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# Uncanny Tales

BY M<sup>RS</sup> MOLESWORTH

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & C<sup>O</sup>

Paternoster Row

TO

AN OTHERWISE UNACKNOWLEDGED "COLLABORATEUR"

IN THESE STORIES,

J. C. P.

<sup>19</sup> SUMNER PLACE, S.W.,

*October, 1896.*

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# UNCANNY TALES.

## THE SHADOW IN THE MOONLIGHT.

### PART I.

We never thought of Finster St. Maby'n's being haunted. We really never did.

This may seem strange, but it is absolutely true. It was such an extremely interesting and curious place in many ways that it required nothing extraneous to add to its attractions. Perhaps this was the reason.

Now-a-days, immediately that you hear of a house being "very old," the next remark is sure to be "I hope it is"—or "is not"—that depends on the taste of the speaker—"haunted".

But Finster was more than very old; it was *ancient* and, in a modest way, historical. I will not take up time by relating its history, however, or by referring my readers to the chronicles in which mention of it may be found. Nor shall I yield to the temptation of describing the room in which a certain royalty spent one night, if not two or three nights, four centuries ago, or the tower, now in ruins, where an even more renowned personage was imprisoned for several months. All these facts—or legends—have nothing to do with what I have to tell. Nor, strictly speaking, has Finster itself, except as a sort of prologue to my narrative.

We heard of the house through friends living in the same county, though some distance farther inland. They—Mr. and Miss Miles, it is convenient to give their name at once—knew that we had been ordered to leave our own home for some months, to get over the effects of a very trying visitation of influenza, and that sea-air was specially desirable.

We grumbled at this. Seaside places are often so dull and commonplace. But when we heard of Finster we grumbled no longer.

"Dull" in a sense it might be, but assuredly not "commonplace". Janet Miles's description of it, though she was not particularly clever at description, read like a fairy tale, or one of Longfellow's poems.

"A castle by the sea—how perfect!" we all exclaimed. "Do, oh, do fix for it, mother!"

The objections were quickly over-ruled. It was rather isolated, said Miss Miles, standing, as was not difficult to trace in its name, on a point of land—a corner rather—with sea on two sides. It had not been lived in, save spasmodically, for some years, for the late owner was one of those happy, or unhappy people, who have more houses than they can use, and the present one was a minor. Eventually it was to be overhauled and some additions and alterations made, but the trustees would be glad to let it at a moderate rent for some months, and had intended putting it into some agents' hands when Mr. Miles happened to meet one of them, who mentioned it to him. There was nothing against it; it was absolutely healthy. But the furniture was old and shabby, and there was none too much of it. If we wanted to have visitors we should certainly require to add to it. This, however, could easily be done, our informant went on to say. There was a very good upholsterer and furniture dealer at Raxtrew, the nearest town, who was in the habit of hiring out things to the officers at the fort. "Indeed," she added, "we often pick up charming old pieces of furniture from him for next to nothing, so you could both hire and buy."

Of course, we should have visitors—and our own house would not be the worse for some additional chairs and tables here and there, in place of some excellent monstrosities Phil and Nugent and I had persuaded mother to get rid of.

"If I go down to spy the land with father," I said, "I shall certainly go to the furniture dealer's and have a good look about me."

I did go with father. I was nineteen—it is four years ago—and a capable sort of girl. Then I was the only one who had not been ill, and mother had been the worst of all, mother and Dormy—poor little chap—for *he* nearly died.

He is the youngest of us—we are four boys and two girls. Sophy was then fifteen. My own name is Leila.

If I attempted to give any idea of the impression Finster St. Maby's made upon us, I should go on for hours. It simply took our breath away. It really felt like going back a few centuries merely to enter within the walls and gaze round you. And yet we did not see it to any advantage, so at least said the two Miles's who were our guides. It was a gloomy day, with the feeling of rain not far off, early in April. It might have been November, though it was not cold.

"You can scarcely imagine what it is on a bright day," said Janet, eager, as people always are in such circumstances, to show off her *trouvaille*. "The lights and shadows are so exquisite."

"I love it as it is," I said. "I don't think I shall ever regret having seen it first on a grey day. It is just perfect."

She was pleased at my admiration, and did her utmost to facilitate matters. Father was taken with the place, too, I could see, but he hummed and hawed a good deal about the bareness of the rooms—the bedrooms especially. So Janet and I went into it at once in a business-like way, making lists of the actually necessary additions, which did not prove very formidable after all.

"Hunter will manage all that *easily*," said Miss Miles, upon which father gave in—I believe he had meant to do so all the time. The rent was really so low that a little furniture-hire could be afforded, I suggested. And father agreed.

"It is extremely low," he said, "for a place possessing so many advantages."

But even then it did not occur to any of us to suggest "suspiciously low".

We had the Miles's guarantee for it all, to begin with. Had there been any objection they must have known it.

We spent the night with them and the next morning at the furniture dealer's. He was a quick, obliging little man, and took in the situation at a glance. And *his* terms were so moderate that father said to me amiably: "There are some quaint odds and ends here, Leila. You might choose a few things, to use at Finster in the first place, and then to take home with us."

I was only too ready to profit by the permission, and with Janet's help a few charmingly quaint chairs and tables, a three-cornered wall cabinet, and some other trifles were soon put aside for us. We were just leaving, when at one end of the shop some tempting-looking draperies caught my eye.

"What are these?" I asked the upholsterer. "Curtains! Why, this is real old tapestry!"

The obliging Hunter drew out the material in question.

"They are not exactly curtains, miss," he said. "I thought they would make nice *portières*. You see the tapestry is set into cloth. It was so frail when I got it that it was the only thing to do with it."

He had managed it very ingeniously. Two panels, so to say, of old tapestry, very charming in tone, had been lined and framed with dull green cloth, making a very good pair of *portières* indeed.

"Oh, papa!" I cried, "do let us have these. There are sure to be draughty doors at Finster, and afterwards they would make *perfect "portières"* for the two side doors in the hall at home."

Father eyed the tapestry appreciatively, but first prudently inquired the price. It seemed higher in proportion than Hunter's other charges.

"You see, sir," he said half apologetically, "the panels are real antique work, though so much the worse for wear."

"Where did they come from?" asked father.

Hunter hesitated.

"To tell you the truth, sir," he replied, "I was asked not to name the party that I bought it from. It seems a pity to part with *heir-looms*, but—it happens sometimes—I bought several things together of a family quite lately. The *portières* have only come out of the workroom this morning. We hurried on with them to stop them fraying more—you see where they were before, they must have been nailed to the wall."

Janet Miles, who was something of a connoisseur, had been examining the tapestry.

"It is well worth what he asks," she said, in a low voice. "You don't often come across such tapestry in England."

So the bargain was struck, and Hunter promised to see all that we had chosen, both purchased and hired, delivered at Finster the week before we proposed to come.

Nothing interfered with our plans. By the end of the month we found ourselves at our temporary home—all of us except Nat, our third brother, who was at school. Dormer, the small boy, still did lessons with Sophy's governess. The two older "boys," as we called them, happened to be at home from different reasons—one, Nugent, on leave from India; Phil, forced to miss a term at college through an attack of the same illness which had treated mother and Dormy so badly.

But now that everybody was well again, and going to be very much better, thanks to Finster air, we thought the ill wind had brought us some very distinct good. It would not have been half such fun had we not been a large family party to start with, and before we had been a week at the place we had added to our numbers by the first detachment of the guests we had invited.

It was not a very large house; besides ourselves we had not room for more than three or four others. For some of the rooms—those on the top story—were really too dilapidated to suit any one but rats—"rats or ghosts," said some one laughingly one day, when we had been exploring them.

Afterwards the words returned to my memory.

We had made ourselves very comfortable, thanks to the invaluable Hunter. And every day the weather grew milder and more spring-like. The woods on the inland side were full of primroses. It promised to be a lovely season.

There was a gallery along one side of the house, which soon became a favourite resort; it made a pleasant lounging-place, in the day-time especially, though less so in the evening, as the fireplace at one end warmed it but imperfectly, and besides this it was difficult to light up. It was draughty, too, as there was a superfluity of doors, two of which, one at each end, we at once condemned. They were not needed, as the one led by a very long spiral staircase, to the unused attic rooms, the other to the kitchen and offices. And when we did have afternoon tea in the gallery, it was easy to bring it through the dining or drawing-rooms, long rooms, lighted at their extreme ends, which ran parallel to the gallery lengthways, both of which had a door opening on to it as well as from the hall on the other side. For all the principal rooms at Finster were on the first-floor, not on the ground-floor.

The closing of these doors got rid of a great deal of draught, and, as I have said, the weather was really mild and calm.

One afternoon—I am trying to begin at the beginning of our strange experiences; even at the risk of long-windedness it seems better to do so—we were all assembled in the gallery at tea-time. The "children," as we called Sophy and Dormer, much to Sophy's disgust, and their governess, were with us, for rules were relaxed at Finster, and Miss Larpent was a great favourite with us all.

Suddenly Sophy gave an exclamation of annoyance.

"Mamma," she said, "I wish you would speak to Dormer. He has thrown over my tea-cup—only look at my frock!" "If you cannot sit still," she added, turning herself to the boy, "I don't think you should be allowed to come to tea here."

"What is the matter, Dormy?" said mother.

Dormer was standing beside Sophy, looking very guilty, and rather white.

"Mamma," he said, "I was only drawing a chair out. It got so dreadfully cold where I was sitting, I really could not stay there," and he shivered slightly.

He had been sitting with his back to one of the locked-up doors. Phil, who was nearest, moved his hand slowly across the spot.

"You are fanciful, Dormy," he said, "there is really no draught whatever."

This did not satisfy mother.

"He must have got a chill, then," she said, and she went on to question the child as to what he had been doing all day, for, as I have said, he was still delicate.

But he persisted that he was quite well, and no longer cold.

