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## SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT.

## PART I.

## CHAPTER I.

## A NEW-COMER.

“YES, indeed,” remarked one of the guests at the English table, “yes, indeed, we start life thinking that we shall build a great cathedral, a crowning glory to architecture, and we end by contriving a mud hut.”

“I am glad you think so well of human nature,” said the Disagreeable Man, suddenly looking up from the newspaper which he always read during meal-time. “I should be more inclined to say that we end by being content to dig a hole, and get into it, like the earth men.”

A silence followed these words; the English community at that end of the table was struck with astonishment at hearing the Disagreeable

Man speak. The few sentences he had spoken during the last four years at Petershof were on record; this was decidedly the longest of them all.

"He is going to speak again," whispered beautiful Mrs. Reffold to her neighbor.

The Disagreeable Man once more looked up from his newspaper.

"Please pass me the Yorkshire relish," he said in his rough way to a girl sitting next to him.

The spell was broken, and the conversation started afresh. But the girl who had passed the Yorkshire relish sat silent and listless, her food untouched, and her wine untasted. She was small and thin; her face looked haggard. She was a new-comer, and had, indeed, arrived at Petershof only two hours before the *table-d'hôte* bell rang. But there did not seem to be any nervous shrinking in her manner, nor any shyness at having to face the two hundred and fifty guests of the Kurhaus. She seemed

rather to be unaware of their presence; or, if aware of, certainly indifferent to, the scrutiny under which she was being placed. She was recalled to reality by the voice of the Disagreeable Man. She did not hear what he said, but she mechanically stretched out her hand and passed him the mustard-pot.

"Is that what you asked for?" she said half dreamily; "or was it the water-bottle?"

"You are rather deaf, I should think," said the Disagreeable Man placidly. "I only remarked that it was a pity you were not eating your dinner. Perhaps the scrutiny of the two hundred and fifty guests in this civilized place is a vexation to you."

"I did not know they were scrutinizing," she answered; "and even if they are, what does it matter to me? I am sure I am quite too tired to care."

"Why have you come here?" asked the Disagreeable Man suddenly.

"Probably for the same reason as yourself," she said; "to get better or well."

"You won't get better," he answered cruelly; "I know your type well; you burn yourselves out quickly. And—my God—how I envy you!"

"So you have pronounced my doom," she said, looking at him intently. Then she laughed; but there was no merriment in the laughter.

"Listen," she said, as she bent nearer to him; "because you are hopeless, it does not follow that you should try to make others hopeless too. You have drunk deep of the cup of poison; I can see that. To hand the cup on to others is the part of a coward."

She walked past the English table, and the Polish table, and so out of the Kurhaus dining-hall.

## CHAPTER II.

CONTAINS A FEW DETAILS.

IN an old second-hand bookshop in London, an old man sat reading Gibbon's *History of Rome*. He did not put down his book when the postman brought in a letter. He just glanced indifferently at the letter, and impatiently at the postman. Zerviah Holme did not like to be interrupted when he was reading Gibbon; and as he was always reading Gibbon, an interruption was always regarded by him as an insult.

About two hours afterwards, he opened the letter, and learnt that his niece, Bernardine, had arrived safely in Petershof, and that she intended to get better and come home strong. He tore up the letter, and instinctively turned to the photograph on the mantelpiece. It was the picture of a face young and yet old, sad and yet with possi-

bilities of merriment, thin and drawn and almost wrinkled, and with piercing eyes which, even in the dull lifelessness of the photograph, seemed to be burning themselves away. Not a pleasing nor a good face ; yet intensely pathetic because of its undisguised harassment.

Zerviah looked at it for a moment.

"She has never been much to either of us," he said to himself. "And yet, when Malvina was alive, I used to think that she was hard on Bernardine. I believe I said so once or twice. But Malvina had her own way of looking at things. Well, that is over now."

He then, with characteristic speed, dismissed all thoughts which did not relate to Roman history ; and the remembrance of Malvina, his wife, and Bernardine, his niece, took up an accustomed position in the background of his mind.

Bernardine had suffered a cheerless childhood in which dolls and toys took no leading part. She had no affection to bestow on any doll, nor any woolly lamb, nor apparently on any human person ;

unless, perhaps, there was the possibility of a friendly inclination towards Uncle Zerviah, who would not have understood the value of any deeper feeling, and did not therefore call the child cold-hearted and unresponsive, as he might well have done.

