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**The Girl He Left Behind.**

THE good ship Tamar was bearing up channel before a brisk southwest wind. The passengers were gathered on deck, conversing in little groups, as they stood watching the green English shores, lying bright and still in the afternoon light. But one stood apart from the rest, leaning over the stern taffrail gazing with fixed eyes and thoughtful face. He was a man of about forty-five years of age, of somewhat spare build, with ample brown beard and bronze tanned cheeks. A near scrutiny would have revealed something of sadness in his eyes at the moment, as though the prospect of again setting foot on his native land, from which he had been absent for many years, was not wholly one of pleasure.

George Herder had then looked forward to returning to England with somewhat different feelings from those which he was at present experiencing. Instead of thought of wedding bells, he was coming back with no deeper sentiment in his heart than a desire to see once more the friends and home of his boyhood, before finally settling in the country of his adoption, where he had formed stronger ties, he thought, than any that now existed for him in the land of his birth. And yet a dimness gathered his eyes as the past came back upon him, and his memories were neither gloomy nor misanthropic.

On the afternoon of the following day the Tamar dropped anchor off Gravesend. Most of the unmarried men on board went on shore at once, and among them George Herder. On reaching London he took a cab, and gave the man the address to drive to. He was set down in Heresford Road, Bayswater, at a house in a terrace. He gave the servant who opened the door his name, and, following her up stairs, entered the room into which she showed him. As he did so a man rose from the table at which he was seated, glanced for a moment at the stranger, and then came quickly forward, and grasped him by both hands.

"George, old man, is it you. Welcome back to England. But I can't tell how glad I feel at seeing you again, old fellow!"

"Did you get my telegram?" asked Herder.

"Yes, I got it. I have been talking to the landlady, and she can let you have a bedroom here, if you like, and we can share this room in common. The arrangement might suit you for the present, at any rate. What do you say?"

"It will do capitally," answered Herder. "It will be convenient our being together, for we have much to say to each other. I'll need to be piloted about London, too; I've forgotten my way greatly, and I find many of the places changed."

"I thought of that, too. I am not very busy just now, so we can have a good deal of time together. I shall be free every afternoon by four o'clock."

Fred Hammond held a position of some responsibility in the civil service. Next day George Herder's time was chiefly occupied in looking up the few friends in London with whom he had kept up an acquaintance by correspondence. Hammond and he had finished dinner in their lodgings, and had produced their pipes, when the former said: "I've got an engagement for this evening, which it's too late now to think of getting off. Some very good friends of mine, who live in a square close by, have a sort of musical party and conversation. I am on quite such terms with them as to be able to use the freedom of taking you with me, if you would care to go. I can't promise that you will be greatly interested among a lot of people

who are strangers to you; but we need only stop an hour or so, and it may be less dull than staying here by yourself."

"I don't mind going with you for a short time, if you can use the liberty of introducing me to your friends," said Herder.

Mrs. Norcott entertained a sufficient number of guests that evening to fill her drawing-rooms comfortably, without crowding. Music, conversation and cards for the more elderly of the company, formed the staple of the evening's amusements. The host and hostess received Herder with agreeable geniality; but as the people about him were all entire strangers, it could hardly be otherwise than that George should every now and then feel somewhat at a loss what to do with himself. He had exchanged a few commonplaces with an old Indian officer to whom he had been introduced, and was standing in a corner of the room gazing rather aimlessly about him, when Hammond came up and said: "I'm afraid this isn't very lively for you, but I think we need not stay any longer. I've explained matters to Mrs. Norcott. I just want you to hear this lady play, and then we'll go. She is one of the best amateur pianoforte-players I know, and I always consider it a treat to hear her. You used to be fond of music; I think you'll like this."