"It wasn't exactly a draught," he said, "it was—oh! just icy, all of a sudden. I've felt it before—sitting in that chair."

Mother said no more, and Dormer went on with his tea, and when bed-time came he seemed just as usual, so that her anxiety faded. But she made thorough investigation as to the possibility of any draught coming up from the back stairs, with which this door communicated. None was to be discovered—the door fitted fairly well, and beside this, Hunter had tacked felt round the edges—furthermore, one of the thick heavy *portières* had been hung in front.

An evening or two later we were sitting in the drawing room after dinner, when a cousin who was staying with us suddenly missed her fan.

"Run and fetch Muriel's fan, Dormy," I said, for Muriel felt sure it had slipped under the dinner table. None of the men had as yet joined us.

"Why, where are you going, child?" as he turned towards the farther door. "It is much quicker by the gallery."

He said nothing, but went out, walking rather slowly, by the gallery door. And in a few minutes he returned, fan in hand, but by the *other* door.

He was a sensitive child, and though I wondered what he had got into his head against the gallery, I did not say anything before the others. But when, soon after, Dormy said "Good night," and went off to bed, I followed him.

"What do you want, Leila?" he said rather crossly.

"Don't be vexed, child," I said. "I can see there is something the matter. Why do you not like the gallery?"

He hesitated, but I had laid my hand on his shoulder, and he knew I meant to be kind.

"Leila," he said, with a glance round, to be sure that no one was within hearing—we were standing, he and I, near the inner dining-room door, which was open—"you'll laugh at me, but—there's something queer there—sometimes!"

"What? And how do you mean 'sometimes'?" I asked, with a slight thrill at his tone.

"I mean not always, I've felt it several times—there was the cold the day before yesterday, and besides that, I've felt

a—a sort of *breaving*—Dormy was not perfect in his "th's"—"like somebody very unhappy."

"Sighing?" I suggested.

"Like sighing in a whisper," he replied, "and that's always near the door. But last week—no, not so long ago, it was on Monday—I went round that way when I was going to bed. I didn't want to be silly. But it was moonlight—and—Leila, a shadow went all along the wall on that side, and stopped at the door. I saw it wagging about—its *hands*," and here he shivered—"on that funny curtain that hangs up, as if it were feeling for a minute or two, and then——"

"Well,—what then?"

"It just went out," he said simply. "But it's moonlight again to-night, sister, and I daren't see it again. I just *daren't*."

"But you did go to the dining-room that way," I reminded him.

"Yes, but I shut my eyes and ran, and even then I felt as if something cold was behind me."

"Dormy, dear," I said, a good deal concerned, "I do think it's your fancy. You are not *quite* well yet, you know."

"Yes, I am," he replied sturdily. "I'm not a bit frightened anywhere else. I sleep in a room alone you know. It's not *me*, sister, its somefing in the gallery."

"Would you be frightened to go there with me now? We can run through the dining-room; there's no one to see us," and I turned in that direction as I spoke.

Again my little brother hesitated.

"I'll go with you if you'll hold hands," he said, "but I'll shut my eyes. And I won't open them till you tell me there's no shadow on the wall. You must tell me truly."

"But there must be some shadows," I said, "in this bright moonlight, trees and branches, or even clouds scudding across—something of that kind is what you must have seen, dear."

He shook his head.

"No, no, of course I wouldn't mind that. I know the difference. No—you couldn't mistake. It goes along, right along, in a creeping way, and then at the door its hands come farther out, and it *feels*."

"Is it like a man or a woman?" I said, beginning to feel rather creepy myself.

"I think it's most like a rather little man," he replied, "but I'm not sure. Its head has got something fuzzy about it—oh, I know, like a sticking out wig. But lower down it seems wrapped up, like in a cloak. Oh, it's *horrid*."

And again he shivered—it was quite time all this nightmare nonsense was put out of his poor little head.

I took his hand and held it firmly; we went through the dining-room. Nothing could have looked more comfortable and less ghostly. For the lights were still burning on the table, and the flowers in their silver bowls, some wine gleaming in the glasses, the fruit and pretty dishes, made a pleasant glow of colour. It certainly seemed a curiously sudden contrast when we found ourselves in the gallery beyond, cold and unilluminated, save by the pale moonlight streaming through the unshuttered windows. For the door closed with a bang as we passed through—the gallery *was* a draughty place.

Dormy's hold tightened.

"Sister," he whispered, "I've shut my eyes now. You must stand with your back to the windows—between them, or else you'll think it's our own shadows—and watch."



I did as he said, and I had not long to wait.

It came—from the farther end, the second condemned door, whence the winding stair mounted to the attics—it seemed to begin or at least take form there. Creeping along, just as Dormy said—stealthily but steadily—right down to the other extremity of the long room. And then it grew blacker—more concentrated—and out from the vague outline came two bony hands, and, as the child had said, too, you could see that they were *feeling*—all over the upper part of the door.

I stood and watched. I wondered afterwards at my own courage, if courage it was. It was the shadow of a small man, I felt sure. The head seemed large in proportion, and—yes—it—the original of the shadow—was evidently covered by an antique wig. Half mechanically I glanced round—as if in search of the material body that *must* be there. But no; there was nothing, literally *nothing*, that could throw this extraordinary shadow.

Of this I was instantly convinced; and here I may as well say once for all, that never was it maintained by any one, however previously sceptical, who had fully witnessed the whole, that it could be accounted for by ordinary, or, as people say, "natural" causes. There was this peculiarity at least about our ghost.

Though I had fast hold of his hand, I had almost forgotten Dormy—I seemed in a trance.

Suddenly he spoke, though in a whisper.

"You see it, sister, I know you do," he said.

"Wait, wait a minute, dear," I managed to reply in the same tone, though I could not have explained why I waited.

Dormy had said that after a time—after the ghastly and apparently fruitless *feeling* all over the door—"it"—"went out".

I think it was this that I was waiting for. It was not quite as he had said. The door was in the extreme corner of the wall, the hinges almost in the angle, and as the shadow began to move on again, it *looked* as if it disappeared; but no, it was only fainter. My eyes, preternaturally sharpened by my intense gaze, still saw it, working its way round the corner, as assuredly no *shadow* in the real sense of the word ever did nor could do. I realised this, and the sense of horror grew all but intolerable; yet I stood still, clasping the cold little hand in mine tighter and tighter. And an instinct of protection of the child gave me strength. Besides, it was coming on so quickly—we could not have escaped—it was coming, nay, it *was behind* us.

"Leila!" gasped Dormy, "the cold—you feel it now?"

Yes, truly—like no icy breath that I had ever felt before was that momentary but horrible thrill of utter cold. If it had lasted another second I think it would have killed us both. But, mercifully, it passed, in far less time than it has taken me to tell it, and then we seemed in some strange way to be released.

"Open your eyes, Dormy," I said, "you won't see anything, I promise you. I want to rush across to the dining-room."

He obeyed me. I felt there was time to escape before that awful presence would again have arrived at the dining-room door, though it was *coming*—ah, yes, it was coming, steadily pursuing its ghastly round. And, alas! the dining-room door was closed. But I kept my nerve to some extent. I turned the handle without over much trembling, and in another moment, the door shut and locked behind us, we stood in safety, looking at each other, in the bright cheerful room we had left so short a time ago.

*Was* it so short a time? I said to myself. It seemed hours!

And through the door open to the hall came at that moment the sound of cheerful laughing voices from the drawing-room. Some one was coming out. It seemed impossible, incredible, that within a few feet of the matter-of-fact pleasant material life, this horrible inexplicable drama should be going on, as doubtless it still was.

Of the two I was now more upset than my little brother. I was older and "took in" more. He, boy-like, was in a sense triumphant at having proved himself correct and no coward, and though he was still pale, his eyes shone with excitement and a queer kind of satisfaction.

But before we had done more than look at each other, a figure appeared at the open doorway. It was Sophy.

"Leila," she said, "mamma wants to know what you are doing with Dormy? He is to go to bed at once. We saw you go out of the room after him, and then a door banged. Mamma says if you are playing with him it's very bad for him so late at night."

Dormy was very quick. He was still holding my hand, and he pinched it to stop my replying.

"Rubbish!" he said. "I am speaking to Leila quietly, and she is coming up to my room while I undress. Good night, Sophy."

"Tell mamma Dormy really wants me," I added, and then Sophy departed.

"We musn't tell *her*, Leila," said the boy. "She'd have 'sterics."

"Whom shall we tell?" I said, for I was beginning to feel very helpless and upset.

"Nobody, to-night," he replied sensibly. "You *mustn't* go in there," and he shivered a little as he moved his head towards the gallery; "you're not fit for it, and they'd be wanting you to. Wait till the morning and then I'd—I think I'd tell Philip first. You needn't be frightened to-night, sister. It won't stop you sleeping. It didn't me the time I saw it before."

He was right. I slept dreamlessly. It was as if the intense nervous strain of those few minutes had utterly exhausted me.

## PART II.

Phil is our soldier brother. And there is nothing fanciful about *him*! He is a rock of sturdy common-sense and unflinching good nature. He was the very best person to confide our strange secret to, and my respect for Dormy increased.

We did tell him—the very next morning. He listened very attentively, only putting in a question here and there, and though, of course, he was incredulous—had I not been so myself?—he was not mocking.

"I am glad you have told no one else," he said, when we had related the whole as circumstantially as possible. "You see mother is not very strong yet, and it would be a pity to bother father, just when he's taken this place and settled it all. And for goodness' sake, don't let a breath of it get about among the servants; there'd be the—something to pay, if you did."

"I won't tell anybody," said Dormy.

"Nor shall I," I added. "Sophy is far too excitable, and if she knew, she would certainly tell Nannie." Nannie is our old nurse.

"If we tell any one," Philip went on, "that means," with a rather irritating smile of self-confidence, "if by any possibility I do not succeed in making an end of your ghost and we want another opinion about it, the person to tell would be Miss Larpent."