This she certainly was, judged by the standard of other children ; but then no softening influences had been at work during her tenderest years. Aunt Malvina knew as much about sympathy as she did about the properties of an ellipse ; and even the fairies had failed to win little Bernardine. At first they tried with loving patience what they might do for her ; they came out of their books, and danced and sang to her, and whispered sweet stories to her, at twilight, the fairies' own time. But she would have none of them, for all their gentle persuasion. So they gave up trying to please her, and left her, as they had found her, loveless. What can be said of a childhood which even the fairies have failed to touch with the warm glow of affection ?

Such a little restless spirit, striving to express itself now in this direction, now in that; yet always actuated by the same constant force, *the desire for work*. Bernardine seemed to have no special wish to be useful to others; she seemed just to have a natural tendency to work, even as others have a natural tendency to play. She was always in earnest; life for little Bernardine meant something serious.

Then the years went by. She grew up and filled her life with many interests and ambitions. She was at least a worker, if nothing else; she had always been a diligent scholar, and now she took her place as an able teacher. She was self-reliant, and, perhaps, somewhat conceited. But, at least, Bernardine the young woman, had learnt something which Bernardine the young child had not been able to learn: she learnt how to smile. It took her about six and twenty years to learn; still, some people take longer than that; in fact, many never learn. This is a brief summary of Bernardine Holme's past.

Then one day, when she was in the full swing of her many engrossing occupations: teaching, writing articles for newspapers, attending socialistic meetings, and taking part in political discussions—she was essentially a “modern product,” this Bernardine—one day she fell ill. She lingered in London for some time, and then she went to Petershof.

### CHAPTER III.

#### MRS. REFFOLD LEARNS HER LESSON.

PETERSHOF was a winter resort for consumptive patients, though, indeed, many people who simply needed the change of a bracing climate went there to spend a few months; and came away wonderfully better for the mountain air. This is what Bernardine Holme hoped to do; she was broken down in every way, but it was thought that a prolonged stay in Petershof might help her back to a reasonable amount of health, or, at least, prevent her from slipping into further decline. She had come alone, because she had no relations except that old uncle, and no money to pay any friend who might have been willing to come with her. But she probably cared very little, and the morning after her arrival, she strolled out by herself, investigating the place where she was

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about to spend six months. She was dragging herself along, when she met the Disagreeable Man. She stopped him. He was not accustomed to be stopped by anyone, and he looked rather astonished.

"You were not very cheering last night," she said to him.

"I believe I am not generally considered to be lively," he answered, as he knocked the snow off his boot.

"Still, I am sorry I spoke to you as I did," she went on frankly. "It was foolish of me to mind what you said."

He made no reference to his own remark, and was passing on his way again, when he turned back and walked with her.

"I have been here nearly seven years," he said, and there was a ring of sadness in his voice as he spoke, which he immediately corrected.

"If you want to know anything about the place, I can tell you. If you are able to walk, I can show you some lovely spots, where you will not

be bothered with people. I can take you to a snow fairy-land. If you are sad and disappointed, you will find shining comfort there. It is not all sadness in Petershof. In the silent snow forests, if you dig the snow away, you will find the tiny buds nestling in their white nursery. If the sun does not dazzle your eyes, you may always see the great mountains piercing the sky. These wonders have been a happiness to me. You are not too ill but that they may be a happiness to you also."

"Nothing can be much of a happiness to me," she said, half to herself, and her lips quivered. "I have had to give up so much; all my work, all my ambitions."

"You are not the only one who has had to do that," he said sharply. "Why make a fuss? Things arrange themselves, and eventually we adjust ourselves to the new arrangement. A great deal of caring and grieving, phase one; still more caring and grieving, phase two; less caring and grieving, phase three; no further

feeling whatsoever, phase four. Mercifully I am at phase four. You are at phase one. Make a quick journey over the stages."

He turned and left her, and she strolled along, thinking of his words, wondering how long it would take her to arrive at his indifference. She had always looked upon indifference as paralysis of the soul, and paralysis meant death. Nay, was worse than death. And here was this man who had obviously suffered both mentally and physically, telling her that the only sensible course was to learn not to care. How could she learn not to care? All her life long she had studied and worked and cultivated herself in every direction in the hope of being able to take a high place in literature, or, in any case, to do something in life distinctly better than what other people did. When everything was coming near to her grasp, when there seemed a fair chance of realizing her ambitions, she had suddenly fallen ill, broken up so entirely in every way, that those who knew her when she