The piano stood at the opposite end of the room. While Hammond was speaking, a lady seated herself at it and began playing. As Herder looked at her he started so evidently that it did not escape his companion's notice. Was it possible that he knew that face and figure. The lady was middle-aged, of a rather small and slight figure, with a face not regularly moulded, but soft, refined and expressive; brown hair, with a ripple in it, and brown eyes. The face had lost the rounded curves of girlhood and all the color that once mantled in it; the eye had somewhat faded, and there were not wanting lines upon the brow; but surely George could not be mistaken. The light from a bracket above the piano fell upon the player and revealed her face and figure in clear outline. She played an arrangement of Irish melodies, old and familiar airs all of them, but so delicately and sympathetically played that the whole room was hushed to listen. Conversation ceased for the time, and several of the card players from the adjoining room, abandoning their game, came forward and stood at the doors while the music continued. It was evident that the skill of the performer was well known to many of the company. Herder listened with rapt ears. The music was stirring old memories in his heart, reviving them with a strange power. If anything had been needed to confirm him in his recognition of the performer, the music she had happened to choose would have done so. Were not some of these old airs once his chief favorites—airs that used to haunt him for days together, and that still came back upon him now and then? The music ceased; a murmur of applause went around the room, and the performer rose and left the piano.

"That lady plays admirably," observed Herder to his companion, with an effort to appear calmer than he really felt.

"Ah! I thought you would like her," answered Hammond. "The music is simple enough, but whatever Mrs. Vallance plays is played in a way you don't often meet with."

"Vallance! Are you sure that is the name?" asked George, and the disappointment in his voice was evident.

"Perfectly," replied Hammond, a little surprised. "I know her very well. Why do you doubt it?"

"Oh, it's of no consequence; I suppose I was mistaken; but it's very strange." The last part of Herder's sentence was spoken in an absent, half-musing way, as though the speaker had grown suddenly unconscious of his companion's presence.

"What is strange?" said Hammond. "You seem greatly interested in Mrs. Vallance, George. What is the mystery?"

"Have you known Mrs. Vallance long, Fred?"

"Yes, and I have the pleasure of knowing her pretty intimately. There is somewhat of a little history connected with her."

"Is there? Would you mind telling it to me if it is not a private matter?"

"Certainly, if you wish; it is no secret. But we can't talk here. Let us find Mrs. Norcott and make our adieus."

"I can tell you what I know of Mrs. Vallance," began Hammond, when the two men had reached their lodgings and were again seated, each in an easy chair, at the open window, for it was summer time. "In a few sentences, for it is after all a simple enough story. When Mrs. Vallance was a girl of twenty she was engaged at Plymouth, where she resided, to a young fellow a few years older than herself. Unfortunately, however, he had not the wherewithal to keep a wife, and with the hope of increasing his worldly circumstances more rapidly than he was doing in England, he resolved to emigrate to Australia. He was to return in a short time and take the girl out with him. In Australia he started sheep farming, I believe; but his success was by no means as rapid as he had hoped for. Years passed on, and still there seemed no prospect of his being soon able to return to England. At last the girl received a letter in which her affianced lover—whose name I never happened to hear—stated that he could not possibly say when he would be in a position to fulfil his promise to her. Under these circumstances he could not ask her to wait any longer for him; and he therefore released her from her engagement. Well, the girl was sad depressed enough for a while, they say, but by-and-by she seemed to get over it. About this time Mr. Vallance, an old friend of the father's, came a good deal about the house, and it was soon evident that he was attracted by the daughter. Vallance was a partner in a long-established mercantile house in London, and was reputed to be rich. He was a kind-hearted and estimable man in many ways. The parents looked favorably upon his suit, and, when he proposed for the daughter's hand she accepted him. They were married.