"Yes," I said, "I think so, too."

I would not risk irritating him by saying how convinced I was that conviction awaited *him* as surely it had come to myself, and I knew that Miss Larpent, though far from credulous, was equally far from stupid scepticism concerning the mysteries "not dreamt of" in ordinary "philosophy".

"What do you mean to do?" I went on. "You have a theory, I see. Won't you tell me what it is?"

"I have two," said Phil, rolling up a cigarette as he spoke. "It is either some queer optical illusion, partly the effect of some odd reflection outside—or it is a clever trick."

"A trick!" I exclaimed; "what *possible* motive could there be for a trick?"

Phil shook his head.

"Ah," he said, "that I cannot at present say."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I shall sit up to-night in the gallery and see for myself."

"Alone?" I exclaimed, with some misgiving. For big, sturdy fellow as he was, I scarcely liked to think of him—of *any one*—alone with that awful thing.

"I don't suppose you or Dormy would care to keep me company," he replied, "and on the whole I would rather not have you."

"I wouldn't do it," said the child honestly, "not for—for nothing."

"I shall keep Tim with me," said Philip, "I would rather have him than any one."

Tim is Phil's bull-dog, and certainly, I agreed, much better than nobody.

So it was settled.

Dormy and I went to bed unusually early that night, for as the day wore on we both felt exceedingly tired. I pleaded a headache, which was not altogether a fiction, though I repented having complained at all when I found that poor mamma immediately began worrying herself with fears that "after all" I, too, was to fall a victim to the influenza.

"I shall be all right in the morning," I assured her.

I knew no further details of Phil's arrangements. I fell asleep almost at once. I usually do. And it seemed to me that I had slept a whole night when I was awakened by a glimmering light at my door, and heard Philip's voice speaking softly.

"Are you awake, Lel?" he said, as people always say when they awake you in any untimely way. Of course, *now* I was awake, very much awake indeed.

"What is it?" I exclaimed eagerly, my heart beginning to beat very fast.

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all," said my brother, advancing a little into the room. "I just thought I'd look in on my way to bed to reassure you. I have seen *nothing*, absolutely nothing."

I do not know if I was relieved or disappointed.

"Was it moonlight?" I asked abruptly.

"No," he replied, "unluckily the moon did not come out at all, though it is nearly at the full. I carried in a small lamp,

which made things less eerie. But I should have preferred the moon."

I glanced up at him. Was it the reflection of the candle he held, or did he look paler than usual?

"And," I added suddenly, "did you *feel* nothing?"

He hesitated.

"It—it was chilly, certainly," he said. "I fancy I must have dosed a little, for I did feel pretty cold once or twice."

"Ah, indeed!" thought I to myself. "And how about Tim?"

Phil smiled, but not very successfully.

"Well," he said, "I must confess Tim did not altogether like it. He started snarling, then he growled, and finished up with whining in a decidedly unhappy way. He's rather upset—poor old chap!"

And then I saw that the dog was beside him—rubbing up close to Philip's legs—a very dejected, reproachful Tim—all the starch taken out of him.

"Good-night, Phil," I said, turning round on my pillow. "I'm glad you are satisfied. To-morrow morning you must tell me which of your theories holds most water. Good-night, and many thanks."

He was going to say more, but my manner for the moment stopped him, and he went off.

Poor old Phil!

We had it out the next morning. He and I alone. He was *not* satisfied. Far from it. In the bottom of his heart I believe it was a strange yearning for a breath of human companionship, for the sound of a human voice, that had made him look in on me the night before.

*For he had felt the cold passing him.*

But he was very plucky.

"I'll sit up again to-night, Leila," he said.

"Not to-night," I objected. "This sort of adventure requires one to be at one's best. If you take my advice you will go to bed early and have a good stretch of sleep, so that you will be quite fresh by to-morrow. There will be a moon for some nights still."

"Why do you keep harping on the moon?" said Phil rather crossly, for him.

"Because—I have some idea that it is only in the moonlight that—that anything is to be *seen*."

"Bosh!" said my brother politely—he was certainly rather discomposd—"we are talking at cross-purposes. You are satisfied——"

"Far from satisfied," I interpolated.

"Well, convinced, whatever you like to call it—that the whole thing is supernatural, whereas I am equally sure it is a trick; a clever trick I allow, though I haven't yet got at the motive of it."

"You need your nerves to be at their best to discover a trick of this kind, if a trick it be," I said quietly.

Philip had left his seat, and walked up and down the room; his way of doing so gave me a feeling that he wanted to

walk off some unusual consciousness of irritability. I felt half provoked and half sorry for him.

At that moment—we were alone in the drawing-room—the door opened, and Miss Larpent came in.

"I cannot find Sophy," she said, peering about through her rather short-sighted eyes, which, nevertheless, see a great deal sometimes; "do you know where she is?"

"I saw her setting off somewhere with Nugent," said Philip, stopping his quarter-deck exercise for a moment.

"Ah, then it is hopeless. I suppose I must resign myself to very irregular ways for a little longer," Miss Larpent replied with a smile.

She is not young, and not good looking, but she is gifted with a delightful way of smiling, and she is—well, the dearest and almost the wisest of women.

She looked at Philip as he spoke. She had known us nearly since our babyhood.

"Is there anything the matter?" she said suddenly. "You look fagged, Leila, and Philip seems worried."

I glanced at Philip. He understood me.

"Yes," he replied, "I am irritated, and Leila is——" he hesitated.

"What?" asked Miss Larpent.

"Oh, I don't know—obstinate, I suppose. Sit down, Miss Larpent, and hear our story. Leila, you can tell it."

I did so—first obtaining a promise of secrecy, and making Phil relate his own experience.

Our new *confidante* listened attentively, her face very grave. When she had heard all, she said quietly, after a moment's silence:—

"It's very strange, very. Philip, if you will wait till to-morrow night, and I quite agree with Leila that you had better do so, I will sit up with you. I have pretty good nerves, and I have always wanted an experience of that kind."

"Then you don't think it is a trick?" I said eagerly. I was like Dormer, divided between my real underlying longing to explain the thing, and get rid of the horror of it, and a half childish wish to prove that I had not exaggerated its ghastliness.

"I will tell you that the day after to-morrow," she said. I could not repress a little shiver as she spoke.

She *had* good nerves, and she was extremely sensible.

But I almost blamed myself afterwards for having acquiesced in the plan. For the effect on her was very great. They never told me exactly what happened; "You *know*," said Miss Larpent. I imagine their experience was almost precisely similar to Dormy's and mine, intensified, perhaps, by the feeling of loneliness. For it was not till all the rest of the family was in bed that this second vigil began. It was a bright moonlight night—they had the whole thing complete.

It was impossible to throw off the effect; even in the daytime the four of us who had seen and heard, shrank from the gallery, and made any conceivable excuse for avoiding it.

But Phil, however convinced, behaved consistently. He examined the closed door thoroughly, to detect any possible trickery. He explored the attics, he went up and down the staircase leading to the offices, till the servants must have thought he was going crazy. He found *nothing*—no vaguest hint even as to why the gallery was chosen by the ghostly shadow for its nightly round.

Strange to say, however, as the moon waned, our horror faded, so that we almost began to hope the thing was at an end, and to trust that in time we should forget about it. And we congratulated ourselves that we had kept our own counsel and not disturbed any of the others—even father, who would, no doubt, have hooted at the idea—by the baleful whisper that our charming castle by the sea was haunted!

And the days passed by, growing into weeks. The second detachment of our guests had left, and a third had just arrived, when one morning as I was waiting at what we called "the sea-door" for some of the others to join me in a walk along the sands, some one touched me on the shoulder. It was Philip.

"Leila," he said, "I am not happy about Dormer. He is looking ill again, and——"

"I thought he seemed so much stronger," I said, surprised and distressed, "quite rosy, and so much merrier."

"So he was till a few days ago," said Philip. "But if you notice him well you'll see that he's getting that white look again. And—I've got it into my head—he is an extraordinarily sensitive child, that it has something to do with the moon. It's getting on to the full."

For the moment I stupidly forgot the association.

"Really, Phil," I said, "you are too absurd! Do you actually—oh," as he was beginning to interrupt me, and my face fell, I feel sure—"you don't mean about the gallery."

"Yes, I do," he said.

"How? Has Dormy told you anything?" and a sort of sick feeling came over me. "I had begun to hope," I went on, "that somehow it had gone; that, perhaps, it only comes once a year at a certain season, or possibly that newcomers see it at the first and not again. Oh, Phil, we *can't* stay here, however nice it is, if it is really haunted."

"Dormy hasn't said much," Philip replied. "He only told me he had *felt the cold* once or twice, 'since the moon came again,' he said. But I can see the fear of more is upon him. And this determined me to speak to you. I have to go to London for ten days or so, to see the doctors about my leave, and a few other things. I don't like it for you and Miss Larpent if—if this thing is to return—with no one else in your confidence, especially on Dormy's account. Do you think we must tell father before I go?"

I hesitated. For many reasons I was reluctant to do so. Father would be exaggeratedly sceptical at first, and then, if he were convinced, as I *knew* he would be, he would go to the other extreme and insist upon leaving Finster, and there would be a regular upset, trying for mother and everybody concerned. And mother liked the place, and was looking so much better!

"After all," I said, "it has not hurt any of us. Miss Larpent got a shake, so did I. But it wasn't as great a shock to us as to you, Phil, to have to believe in a ghost. And we can avoid the gallery while you are away. No, except for Dormy, I would rather keep it to ourselves—after all, we are not going to live here always. Yet it is so nice, it seems such a pity."

It was such an exquisite morning; the air, faintly breathing of the sea, was like elixir; the heights and shadows on the cliffs, thrown out by the darker woods behind, were indeed, as Janet Miles had said, "wonderful".