was well, could scarcely recognize her now that she was ill. The doctors spoke of an overstrained nervous system; the pestilence of these modern days; they spoke of rest, change of work and scene, bracing air. She might regain her vitality; she might not. Those who had played themselves out must pay the penalty. She was thinking of her whole history, pitying herself profoundly, coming to the conclusion, after true human fashion, that she was the worst-used person on earth, and that no one but herself knew what disappointed ambitions were; she was thinking of all this, and looking profoundly miserable and martyr-like, when some one called her by her name. She looked around and saw one of the English ladies belonging to the Kurhaus; Bernardine had noticed her the previous night. She seemed in capital spirits, and had three or four admirers waiting on her very words. She was a tall, handsome woman, dressed in a superb fur-trimmed cloak, a woman of splendid bearing and address. Bernardine looked a contemptible

little piece of humanity beside her. Some such impression conveyed itself to the two men who were walking with Mrs. Reffold. They looked at the one woman, and then at the other, and smiled at each other, as men do smile on such occasions.

"I am going to speak to this little thing," Mrs. Reffold had said to her two companions before they came near Bernardine. "I must find out who she is, and where she comes from. And, fancy, she has come quite alone. I have inquired. How hopelessly out of fashion she dresses. And what a hat!"

"I should not take the trouble to speak to her," said one of the men. "She may fasten herself on to you. You know what a bore that is."

"Oh, I can easily snub any one if I wish," replied Mrs. Reffold, rather disdainfully.

So she hastened up to Bernardine, and held out her well-gloved hand.

"I had not a chance of speaking to you last night, Miss Holme," she said. "You retired



so early. I hope you have rested after your journey, you seemed quite worn out."

"Thank you," said Bernardine, looking admiringly at the beautiful woman, and envying her, just as all plain women envy their handsome sisters.

"You are not alone, I suppose?" continued Mrs. Reffold.

"Yes, quite alone," answered Bernardine.

"But you are evidently acquainted with Mr. Allitsen, your neighbor <sup>de</sup> at table," said Mrs. Reffold; "so you will not feel quite lonely here. It is a great advantage to have a friend at a place like this."

"I never saw him before last night," said Bernardine.

"Is it possible?" said Mrs. Reffold, in her pleasantest voice. "Then you *have* made a triumph of the Disagreeable Man. He very rarely deigns to talk with any of us. He does not even appear to see us. He sits quietly and reads. It would be interesting to hear what his con-

versation is like. I should be quite amused to know what you did talk about."

"I dare say you would," said Bernardine quietly.

Then Mrs. Reffold, wishing to screen her inquisitiveness, plunged into a description of Petershof life, speaking enthusiastically about everything, except the scenery which she did not mention. After a time she ventured to begin once more taking soundings. But somehow or other, those bright eyes of Bernardine, which looked at her so searchingly, made her a little nervous, and, perhaps, a little indiscreet.

"Your father will miss you," she said tentatively.

"I should think probably not," answered Bernardine. "One is not easily missed, you know." There was a twinkle in Bernardine's eye as she added: "He is probably occupied with other things."

"What is your father?" asked Mrs. Reffold, in her most coaxing tones.

"I don't know what he is now," answered Bernardine placidly. "But he was a genius. He is dead."

Mrs. Reffold gave a slight start, for she began to feel that this insignificant little person was making fun of her. This would never do, and before witnesses, too. So she gathered together her best resources and said:

"Dear me, how very unfortunate: a genius too. Death is indeed cruel. And here one sees so much of it, that unless one learns to steel one's heart, one becomes melancholy. Ah, it is indeed sad to see all this suffering!" (Mrs. Reffold herself had quite succeeded in steeling her heart against her own invalid husband.) She then gave an account of several bad cases of consumption, not forgetting to mention two instances of suicide which had lately taken place in Petershof.

"One gentleman was a Russian," she said. "Fancy coming all the way from Russia to this little out-of-the-world place! But people come from the uttermost ends of the earth, though of

course there are many Londoners here. I suppose you are from London?"

"I am not living in London now," said Bernardine cautiously.

"But you know it, without doubt," continued Mrs. Reffold. "There are several Kensington people here. You may meet some friends; indeed in our hotel there are two or three families from Lexham Gardens."

Bernardine smiled a little viciously; looked first at Mrs. Reffold's two companions with an amused sort of indulgence, and then at the lady herself.

She paused a moment and then said:

"Have you asked all the questions you wish to ask? And, if so, may I ask one of you? Where does one get the best tea?"

Mrs. Reffold gave an inward gasp, but pointed gracefully to a small confectionary shop on the other side of the road. Mrs. Reffold did everything gracefully.