"Mr. Vallance took a handsome house in London, and made a kind husband and a generous son-in-law. But this prosperous condition of things did not last long. In little more than two years after his marriage, the house to which Vallance belonged, to the astonishment of the mercantile world, stopped payment. The affair made a considerable talk in the city at the time. Nobody seemed to have anticipated the firm's failure, and I don't think Mr. Vallance could have had any thought of the possibility of such a change in his circumstances when he married his wife, from the way he took the matter to heart. He never recovered from the shock, and in a year after the firm suspended he died. His widow was left almost entirely dependent upon her own exertions for the support of herself and her two young children. She removed to Plymouth again, began to give music lessons, and in this way has maintained herself and her family ever since; and very nobly she has done it. It was shortly after her husband's death that I became acquainted with her. I have given you the most favorable version of her story. As regards her engagement with Mr. Vallance, there were not wanting people in Plymouth, who hinted their doubts as to whether she had ever received such a letter as I have mentioned from the young fellow in Australia. Gossips said that she lent a willing ear to Mr. Vallance's addresses."

"Was it a general report?" asked Herder.

"Well, it was not uncommon to hear the matter talked of in that way."

"And what is your own opinion?"

"There is no lady of my acquaintance for whom I have a greater respect and liking than for Mrs. Vallance," answered Hammond; "and I would not believe anything unworthy of her."

There was a short pause, during which the two men puffed their pipes in silence. Then Herder said:

"Miss Maurice—that was the young lady's maiden name, I think, though you did not mention it—did receive such a letter as you describe, from her friend in Australia; a letter, too, that released her completely from her long engagement."

"And how on earth do you know all this?" asked Hammond.

"For the simple reason that I am the young fellow that went to Australia."

"You, George!" exclaimed Hammond, starting from his chair, and star-

ling in his companion's face. "How is it I never heard a word of this before? I thought we knew most of each other's affairs as young men."

"Well, Fred, for a year before I became engaged to Miss Maurice you were in Germany with your mother and sister, and I was away, you know, before you came back. I never mentioned my acquaintance with Miss Maurice to you; I was rather a shy and shame-faced fellow, somehow, about that sort of thing, and I did not tell even so close a chum as you about it, though I was on the point of doing so when I started so suddenly for Australia. After that I felt the less inclined to write about the subject, my prospects were so vague, and uncertain in every way."

"It was rather strange, George, that I never heard your name mentioned in the matter, and there was nothing to make me think of connecting you with Miss Maurice's friend. You knew Mrs. Vallance again, then, to-night? I could not think what made your manners so odd."

"Yes, I knew her. She is much changed, of course, though not more so, I suppose, than was to be expected. I left behind me a girl of twenty, with a bloom on her cheek like a June rose and eyes like sunshine. Both the rose-red and the light in her eyes have faded, but she is still Kate Maurice, the same sweet looking woman I knew long ago. One thing only made me hesitate to-night as to whether I was not mistaken, after all, and I don't understand it yet. I heard in Australia that the man Miss Maurice married was a Mr. Ewing, but I suppose there was some mistake about the name."

"It was a mistake," said Hammond; "but I can see how it probably occurred. The title of the firm of which Mr. Vallance was a junior partner, was Griffith and Ewing. Your informant must have heard that Miss Maurice married the junior partner, and concluded that it was Mr. Ewing, or the story got mixed up in some such a way."

"Yes; the more easily as it had passed through several mouths by the time it reached me."

"And I suppose that letter of yours expressed the real state of things with you at the time?"

"Exactly; you have got the gist of the letter quite correctly. When I wrote that, I saw no prospect for years of being able to marry. When things did at length take a turn in the right direction with me, I made fair progress. And now, though I am not a wealthy man, I have as much as I had any right to expect."

"Well, George, how is this little story of yours to end?" And as Hammond spoke he looked quietly into his friend's face, but with a little curiosity.

"Ah, how?" answered the other, and the friends again for a little time relapsed into silence.

"Is Mrs. Vallance staying in London any time, do you know?" inquired Herder presently.

"She has been paying a short visit to Mrs. Norcott, and is to return home in a day or two, she told me," replied Hammond. "When do you think of going to Plymouth yourself?"

"This is Wednesday; I think I shall go on Friday or Saturday. When I have got my things out of the ship, and arranged one or two small matters of business, I shall have nothing further to keep me in London, and I am anxious to see my old aunt. She is almost my only relative now left. I was a favorite of hers, you remember."