"Yes," Phil agreed, "it is an awful nuisance. But as for Dormy," he went on, "supposing I get mother to let me take him with me? He'd be as jolly as a sand-boy in London, and my old landlady would look after him like anything if ever I had to be out late. And I'd let my doctor see him—quietly, you know—he might give him a tonic or something."

I heartily approved of the idea. So did mamma when Phil broached it—she, too, had thought her "baby" looking quite pale lately. A London doctor's opinion would be such a satisfaction. So it was settled, and the very next day the two set off. Dormer, in his "old-fashioned," reticent way, in the greatest delight, though only by one remark did the brave little fellow hint at what was, no doubt, the principal cause of his satisfaction.

"The moon will be long past the full when we come back," he said. "And after that there'll only be one other time before we go, won't there, Leila? We've only got this house for three months?"

"Yes," I said, "father only took it for three," though in my heart I knew it was with the option of three more—six in all.

And Miss Larpent and I were left alone, not with the ghost, certainly, but with our fateful knowledge of its unwelcome proximity.

We did not speak of it to each other, but we tacitly avoided the gallery, even, as much as possible, in the daytime. I felt, and so, she has since confessed, did she, that it would be impossible to endure *that cold* without betraying ourselves.

And I began to breathe more freely, trusting that the dread of the shadow's possible return was really only due to the child's overwrought nerves.

Till—one morning—my fool's paradise was abruptly destroyed.

Father came in late to breakfast—he had been for an early walk, he said, to get rid of a headache. But he did not look altogether as if he had succeeded in doing so.

"Leila," he said, as I was leaving the room after pouring out his coffee—mamma was not yet allowed to get up early—"Leila, don't go. I want to speak to you."

I stopped short, and turned towards the table. There was something very odd about his manner. He is usually hearty and eager, almost impetuous in his way of speaking.

"Leila," he began again, "you are a sensible girl, and your nerves are strong, I fancy. Besides, you have not been ill like the others. Don't speak of what I am going to tell you."

I nodded in assent; I could scarcely have spoken. My heart was beginning to thump. Father would not have commended my nerves had he known it.

"Something odd and inexplicable happened last night," he went on. "Nugent and I were sitting in the gallery. It was a mild night, and the moon magnificent. We thought the gallery would be pleasanter than the smoking-room, now that Phil and his pipes are away. Well—we were sitting quietly. I had lighted my reading-lamp on the little table at one end of the room, and Nugent was half lying in his chair, doing nothing in particular except admiring the night, when all at once he started violently with an exclamation, and, jumping up, came towards me. Leila, his teeth were chattering, and he was *blue* with cold. I was very much alarmed—you know how ill he was at college. But in a moment or two he recovered.

"What on earth is the matter?" I said to him. He tried to laugh.

"I really don't know," he said; "I felt as if I had had an electric shock of *cold*—but I'm all right again now."

"I went into the dining-room, and made him take a little brandy and water, and sent him off to bed. Then I came back, still feeling rather uneasy about him, and sat down with my book, when, Leila—you will scarcely credit it—I myself felt the same shock exactly. A perfectly *hideous* thrill of cold. That was how it began. I started up, and then, Leila, by degrees, in some instinctive way, I seemed to realise what had caused it. My dear child, you will think I have gone crazy when I tell you that there was a shadow—a shadow in the moonlight—*chasing* me, so to say, round the room, and once again it caught me up, and again came that appalling sensation. I would not give in. I dodged it after that, and set myself to watch it, and then——"

I need not quote my father further; suffice to say his experience matched that of the rest of us entirely—no, I think it surpassed them. It was the worst of all.

Poor father! I shuddered for him. I think a shock of that kind is harder upon a man than upon a woman. Our sex is less sceptical, less entrenched in sturdy matters of fact, more imaginative, or whatever you like to call the readiness to believe what we cannot explain. And it was astounding to me to see how my father at once capitulated—never even *alluding* to a possibility of trickery. Astounding, yet at the same time not without a certain satisfaction in it. It was almost a relief to find others in the same boat with ourselves.

I told him at once all *we* had to tell, and how painfully exercised we had been as to the advisability of keeping our secret to ourselves. I never saw father so impressed; he was awfully kind, too, and so sorry for us. He made me fetch Miss Larpent, and we held a council of—I don't know what to call it!—not "war," assuredly, for none of us thought of fighting the ghost. How could one fight a shadow?

We decided to do nothing beyond endeavouring to keep the affair from going further. During the next few days father arranged to have some work done in the gallery which would prevent our sitting there, without raising any suspicions on mamma's or Sophy's part.

"And then," said father, "we must see. Possibly this extraordinary influence only makes itself felt periodically."

"I am almost certain it is so," said Miss Larpent.

"And in this case," he continued, "we may manage to evade it. But I do not feel disposed to continue my tenancy here after three months are over. If once the servants get hold of the story, and they are sure to do so sooner or later, it would be unendurable—the worry and annoyance would do your mother far more harm than any good effect the air and change have had upon her."

I was glad to hear this decision. Honestly, I did not feel as if I could stand the strain for long, and it might kill poor little Dormy.

But where should we go? Our own home would be quite uninhabitable till the autumn, for extensive alterations and repairs were going on there. I said this to father.

"Yes," he agreed, "it is not convenient,"—and he hesitated. "I cannot make it out," he went on, "Miles would have been *sure* to know if the house had a bad name in any way. I think I will go over and see him to-day, and tell him all about it—at least I shall inquire about some other house in the neighbourhood—and *perhaps* I will tell him our reason for leaving this."

He did so—he went over to Raxtrew that very afternoon, and, as I quite anticipated would be the case, he told me on his return that he had taken both our friends into his confidence.

"They are extremely concerned about it," he said, "and very sympathising, though, naturally, inclined to think us a parcel of very weak-minded folk indeed. But I am glad of one thing—the Rectory there, is to be let from the first of July for three months. Miles took me to see it. I think it will do very well—it is quite out of the village, for you really can't call it a town—and a nice little place in its way. Quite modern, and as unghost-like as you could wish, bright and cheery."

"And what will mamma think of our leaving so soon?" I asked.

But as to this father reassured me. He had already spoken of it to her, and somehow she did not seem disappointed. She had got it into her head that Finster did not suit Dormy, and was quite disposed to think that three months of such strong air were enough at a time.

"Then have you decided upon Raxtrew Rectory?" I asked.

"I have the refusal of it," said my father. "But you will be almost amused to hear that Miles begged me not to fix absolutely for a few days. He is coming to us to-morrow, to spend the night."



"You mean to see for himself?"

Father nodded.

"Poor Mr. Miles!" I ejaculated. "You won't sit up with him, I hope, father?"

"I offered to do so, but he won't hear of it," was the reply. "He is bringing one of his keepers with him—a sturdy, trustworthy young fellow, and they two with their revolvers are going to nab the ghost, so he says. We shall see. We must manage to prevent our servants suspecting anything."

This *was* managed. I need not go into particulars. Suffice to say that the sturdy keeper reached his own home before dawn on the night of the vigil, no endeavours of his master having succeeded in persuading him to stay another moment at Finster, and that Mr. Miles himself looked so ill the next morning when he joined us at the breakfast-table that we, the initiated, could scarcely repress our exclamations, when Sophy, with the curious instinct of touching a sore place which some people have, told him that he looked exactly "as if he had seen a ghost".

His experience had been precisely similar to ours. After that we heard no more from him—about the pity it was to leave a place that suited us so well, etc., etc. On the contrary, before he left, he told my father and myself that he thought us uncommonly plucky for staying out the three months, though at the same time he confessed to feeling completely nonplussed.

"I have lived near Finster St. Maby's all my life," he said, "and my people before me, and *never*, do I honestly assure you, have I heard one breath of the old place being haunted. And in a shut-up neighbourhood like this, such a thing would have leaked out."

We shook our heads, but what could we say?

### PART III.

We left Finster St. Maby's towards the middle of July.

Nothing worth recording happened during the last few weeks. If the ghostly drama were still re-enacted night after night, or only during some portion of each month, we took care not to assist at the performance. I believe Phil and Nugent planned another vigil, but gave it up by my father's expressed wish, and on one pretext or another he managed to keep the gallery locked off without arousing any suspicion in my mother or Sophy, or any of our visitors.

It was a cold summer,—those early months of it at least—and that made it easier to avoid the room.

Somehow none of us were sorry to go. This was natural, so far as several were concerned, but rather curious as regarded those of the family who knew no drawback to the charms of the place. I suppose it was due to some instinctive consciousness of the influence which so many of the party had felt it impossible to resist or explain.

And the Rectory at Raxtrew was really a dear little place. It was so bright and open and sunny. Dormy's pale face was rosy with pleasure the first afternoon when he came rushing in to tell us that there were tame rabbits and a pair of guinea-pigs in an otherwise empty loose box in the stable-yard.

"Do come and look at them," he begged, and I went with him, pleased to see him so happy.

I did not care for the rabbits, but I always think guinea-pigs rather fascinating, and we stayed playing with them some little time.

"I'll show you another way back into the house," said Dormy, and he led me through a conservatory into a large,

almost unfurnished room, opening again into a tiled passage leading to the offices.

"This is the Warden boys' playroom," he said. "They keep their cricket and football things here, you see, and their tricycle. I wonder if I might use it?"

"We must write and ask them," I said. "But what are all these big packages?" I went on. "Oh, I see, its our heavy luggage from Finster. There is not room in this house for our odds and ends of furniture, I suppose. It's rather a pity they have put it in here, for we could have had some nice games in this big room on a wet day, and see, Dormy, here are several pairs of roller skates! Oh, we must have this place cleared."

We spoke to father about it—he came and looked at the room and agreed with us that it would be a pity not to have the full use of it. Roller skating would be good exercise for Dormy, he said, and even for Nat, who would be joining us before long for his holidays.

