?"

But still Bessie cried, "I can't! I can't!"

"Don't be afraid," said Fenella. "The Deemster is not like some other judges. He has such pity for a girl in your position that he will do what is right by her whoever the man may be."

"Oh, why do you torture me?" cried Bessie.

"I don't mean to do that," said Fenella. "But a girl has to think of her own position in the long run, and it's only right she should know what it is. If she is charged with a terrible crime, and there is evidence against her which she cannot gainsay, the law has the right to punish her. It is not the most terrible punishment, perhaps. Have you thought of that, Bessie?"

Bessie shuddered and laid hold of Fenella by both hands.

"Oh, the other way, if she can explain—"

"If she can say that her child was born dead and that she merely concealed the birth of it, or that she killed it by accident, perhaps, when she was alone and didn't know what she was doing?"

Bessie was breathing rapidly, and Fenella (still unconscious of the fearful game the unseen powers were playing with her) followed up her advantage.

"You can trust the Deemster, Bessie. He will be merciful to a girl who has stood silent in her shame to save the honor of the man she loves—I'm sure he will. And the jury, too, when they see that you did not intend to kill your child, they may—"

"I know, I know, they may even acquit you altogether!"

Bessie was silent now, and Fenella could see, in the half darkness of the cell, that the girl's big pathetic eyes were gazing at her with a look that said—

"And then the people who have been thinking hard of you, because you have deceived them, will censure you when they see that what you did, however wrong it was, and even criminal, was done perhaps for somebody you loved better than yourself."

Suddenly Bessie dropped to her knees at Fenella's feet and cried:

"I confess, I will confess, yes, it's true. I had a child, and I killed it. I killed it. But I didn't mean to—God knows I didn't."

"Tell me everything," said Fenella. "And then, burying her face in Fenella's lap and clinging to her, Bessie told her story, mentioning no names, but mentioning and excusing nothing."

Before she had finished, Fenella had come to an end, and Fenella, who had been sitting there, and "Yes," and asking short and eager questions (the two women speaking in whispers as if afraid that the dark walls would hear), felt herself seized by a great terror.

"Then it was not Mr. Gell who took her into his rooms when your father shut you out?"

"No, no! Would to God it had been—"

"Then who was it?"

"I don't ask you that. I cannot answer you."

"Who was it? Tell me, tell me."

"I can't! I can't!"

"Was it in Ramsey's chambers?"

"Yes, it was."

"Is he anything to you?"

Bessie dropped her head still deeper

into Fenella's lap and made no answer.

"Is he?" said Fenella, and in her gathering terror, getting no reply, she lifted Bessie's head and looked searchingly into her face, as if to probe her soul.

At the next moment the dreadful truth had fallen on her. The girl's fellow-sinner, the man she had been hunting down to punish him, to shame him, to expose him to public obloquy, was Victor Stowell himself.

At the first shock of the revelation the woman in Fenella asserted itself—the simple, natural, deceived and outraged woman. This girl had gone before her. This common, uneducated creature of the fields and the farmyard. For one cruel moment she had a vision of Bessie in Stowell's arms. This was the face he had loved! This was the face he had loved her only—never having loved anybody else.

A feeling of disgust came over her. The girl had not even had the excuse of caring for Stowell. She had been thinking merely of a way of escape from the tyranny of her stepfather. Or perhaps an admixture of sheer animal instinct had impelled her. How degrading it all was!

Bessie, who had begun to realize what she had done, tried to take her hand, but Fenella drew back and cried:

"Don't touch me!"

All the thoughts of years about woman as the victim and the sinner, the woman in the furnace of her own outraged feelings. An almost unconquerable impulse came to leave Bessie to her fate. Let her pay the penalty of her crime. Why shouldn't she?

But after a while a great pity for the girl came over her. If she had sinned, she had also suffered. If she was there in prison, it was only because she had been trying in her ignorant way to wipe out her fault.

But she herself—she had her hopes gone, her love wasted. And Fenella burst into a flood of tears. And then Bessie (the two women had changed places now) began to comfort her.

"I'm sorry. I didn't think what I was doing. Don't cry."

At the next moment they were in each other's arms, crying like children—two ship-brother women on the everlasting ocean of man's changeless lust.

Bessie was the first to recover. She was full of hope and expectation, and she found nothing in the future. Now that she had confessed everything the Deemster would tell the jury to let her off, and then Allick would forgive her also.

"He will forgive me, will he not?"

She was like a child again, and Fenella found a cruel relief in humoring her.

"Yes," she answered.

"When I leave this place I'm going to be so good," said Bessie. "I will make him such a happy life. We'll be married immediately—by bishop or priest, you know—and then leave the Isle of Man and go to America. He often spoke of that, and it will be best for both of us, don't you think so?"

"No doubt, no doubt," said Fenella. At length she remembered that Gell would be waiting for her. She must go. She kissed Bessie on the forehead and she paused, wondering what she was to say and how she was to say it. While she stood there she heard sounds from the cell behind her. Bessie was singing.

Meantime Gell had been fighting his own battle. The black thought which had come hurrying down on him at Bessie's confession, first read the letter which Bessie had left behind her, was torturing him again. It was about the man's sin, and it was to call up the memory of the long line of good and generous things that Stowell had done for him all the way up since he was a boy.

When at last he saw Fenella approaching he searched her face for a ray of hope, but his heart sank at the sight of it.

"Well," she has confessed.

"She had a child?"

"Yes."

"It was born dead?"

"Yes."

"God in heaven!" said Gell, and it seemed to Fenella that at that moment the man's heart had broken.

"She could not do so—nothing being of consequence except the one terrible fact of the man's betrayal."

"God in heaven!" said Gell again, and he tried to leave her.

"What are you going to do in the morning?"

"I don't know."

"Where are you going to now?"

"To—"

"To—"

Again she knew that she ought to say more, but again she could not.

In Gell was making for the gate, and Fenella, bankrupt in heart herself, wanted to comfort him.

"Mr. Gell," she said, "I have been doing you a great injustice. I ask you to forgive me."

With his hand on the bolt he turned his broken face to her.

"That's nothing—nothing now," he said.

And again she heard, "God in heaven!" as the gate closed behind him.

"Ah, here you are, dear!"

It was Janet who had heard the hum of Stowell's car on the drive and had come hurrying out to meet him.

"You've had a tiring day—I can see that," she said, as she poured out a cup of tea for him. "Ah, these high positions! There's nothing to be got without being paid for, as your father used to say."

To escape from Jane's soliloquy and to tire himself out so that he might have a chance of sleeping that night, he walked down to the shore.

A storm was rising. The gulls were flying inland and their white wings were mingling with the black ones of the rocks. The fierce sky to the south, the cold gray of the sea to the north, the black shrouding tower on the stark headland, looking like a blinded light-

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