"I think you are perfectly right in visiting her at once," Hammond answered quietly.

The Friday evening following found Herder at Plymouth. Early next morning he visited his aunt and one or two old friends, and then made his way in the direction of the house in which he spent his boyhood. It lay two or three miles out of town, and Herder found it again without difficulty. A few villas had sprung up in the neighborhood, but otherwise the place and its surroundings were little altered. Time had been less busy in this part of the vicinity of Plymouth than in most others. George walked around the house, stood gazing over the low garden fence for a while, and then strolled away in the direction of the hills in the rear. By-and-by he came upon a stream flowing between

grassy banks, and shaded by willow trees. The recollections of the place came fully back upon him now, and he recalled point after point in the landscape. As he followed the windings of the stream he felt himself once more on familiar ground, and he almost forgot for the moment the years that had elapsed since last he trod these same paths. He had fallen into the sort of reverie which the circumstances naturally induced, when he reached a point where the stream widened into a little pool, with an overhanging rock on one side, and on the other a close line of willows, whose drooping boughs swept the clear-brown waters beneath. A boy who was on the bank fishing, looked up as Herder approached. He had a frank, intelligent face and brown wavy hair.

"Good sport this morning?" asked Herder, accosting him.

"Not first-rate;" and the speaker lifted the lid of a small creel that lay on the grass beside him, for the stranger's inspection of the morning's take.

"This used to be a good spot, and this is not a bad morning either; a little bright, perhaps," continued Herder.

"The river is not so good as it once was, I think, sir; at least if all the stories old fishermen tell of it are true; but I dare say these old chaps forget or exaggerate. I get a good lot of fish sometimes, though generally higher up than this. Do you ever fish here, sir? I never saw you."

"I did once," answered George; "I think I knew every yard of it from this to the Bridgend Inn. Is the inn still to the fore?"

"O yes; but I suppose it would be old Marley who kept it when you were a boy, sir?" His nephew, Fred, has it now."

"Ah, so old Dave is gone."

The two fell into a conversation about trout fishing and all pertaining to it. In a little while the youth left the pool and moved slowly up the stream, Herder walking by his side—a frank, bright, intelligent boy, who gossiped on with the open-hearted freedom of an English youth. What was it in the tones of his voice, every now and then, that puzzled Herder with a faint sense of familiarity? He looked more narrowly at his companion's face, and as he did so another face came slowly back and filled his mental vision. A strong desire to learn his young companion's name possessed him and he asked it.

"John Vallance," was the answer. "May I ask yours, sir?"

George seemed to hear the words with no feeling of surprise, but he was conscious that his interest in the youth beside him deepened with the confirmation of his suspicion. He hesitated for a moment and then told his name.

"Herder," repeated the youth; "I know that name. There's an old lady, Miss Field, who lives near us, a great friend of my mother's, who has a nephew named Herder. She often talks of him. George, she always calls him. But he's in Australia; been there for ever so long."

Herder did not answer; the two resumed their talk upon fishing, and from that it turned upon other subjects. Herder encouraged young Vallance to talk, and gradually drew from him the leading particulars of his life. He spoke of his mother, his sister Katy, himself and his school life, freely and unconstrainedly, for there was nothing to conceal.

The two had now reached the Bridgend Inn, a small, old-fashioned-looking hostelry, frequented by anglers, standing close to the bank of the stream, where it was crossed by a rustic wooden bridge. Herder and John Vallance entered the cool, little sanded parlor, and George ordered some refreshments. The host brought them cold meat, bread and cheese and a jug of beer; and off these simple viands the two made a merry lunch together.

When Herder had paid for the refreshment, and John and he were leaving the inn, after chatting for a moment with the landlady, George said to his companion: "It's time I was making my way to Plymouth again. There used to be a short path back to the town from here, across the hills. But I don't think I could find it myself, now."

"Yes," answered John; "I can put you upon it in a few moments. I shall keep along the river for a bit longer, I think. There's the road, sir. Keep