So our big cases, and the chairs and tables we had bought from Hunter, in their careful swathings of wisps and matting, were carried out to an empty barn—a perfectly dry and weather-tight barn—for everything at the Rectory was in excellent repair. In this, as in all other details, our new quarters were a complete contrast to the picturesque abode we had just quitted.

The weather was charming for the first two or three weeks—much warmer and sunnier than at Finster. We all enjoyed it, and seemed to breathe more freely. Miss Larpent, who was staying through the holidays this year, and I congratulated each other more than once, when sure of not being overheard, on the cheerful, wholesome atmosphere in which we found ourselves.

"I do not think I shall ever wish to live in a very old house again," she said one day. We were in the play-room, and I had been persuading her to try her hand—or feet—at roller skating. "Even now," she went on, "I own to you, Leila, though it may sound very weak-minded, I cannot think of that horrible night without a shiver. Indeed, I could fancy I feel that thrill of indescribable cold at the present moment."

She *was* shivering—and, extraordinary to relate, as she spoke, her tremor communicated itself to me. Again, I could swear to it, again I felt that blast of unutterable, unearthly cold.

I started up. We were seated on a bench against the wall—a bench belonging to the play-room, and which we had not thought of removing, as a few seats were a convenience.

Miss Larpent caught sight of my face. Her own, which was very white, grew distressed in expression. She grasped my arm.

"My dearest child," she exclaimed, "you look blue, and your teeth are chattering! I do wish I had not alluded to that fright we had. I had no idea you were so nervous."

"I did not know it myself," I replied. "I often think of the Finster ghost quite calmly, even in the middle of the night. But just then, Miss Larpent, do you know, I really *felt* that horrid cold again!"

"So did I—or rather my imagination did," she replied, trying to talk in a matter-of-fact way. She got up as she spoke, and went to the window. "It can't be *all* imagination," she added. "See, Leila, what a gusty, stormy day it is—not like the beginning of August. It really is cold."

"And this play-room seems nearly as draughty as the gallery at Finster," I said. "Don't let us stay here—come into the drawing-room and play some duets. I wish we could quite forget about Finster."

"Dormy has done so, I hope," said Miss Larpent.

That chilly morning was the commencement of the real break-up in the weather. We women would not have minded it

so much, as there are always plenty of indoor things we can find to do. And my two grown-up brothers were away. Raxtrew held no particular attractions for them, and Phil wanted to see some of our numerous relations before he returned to India. So he and Nugent started on a round of visits. But, unluckily, it was the beginning of the public school holidays, and poor Nat—the fifteen-year-old boy—had just joined us. It was very disappointing for him in more ways than one. He had set his heart on seeing Finster, impressed by our enthusiastic description of it when we first went there, and now his anticipations had to come down to a comparatively tame and uninteresting village, and every probability—so said the wise—of a stretch of rainy, unsummerlike weather.

Nat is a good-natured, cheery fellow, however—not nearly as clever or as impressionable as Dormy, but with the same common sense. So he wisely determined to make the best of things, and as we were really sorry for him, he did not, after all, come off very badly.

His principal amusement was roller-skating in the play-room. Dormy had not taken to it in the same way—the greater part of *his* time was spent with the rabbits and guinea-pigs, where Nat, when he himself had had skating enough, was pretty sure to find him.

I suppose it is with being the eldest sister that it always seems my fate to receive the confidences of the rest of the family, and it was about this time, a fortnight or so after his arrival, that it began to strike me that Nat looked as if he had something on his mind.

"He is sure to tell me what it is, sooner or later," I said to myself. "Probably he has left some small debts behind him at school—only he did not look worried or anxious when he first came home."

The confidence was given. One afternoon Nat followed me into the library, where I was going to write some letters, and said he wanted to speak to me. I put my paper aside and waited.

"Leila," he began, "you must promise not to laugh at me."

This was not what I expected.

"Laugh at you—no, certainly not," I replied, "especially if you are in any trouble. And I have thought you were looking worried, Nat."

"Well, yes," he said, "I don't know if there is anything coming over me—I feel quite well, but—Leila," he broke off, "do you believe in ghosts?"

I started.

"Has any one——" I was beginning rashly, but the boy interrupted me.

"No, no," he said eagerly, "no one has put anything of the kind into my head—no one. It is my own senses that have seen—felt it—or else, if it is fancy, I must be going out of my mind, Leila—I do believe there is a ghost here *in the play-room*."

I sat silent, an awful dread creeping over me, which, as he went on, grew worse and worse. Had the thing—the Finster shadow—attached itself to us—I had read of such cases—had it journeyed with us to this peaceful, healthful house? The remembrance of the cold thrill experienced by Miss Larpent and myself flashed back upon me. And Nat went on.

Yes, the cold was the first thing he had been startled by, followed, just as in the gallery of our old castle, by the consciousness of the terrible shadow-like presence, gradually taking form in the moonlight. For there had been moonlight the last night or two, and Nat, in his skating ardour, had amused himself alone in the play-room after Dormy had gone to bed.

"The night before last was the worst," he said. "It stopped raining, you remember, Leila, and the moon was very bright—I noticed how it glistened on the wet leaves outside. It was by the moonlight I saw the—the shadow. I wouldn't have thought of skating in the evening but for the light, for we've never had a lamp in there. It came round the walls, Leila, and then it seemed to stop and fumble away in one corner—at the end where there is a bench, you know."

Indeed I did know; it was where our governess and I had been sitting.

"I got so awfully frightened," said Nat honestly, "that I ran off. Then yesterday I was ashamed of myself, and went back there in the evening with a candle. But I saw nothing: the moon did not come out. Only—I felt the cold again. I believe it was there—though I could not see it. Leila, what *can* it be? If only I could make you understand! It is so *much* worse than it sounds to tell."

I said what I could to soothe him. I spoke of odd shadows thrown by the trees outside swaying in the wind, for the weather was still stormy. I repeated the time-worn argument about optical illusions, etc., etc., and in the end he gave in a little. It *might* have been his fancy. And he promised me most faithfully to breathe no hint—not the very faintest—of the fright he had had, to Sophy or Dormy, or any one.

Then I had to tell my father. I really shrank from doing so, but there seemed no alternative. At first, of course, he pooh-poohed it at once by saying Dormy must have been talking to Nat about the Finster business, or if not Dormy, *some one*—Miss Larpent even! But when all such explanations were entirely set at nought, I must say poor father looked rather blank. I was sorry for him, and sorry for myself—the idea of being *followed* by this horrible presence was too sickening.

Father took refuge at last in some brain-wave theory—involuntary impressions had been made on Nat by all of us, whose minds were still full of the strange experience. He said he felt sure, and no doubt he tried to think he did, that this theory explained the whole. I felt glad for him to get any satisfaction out of it, and I did my best to take it up too. But it was no use. I felt that Nat's experience had been an "objective" one, as Miss Larpent expressed it—or, as Dormy had said at the first at Finster: "No, no, sister—it's something *there*—it's nothing to do with *me*."

And earnestly I longed for the time to come for our return to our own familiar home.

"I don't think I shall ever wish to leave it again," I thought.

But after a week or two the feeling began to fade again. And father very sensibly discovered that it would not do to leave our spare furniture and heavy luggage in the barn—it was getting all dusty and cobwebby. So it was all moved back again to the play-room, and stacked as it had been at first, making it impossible for us to skate or amuse ourselves in any way there, at which Sophy grumbled, but Nat did not.

Father was very good to Nat. He took him about with him as much as he could to get the thought of that horrid thing out of his head. But yet it could not have been half as bad for Nat as for the rest of us, for we took the greatest possible precautions against any whisper of the dreadful and mysterious truth reaching him, that the ghost had *followed us* from Finster.

Father did not tell Mr. Miles or Jenny about it. They had been worried enough, poor things, by the trouble at Finster, and it would be too bad for them to think that the strange influence was affecting us in the *second* house we had taken at their recommendation.

"In fact," said father with a rather rueful smile, "if we don't take care, we shall begin to be looked upon askance as a haunted family! Our lives would have been in danger in the good old witchcraft days."

"It is really a mercy that none of the servants have got hold of the story," said Miss Larpent, who was one of our council of three. "We must just hope that no further annoyance will befall us till we are safe at home again."

Her hopes were fulfilled. Nothing else happened while we remained at the Rectory—it really seemed as if the unhappy shade was limited locally, in one sense. For at Finster, even, it had never been seen or felt save in the one

room.

The vividness of the impression of poor Nat's experience had almost died away when the time came for us to leave. I felt now that I should rather enjoy telling Phil and Nugent about it, and hearing what *they* could bring forward in the way of explanation.

We left Raxtrew early in October. Our two big brothers were awaiting us at home, having arrived there a few days before us. Nugent was due at Oxford very shortly.

It was very nice to be in our own house again, after several months' absence, and it was most interesting to see how the alterations, including a good deal of new papering and painting, had been carried out. And as soon as the heavy luggage arrived we had grand consultations as to the disposal about the rooms of the charming pieces of furniture we had picked up at Hunter's. Our rooms are large and nicely shaped, most of them. It was not difficult to make a pretty corner here and there with a quaint old chair or two and a delicate spindle-legged table, and when we had arranged them all—Phil, Nugent, and I, were the movers—we summoned mother and Miss Larpent to give their opinion.

They quite approved, mother even saying that she would be glad of a few more odds and ends.

"We might empower Janet Miles," she said, "to let us know if she sees anything very tempting. Is that really all we have? They looked so much more important in their swathings."

The same idea struck me. I glanced round.

"Yes," I said, "that's all, except—oh, yes, there are the tapestry "*portières*"—the best of all. We can't have them in the drawing-room, I fear. It is too modern for them. Where shall we hang them?"

"You are forgetting, Leila," said mother. "We spoke of having them in the hall. They will do beautifully to hang before the two side doors, which are seldom opened. And in cold weather the hall is draughty, though nothing like the gallery at Finster."