Bernardine thanked her, crossed the road, and passed into the shop.

"Now I have taught her a lesson not to interfere with me," said Bernardine to herself. <sup>do like para 21 B.</sup> How beautiful she is."

Mrs. Reffold and her two companions went silently on their way. At last the silence was broken. *interrupted.*

"Well, I'm blessed!" said the taller of the two, lighting a cigar.

"So am I," said the other, lighting his cigar too.

"Those are precisely my own feelings," remarked Mrs. Reffold.

But she had learned her lesson.

## CHAPTER IV.

### CONCERNING WARLI AND MARIE.

WARLI, the little hunchback postman, a cheery soul, came whistling up the Kurhaus stairs, carrying with him that precious parcel of registered letters, which gave him the position of being the most important person in Petershof. He was a linguist, too, was Warli, and could speak broken English in a most fascinating way, agreeable to every one, but intelligible only to himself. Well, he came whistling up the stairs, when he heard Marie's blithe voice humming her favorite spinning-song.

"Ei, ei," he said to himself; "Marie is in a good temper to-day. I will give her a call as I pass."

He arranged his neckerchief and smoothed his curls; and when he reached the end of the landing, he paused outside a little glass door, and,

all unobserved, watched Marie in her pantry cleaning the candlesticks and lamps.

Marie heard a knock, and, looking up from her work, saw Warli.

"Good day, Warli," she said, glancing hurriedly at a tiny broken mirror suspended on the wall. "I suppose you have a letter for me. How delightful!"

"Never mind about the letter just now," he said, waving his hand as though wishing to dismiss the subject. "How nice to hear you singing so sweetly, Marie! Dear me, in the old days at Grusch, how often I have heard that song of the spinning wheels. You have forgotten the old days, Marie, though you remember the song."

"Give me my letter, Warli, and go about your work," said Marie, pretending to be impatient. But all the same her eyes looked extremely friendly. There was something very winning about the hunchback's face.

"Ah, ah! Marie," he said, shaking his curly

head, "I know how it is with you: you only like people in fine binding. They have not always fine hearts."

"What nonsense you talk, Warli!" said Marie. "There, just hand me the oil-can. You can fill this lamp for me. Not too full, you goose! And this one also; ah, you're letting the oil trickle down! Why, you're not fit for anything except carrying letters! Here, give me my letter."

"What pretty flowers," said Warli. "Now if there is one thing I do like, it is a flower. Can you spare me one, Marie! Put one in my button-hole, do!"

"You are a nuisance this afternoon," said Marie, smiling and pinning a flower on Warli's blue coat. Just then a bell rang violently.

"Those Portuguese ladies will drive me quite mad," said Marie. "They always ring just when I am enjoying myself."

"When you are enjoying yourself!" said Warli triumphantly.

"Of course," returned Marie; "I always do enjoy cleaning the oil-lamps; I always did!"

"Ah, I'd forgotten the oil-lamps!" said Warli.

"And so had I!" laughed Marie. "Na, na, there goes that bell again! Won't they be angry! Won't they scold at me! Here, Warli, give me my letter, and I'll be off."

"I never told you I had any letter for you," remarked Warli. "It was entirely your own idea. Good afternoon, Fraulein Marie,"

The Portuguese ladies' bell rang again, still more passionately this time; but Marie did not seem to hear nor care. She wished to be revenged on that impudent postman. She went to the top of the stairs and called after Warli in her most coaxing tones:

"Do step down one moment; I want to show you something!"

"I must deliver the registered letters," said Warli, with official haughtiness. "I have already wasted too much of my time."

"Won't you waste a few more minutes on me?"

pleaded Marie pathetically. "It is not often I see you now."

Warli came down again, looking very happy.

"I want to show you such a beautiful photograph I've had taken," said Marie. "Ach, it is beautiful!"

"You must give one to me," said Warli, eagerly.

"Oh, I can't do that," replied Marie, as she opened the drawer and took out a small packet. "It was a present to me from the Polish gentleman himself. He saw me the other day here in the pantry. I was so tired and I had fallen asleep, with my broom, just as you see me here. So he made a photograph of me. He admires me very much. Isn't it nice? and isn't the Polish gentleman clever? and isn't it nice to have so much attention paid to one? Oh, there's that horrid bell again! Good afternoon, Herr Warli. That is all I have to say to you, thank you."

Warli's feelings towards the Polish gentleman were not of the friendliest that day.