Why did she say that? It made me shiver, but then, of course, she did not know.

Our hall is a very pleasant one. We sit there a great deal. The side doors mother spoke of are second entrances to the dining-room and library—quite unnecessary, except when we have a large party, a dance or something of that sort. And the "*portières*" certainly seemed the very thing, the mellow colouring of the tapestry showing to great advantage. The boys—Phil and Nugent, I mean—set to work at once, and in an hour or two the hangings were placed.

"Of course," said Philip, "if ever these doors are to be opened, this precious tapestry must be taken down, or very carefully looped back. It is very worn in some places, and in spite of the thick lining it should be tenderly handled. I am afraid it has suffered a little from being so long rolled up at the Rectory. It should have been hung up!"

Still, it looked very well indeed, and when father, who was away at some magistrates' meeting, came home that afternoon, I showed him our arrangements with pride.

He was very pleased.

"Very nice—very nice indeed," he said, though it was almost too dusk for him to judge quite fully of the effect of the tapestry. "But, dear me, child, this hall is very cold. We must have a larger fire. Only October! What sort of a winter are we going to have?"

He shivered as he spoke. He was standing close to one of the "*portières*"—smoothing the tapestry half absently with one hand. I looked at him with concern.

"I *hope* you have not got a chill, papa," I said.

But he seemed all right again when we went into the library, where tea was waiting—an extra late tea for his benefit.

The next day Nugent went to Oxford. Nat had already returned to school. So our home party was reduced to father and mother, Miss Larpent, Phil and I, and the children.

We were very glad to have Phil settled at home for some time. There was little fear of his being tempted away, now that the shooting had begun. We were expecting some of our usual guests at this season; the weather was perfect autumn weather; we had thrown off all remembrance of influenza and other depressing "influences," and were feeling bright and cheerful, when again—ah, yes, even now it gives me a faint, sick sensation to recall the horror of that *third* visitation!

But I must tell it simply, and not give way to painful remembrances.

It was the very day before our first visitors were expected that the blow fell, the awful fear made itself felt. And, as before, the victim was a new one—the one who, for reasons already mentioned, we had specially guarded from any breath of the gruesome terror—poor little Sophy!

What she was doing alone in the hall late that evening I cannot quite recall—yes, I think I remember her saying she had run downstairs when half-way up to bed, to fetch a book she had left there in the afternoon. She had no light, and the one lamp in the hall—we never sat there after dinner—was burning feebly. *It was bright moonlight.*

I was sitting at the piano, where I had been playing in a rather sleepy way—when a sudden touch on my shoulder made me start, and, looking up, I saw my sister standing beside me, white and trembling.

"Leila," she whispered, "come with me quickly. I don't want mamma to notice."

For mother was still nervous and delicate.

The drawing-room is very long, and has two or three doors. No-one else was at our end. It was easy to make our way out unperceived. Sophy caught my hand and hurried me upstairs without speaking till we reached my own room, where a bright fire was burning cheerfully.

Then she began.

"Leila," she said, "I have had such an awful fright. I did not want to speak until we were safe up here."

"What was it?" I exclaimed breathlessly. Did I already suspect the truth? I really do not know, but my nerves were not what they had been.

Sophy gasped and began to tremble. I put my arm round her.

"It does not sound so bad," she said. "But—oh, Leila, what *could* it be? It was in the hall," and then I think she explained how she had come to be there. "I was standing near the side door into the library that we never use—and—all of a sudden a sort of darkness came along the wall, and seemed to settle on the door—where the old tapestry is, you know. I thought it was the shadow of something outside, for it was bright moonlight, and the windows were not shuttered. But in a moment I saw it could not be that—there is nothing to throw such a shadow. It seemed to wriggle about—like—like a monstrous spider, or—" and there she hesitated—"almost like a deformed sort of human being. And all at once, Leila, my breath went and I fell down. I really did. I was *choked* with cold. I think my senses went away, but I am not sure. The next thing I remember was rushing across the hall and then down the south corridor to the drawing-room, and then I was so thankful to see you there by the piano."

I drew her down on my knee, poor child.

"It was very good of you, dear," I said, "to control yourself, and not startle mamma."

This pleased her, but her terror was still uppermost.

"Leila," she said piteously, "can't you explain it? I did so hope you could."

What *could* I say?

"I—one would need to go to the hall and look well about to see what could cast such a shadow," I said vaguely, and I suppose I must involuntarily have moved a little, for Sophy started, and clutched me fast.

"Oh, Leila, don't go—you don't mean you are going now?" she entreated.

Nothing truly was farther from my thoughts, but I took care not to say so.

"I won't leave you if you'd rather not," I said, "and I tell you what, Sophy, if you would like very much to sleep here with me to-night, you shall. I will ring and tell Freake to bring your things down and undress you—on one condition."

"What?" she said eagerly. She was much impressed by my amiability.

"That you won't say *one word* about this, or give the least shadow of a hint to any one that you have had a fright. You don't know the trouble it will cause."

"Of course I will promise to let no one know, if you think it better, for you are so kind to me," said Sophy. But there was a touch of reluctance in her tone. "You—you mean to do something about it though, Leila," she went on. "I shall never be able to forget it if you don't."

"Yes," I said, "I shall speak to father and Phil about it to-morrow. If any one has been trying to frighten us," I added unguardedly, "by playing tricks, they certainly must be exposed."

"Not *us*," she corrected, "it was only me," and I did not reply. Why I spoke of the possibility of a trick I scarcely know. I had no hope of any such explanation.

But another strange, almost incredible idea was beginning to take shape in my mind, and with it came a faint, very faint touch of relief. Could it be not the *houses*, nor the *rooms*, nor, worst of all, we ourselves that were haunted, but something or things among the old furniture we had bought at Raxtrew?

And lying sleepless that night a sudden flash of illumination struck me—could it—whatever the "it" was—could it have something to do with the tapestry hangings?

The more I thought it over the more striking grew the coincidences. At Finster it had been on one of the closed doors that the shadow seemed to settle, as again here in our own hall. But in both cases the "*portières*" had hung in front!

And at the Rectory? The tapestry, as Philip had remarked, had been there rolled up all the time. Was it possible that it had never been taken out to the barn at all? What *more* probable than that it should have been left, forgotten, under the bench where Miss Larpent and I had felt for the second time that hideous cold? And, stay, something else was returning to my mind in connection with that bench. Yes—I had it—Nat had said "it seemed to stop and fumble away in one corner—at the end where there is a bench, you know."

And then to my unutterable thankfulness at last I fell asleep.

#### PART IV.

I told Philip the next morning. There was no need to bespeak his attention. I think he felt nearly as horrified as I had done myself at the idea that our own hitherto bright, cheerful home was to be haunted by this awful thing—*influence* or *presence*, call it what you will. And the suggestions which I went on to make struck him, too, with a sense of relief.

He sat in silence for some time after making me recapitulate as precisely as possible every detail of Sophy's story.

"You are sure it was the door into the library?" he said at last.

"Quite sure," I replied; "and, oh, Philip," I went on, "it has just occurred to me that *father* felt a chill there the other evening."

For till that moment the little incident in question had escaped my memory.

"Do you remember which of the "*portières*" hung in front of the door at Finster?" said Philip.

I shook my head.

"Dormy would," I said, "he used to examine the pictures in the tapestry with great interest. I should not know one from the other. There is an old castle in the distance in each, and a lot of trees, and something meant for a lake."

But in his turn Philip shook his head.

"No," he said, "I won't speak to Dormy about it if I can possibly help it. Leave it to me, Leila, and try to put it out of your own mind as much as you possibly can, and don't be surprised at anything you may notice in the next few days. I will tell you, first of any one, whenever I have anything to tell."

That was all I could get out of him. So I took his advice.

Luckily, as it turned out, Mr. Miles, the only outsider, so to say (except the unfortunate keeper), who had witnessed the ghostly drama, was one of the shooting party expected that day. And him Philip at once determined to consult about this new and utterly unexpected manifestation.

He did not tell me this. Indeed, it was not till fully a week later that I heard anything, and then in a letter—a very long letter from my brother, which, I think, will relate the sequel of our strange ghost story better than any narration at second-hand, of my own.

Mr. Miles only stayed two nights with us. The very day after he came he announced that, to his great regret, he was obliged—most unexpectedly—to return to Raxtrew on important business.

"And," he continued, "I am afraid you will all feel much more vexed with me when I tell you I am going to carry off Phil with me."

Father looked very blank indeed.

"Phil!" he exclaimed, "and how about our shooting?"

"You can easily replace us," said my brother, "I have thought of that," and he added something in a lower tone to father. He—Phil—was leaving the room at the time. *I* thought it had reference to the real reason of his accompanying Mr. Miles, but I was mistaken. Father, however, said nothing more in opposition to the plan, and the next morning the two went off.

We happened to be standing at the hall door—several of us—for we were a large party now—when Phil and his friend drove away. As we turned to re-enter the house, I felt some one touch me. It was Sophy. She was going out for a constitutional with Miss Larpent, but had stopped a moment to speak to me.

"Leila," she said in a whisper, "why have they—did you know that the tapestry had been taken down?"

She glanced at me with a peculiar expression. I had not observed it. Now, looking up, I saw that the two locked doors were visible in the dark polish of their old mahogany as of yore—no longer shrouded by the ancient *portières*. I



started in surprise.

"No," I whispered in return, "I did not know. Never mind, Sophy. I suspect there is a reason for it which we shall know in good time."

I felt strongly tempted—the moon being still at the full—to visit the hall that night—in hopes of feeling and seeing—*nothing*. But when the time drew near, my courage failed; besides I had tacitly promised Philip to think as little as I possibly could about the matter, and any vigil of the kind would certainly not have been acting in accordance with the spirit of his advice.

I think I will now copy, as it stands, the letter from Philip which I received a week or so later. It was dated from his club in London.

"MY DEAR LEILA,

"I have a long story to tell you and a very extraordinary one. I think it is well that it should be put into writing, so I will devote this evening to the task—especially as I shall not be home for ten days or so.

"You may have suspected that I took Miles into my confidence as soon as he arrived. If you did you were right. He was the best person to speak to for several reasons. He looked, I must say, rather—well 'blank' scarcely expresses it—when I told him of the ghost's re-appearance, not only at the Rectory, but in our own house, and on both occasions to persons—Nat, and then Sophy—who had not heard a breath of the story. But when I went on to propound your suggestion, Miles cheered up. He had been, I fancy, a trifle touchy about our calling Finster haunted, and it was evidently a satisfaction to him to start another theory. We talked it well over, and we decided to test the thing again—it took some resolution, I own, to do so. We sat up that night—bright moonlight luckily—and—well, I needn't repeat it all. Sophy was quite correct. It came again—the horrid creeping shadow—poor wretch, I'm rather sorry for it now—just in the old way—quite as much at home in—shire, apparently, as in the Castle. It stopped at the closed library door, and fumbled away, then started off again—ugh! We watched it closely, but kept well in the middle of the room, so that the cold did not strike us so badly. We both noted the special part of the tapestry where its hands seemed to sprawl, and we meant to stay for another round; but—when it came to the point we funked it, and went to bed.

"Next morning, on pretence of examining the date of the tapestry, we had it down—you were all out—and we found—*something*. Just where the hands felt about, there had been a cut—three cuts, three sides of a square, as it were, making a sort of door in the stuff, the fourth side having evidently acted as a hinge, for there was a mark where it had been folded back. And just where—treating the thing as a door—you might expect to find a handle to open it by, we found a distinct dint in the tapestry, as if a button or knob had once been there. We looked at each other. The same idea had struck us. The tapestry had been used to conceal a small door in the wall—the door of a secret cupboard probably. The ghostly fingers had been vainly seeking for the spring which in the days of their flesh and bone they had been accustomed to press.

"'The first thing to do,' said Miles, 'is to look up Hunter and make him tell where he got the tapestry from. Then we shall see.'

"'Shall we take the *portières* with us?' I said.

"But Miles shuddered, though he half laughed too.

"'No, thank you,' he said. 'I'm not going to travel with the evil thing.'

"'We can't hang it up again, though,' I said, 'after this last experience.'

"In the end we rolled up the two *portières*, not to attract attention by only moving one, and—well, I thought it just possible the ghost might make a mistake, and I did not want any more scares while I was away—we

rolled them up together, first carefully measuring the cut, and its position in the curtain, and then we hid them away in one of the lofts that no one ever enters, where they are at this moment, and where the ghost may have been disporting himself, for all I know, though I fancy he has given it up by this time, for reasons you shall hear.

"Then Miles and I, as you know, set off for Raxtrew. I smoothed my father down about it, by reminding him how good-natured they had been to us, and telling him Miles really needed me. We went straight to Hunter. He hummed and hawed a good deal—he had not distinctly promised not to give the name of the place the tapestry had come from, but he knew the gentleman he had bought it from did not want it known.

"'Why?' said Miles. 'Is it some family that has come down in the world, and is forced to part with things to get some ready money?'

"'Oh, dear no!' said Hunter. 'It is not that, at all. It was only that—I suppose I must give you the name—Captain Devereux—did not want any gossip to get about, as to ——'

"'Devereux!' repeated Miles, 'you don't mean the people at Hallinger?'

"'The same,' said Hunter. 'If you know them, sir, you will be careful, I hope, to assure the captain that I did my best to carry out his wishes?'

"'Certainly,' said Miles, 'I'll exonerate you.'

"And then Hunter told us that Devereux, who only came into the Hallinger property a few years ago, had been much annoyed by stories getting about of the place being haunted, and this had led to his dismantling one wing, and—Hunter thought, but was not quite clear as to this—pulling down some rooms altogether. But he, Devereux, was very touchy on the subject—he did not want to be laughed at.

"'And the tapestry came from him—you are certain as to that?' Miles repeated.

"'Positive, sir. I took it down with my own hands. It was fitted on to two panels in what they call the round room at Hallinger—there were, oh, I daresay, a dozen of them, with tapestry nailed on, but I only bought these two pieces—the others were sold to a London dealer.'

"'The round room,' I said. Leila, the expression struck me.

"Miles, it appeared, knew Devereux fairly well. Hallinger is only ten miles off. We drove over there, but found he was in London. So our next move was to follow him there. We called twice at his club, and then Miles made an appointment, saying that he wanted to see him on private business.

"He received us civilly, of course. He is quite a young fellow—in the Guards. But when Miles began to explain to him what we had come about, he stiffened.

"'I suppose you belong to the Psychological Society?' he said. 'I can only repeat that I have nothing to tell, and I detest the whole subject.'

"'Wait a moment,' said Miles, and as he went on I saw that Devereux changed. His face grew intent with interest and a queer sort of eagerness, and at last he started to his feet.

"'Upon my soul,' he said, 'I believe you've run him to earth for me—the ghost, I mean, and if so, you shall have my endless gratitude. I'll go down to Hallinger with you at once—this afternoon, if you like, and see it out.'

"He was so excited that he spoke almost incoherently, but after a bit he calmed down, and told us all he had to tell—and that was a good deal—which would indeed have been nuts for the Psychological Society. What Hunter

had said was but a small part of the whole. It appeared that on succeeding to Hallinger, on the death of an uncle, young Devereux had made considerable changes in the house. He had, among others, opened out a small wing—a sort of round tower—which had been completely dismantled and bricked up for, I think he said, over a hundred years. There was some story about it. An ancestor of his—an awful gambler—had used the principal room in this wing for his orgies. Very queer things went on there, the finish up being the finding of old Devereux dead there one night, when his servants were summoned by the man he had been playing with—with whom he had had an awful quarrel. This man, a low fellow, probably a professional cardsharp, vowed that he had been robbed of a jewel which his host had staked, and it was said that a ring of great value had disappeared. But it was all hushed up—Devereux had really died in a fit—though soon after, for reasons only hinted at, the round tower was shut up, till the present man rashly opened it again.

"Almost at once, he said, the annoyances, to use a mild term, began. First one, then another of the household were terrified out of their wits, just as we were, Leila. Devereux himself had seen it two or three times, the 'it,' of course, being his miserable old ancestor. A small man, with a big wig, and long, thin, claw-like fingers. It all corresponded. Mrs. Devereux is young and nervous. She could not stand it. So in the end the round tower was shut up again, all the furniture and hangings sold, and locally speaking, the ghost laid. That was all Devereux knew.

"We started, the three of us, that very afternoon, as excited as a party of schoolboys. Miles and I kept questioning Devereux, but he had really no more to tell. He had never thought of examining the walls of the haunted room—it was wainscotted, he said—and might be lined all through with secret cupboards, for all he knew. But he could not get over the extraordinariness of the ghost's sticking to the *tapestry*—and indeed it does rather lower one's idea of ghostly intelligence.

"We went at it at once—the tower was not *bricked* up again, luckily—we got in without difficulty the next morning—Devereux making some excuse to the servants, a new set who had not heard of the ghost, for our eccentric proceedings. It was a tiresome business. There were so many panels in the room, as Hunter had said, and it was impossible to tell in which *the* tapestry had been fixed. But we had our measures, and we carefully marked a line as near as we could guess at the height from the floor that the cut in the *portières* must have been. Then we tapped and pummelled and pressed imaginary springs till we were nearly sick of it—there was nothing to guide us. The wainscotting was dark and much shrunk and marked with age, and full of joins in the wood any one of which might have meant a door.

"It was Devereux himself who found it at last. We heard an exclamation from where he was standing by himself at the other side of the room. He was quite white and shaky.

"'Look here,' he said, and we looked.

"Yes—there was a small deep recess, or cupboard in the thickness of the wall, excellently contrived. Devereux had touched the spring at last, and the door, just matching the cut in the tapestry, flew open.

"Inside lay what at first we took for a packet of letters, and I hoped to myself they contained nothing that would bring trouble on poor Devereux. They were not letters, however, but two or three incomplete packs of cards—grey and dust-thick with age—and as Miles spread them out, certain markings on them told their own tale. Devereux did not like it, naturally—their supposed owner had been a member of his house.

"'The ghost has kept a conscience,' he said, with an attempt at a laugh. 'Is there nothing more?'

"Yes—a small leather bag—black and grimy, though originally, I fancy, of chamois skin. It drew with strings. Devereux pulled it open, and felt inside.

"'By George!' he exclaimed. And he held out the most magnificent diamond ring I have ever seen—sparkling away as if it had only just come from the polisher's. 'This must be *the* ring,' he said.

"And we all stared—too astonished to speak.

"Devereux closed the cupboard again, after carefully examining it to make sure nothing had been left behind. He marked the exact spot where he had pressed the spring so as to find it at any time. Then we all left the round room, locking the door securely after us.

"Miles and I spent that night at Hallinger. We sat up late talking it all over. There are some queer inconsistencies about the thing which will probably never be explained. First and foremost—why has the ghost stuck to the tapestry instead of to the actual spot he seemed to have wished to reveal? Secondly, what was the connection between his visits and the full moon—or is it that only by the moonlight the shade becomes perceptible to human sense? Who can say?

"As to the story itself—what was old Devereux's motive in concealing his own ring? Were the marked cards his, or his opponent's, of which he had managed to possess himself, and had secreted as testimony against the other fellow?

"I incline, and so does Miles, to this last theory, and when we suggested it to Devereux, I could see it was a relief to him. After all, one likes to think one's ancestors were gentlemen!

"But what, then, has he been worrying about all this century or more?' he said. 'If it were that he wanted the ring returned to its real owner—supposing the fellow *had* won it—I could understand it, though such a thing would be impossible. There is no record of the man at all—his name was never mentioned in the story.'

"He may want the ring restored to its proper owner all the same,' said Miles. 'You are its owner, as the head of the family, and it has been your ancestor's fault that it has been hidden all these years. Besides, we cannot take upon ourselves to explain motives in such a case. Perhaps—who knows?—the poor shade could not help himself. His peregrinations may have been of the nature of punishment.'

"I hope they are over now,' said Devereux, 'for his sake and everybody else's. I should be glad to think he wanted the ring restored to us, but besides that, I should like to do something—something *good* you know—if it would make him easier, poor old chap. I must consult Liliás.' Liliás is Mrs. Devereux.

"This is all I have to tell you at present, Leila. When I come home we'll have the *portières* up again and see what happens. I want you now to read all this to my father, and if he has no objection—he and my mother, of course—I should like to invite Captain and Mrs. Devereux to stay a few days with us—as well as Miles, as soon as I come back."

Philip's wish was acceded to. It was with no little anxiety and interest that we awaited his return.

The tapestry *portières* were restored to their place—and on the first moonlight night, my father, Philip, Captain Devereux and Mr. Miles held their vigil.

What happened?

*Nothing*—the peaceful rays lighted up the quaint landscape of the tapestry, undisturbed by the poor groping fingers—no gruesome unearthly chill as of worse than death made itself felt to the midnight watchers—the weary, may we not hope repentant, spirit was at rest at last!

And never since has any one been troubled by the shadow in the moonlight.

"I cannot help hoping," said Mrs. Devereux, when talking it over, "that what Michael has done may have helped to calm the poor ghost."

And she told us what it was. Captain Devereux is rich, though not immensely so. He had the ring valued—it

represented a very large sum, but Philip says I had better not name the figures—and then he, so to say, bought it from himself. And with this money he—no, again, Phil says I must not enter into particulars beyond saying that with it he did something very good, and very useful, which had long been a pet scheme of his wife's.

Sophy is grown up now and she knows the whole story. So does our mother. And Dormy too has heard it all. The horror of it has quite gone. We feel rather proud of having been the actual witnesses of a ghostly drama.

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## "THE MAN WITH THE COUGH."

I am a German by birth and descent. My name is Schmidt. But by education I am quite as much an Englishman as a "Deutscher," and by affection much more the former. My life has been spent pretty equally between the two countries, and I flatter myself I speak both languages without any foreign accent.

I count England my headquarters now: it is "home" to me. But a few years ago I was resident in Germany, only going over to London now and then on business. I will not mention the town where I lived. It is unnecessary to do so, and in the peculiar experience I am about to relate I think real names of people and places are just as well, or better, avoided.

I was connected with a large and important firm of engineers. I had been bred up to the profession, and was credited with a certain amount of talent; and I was considered—and, with all modesty, I think I deserved the opinion—steady and reliable, so that I had already attained a fair position in the house, and was looked upon as a "rising man". But I was still young, and not quite so wise as I thought myself. I came very near once to making a great mess of a certain affair. It is this story which I am going to tell.

Our house went in largely for patents—rather too largely, some thought. But the head partner's son was a bit of a genius in his way, and his father was growing old, and let Herr Wilhelm—Moritz we will call the family name—do pretty much as he chose. And on the whole Herr Wilhelm did well. He was cautious, and he had the benefit of the still greater caution and larger experience of Herr Gerhardt, the second partner in the firm.

Patents and the laws which regulate them are queer things to have to do with. No one who has not had personal experience of the complications that arise could believe how far these spread and how entangled they become. Great acuteness as well as caution is called for if you would guide your patent bark safely to port—and perhaps more than anything, a power of holding your tongue. I was no chatterbox, nor, when on a mission of importance, did I go about looking as if I were bursting with secrets, which is, in my opinion, almost as dangerous as revealing them. No one, to meet me on the journeys which it often fell to my lot to undertake, would have guessed that I had anything on my mind but an easy-going young fellow's natural interest in his surroundings, though many a time I have stayed awake through a whole night of railway travel if at all doubtful about my fellow-passengers, or not dared to go to sleep in a hotel without a ready-loaded revolver by my pillow.

For now and then—though not through me—our secrets did ooze out. And if, as *has* happened, they were secrets connected with Government orders or contracts, there was, or but for the exertion of the greatest energy and tact on the part of my superiors, there *would* have been, to put it plainly, the devil to pay.

One morning—it was nearing the end of November—I was sent for to Herr Wilhelm's private room. There I found him and Herr Gerhardt before a table spread with papers covered with figures and calculations, and sheets of beautifully executed diagrams.

"Lutz," said Herr Wilhelm. He had known me from childhood, and often called me by the abbreviation of my

Christian name, which is Ludwig, or Louis. "Lutz, we are going to confide to you a matter of extreme importance. You must be prepared to start for London to-morrow."

"All right, sir," I said, "I shall be ready."

"You will take the express through to Calais—on the whole it is the best route, especially at this season. By travelling all night you will catch the boat there, and arrive in London so as to have a good night's rest, and be clear-headed for work the next morning."

I bowed agreement, but ventured to make a suggestion.

"If, as I infer, the matter is one of great importance," I said, "would it not be well for me to start sooner? I can—yes," throwing a rapid survey over the work I had before me for the next two days—"I can be ready to-night."

Herr Wilhelm looked at Herr Gerhardt. Herr Gerhardt shook his head.

"No," he replied; "to-morrow it must be," and then he proceeded to explain to me why.

I need not attempt to give all the details of the matter with which I was entrusted. Indeed, to "lay" readers it would be impossible. Suffice it to say, the whole concerned a patent—that of a very remarkable and wonderful invention, which it was hoped and believed the Governments of both countries would take up. But to secure this being done in a thoroughly satisfactory manner it was necessary that our firm should go about it in concert with an English house of first-rate standing. To this house—the firm of Messrs. Bluestone and Fagg I will call them—I was to be sent with full explanations. And the next half-hour or more passed in my superiors going minutely into the details, so as to satisfy themselves that I understood. The mastering of the whole was not difficult, for I was well grounded technically; and like many of the best things the idea was essentially simple, and the diagrams were perfect. When the explanations were over, and my instructions duly noted, I began to gather together the various sheets, which were all numbered. But, to my surprise, Herr Gerhardt, looking over me, withdrew two of the most important diagrams, without which the others were valueless, because inexplicable.

"Stay," he said; "these two, Ludwig, must be kept separate. These we send to-day, by registered post, direct to Bluestone and Fagg. They will receive them a day before they see you, and with them a letter announcing your arrival."

I looked up in some disappointment. I had known of precautions of the kind being taken, but usually when the employé sent was less reliable than I believed myself to be. Still, I scarcely dared to demur.

"Do you think that necessary?" I said respectfully. "I can assure you that from the moment you entrust me with the papers they shall never quit me day or night. And if there were any postal delay—you say time is valuable in this case—or if the papers were stolen in the transit—such things have happened—my whole mission would be worthless."

"We do not doubt your zeal and discretion, my good Schmidt," said Herr Gerhardt. "But in this case we must take even extra precautions. I had not meant to tell you, fearing to add to the certain amount of nervousness and strain unavoidable in such a case, but still, perhaps it is best that you should know that we *have* reason for some special anxiety. It has been hinted to us that some breath of this"—and he tapped the papers—"has reached those who are always on the watch for such things. We cannot be too careful."

"And yet," I persisted, "you would trust the post?"

"We do not trust the post," he replied. "Even if these diagrams were tampered with, they would be perfectly useless. And tampered with they will not be. But even supposing anything so wild, the rogues in question knowing of your departure (and they are *more* likely to know of it than of our packet by post), were they in collusion with some traitor in the post-office, are sharp enough to guess the truth—that we have made a Masonic secret of it—the two separate diagrams are valueless without your papers; *your* papers reveal nothing without Nos. 7 and 13."

I bowed in submission. But I was, all the same, disappointed, as I said, and a trifle mortified.

Herr Wilhelm saw it, and cheered me up.

"All right, Lutz, my boy," he said. "I feel just like you—nothing I should enjoy more than a rush over to London, carrying the whole documents, and prepared for a fight with any one who tried to get hold of them. But Herr Gerhardt here is cooler-blooded than we are."

The elder man smiled.

"I don't doubt your readiness to fight, nor Ludwig's either. But it would be by no such honestly brutal means as open robbery that we should be outwitted. Make friends readily with no one while travelling, Lutz, yet avoid the appearance of keeping yourself aloof. You understand?"

"Perfectly," I said. "I shall sleep well to-night, so as to be prepared to keep awake throughout the journey."

The papers were then carefully packed up. Those consigned to my care were to be carried in a certain light, black handbag with a very good lock, which had often before been my travelling companion.

And the following evening I started by the express train agreed upon. So, at least, I have always believed, but I have never been able to bring forward a witness to the fact of my train at the start being the right one, as no one came with me to see me off. For it was thought best that I should depart in as unobtrusive a manner as possible, as, even in a large town such as ours, the members and employes of an old and important house like the Moritzes' were well known.

I took my ticket then, registering no luggage, as I had none but what I easily carried in my hand, as well as *the* bag. It was already dusk, if not dark, and there was not much bustle in the station, nor apparently many passengers. I took my place in an empty second-class compartment, and sat there quietly till the train should start. A few minutes before it did so, another man got in. I was somewhat annoyed at this, as in my circumstances nothing was more undesirable than travelling alone with one other. Had there been a crowded compartment, or one with three or four passengers, I would have chosen it; but at the moment I got in, the carriages were all either empty or with but one or two occupants. Now, I said to myself, I should have done better to wait till nearer the time of departure, and then chosen my place.

I turned to reconnoitre my companion, but I could not see his face clearly, as he was half leaning out of the window. Was he doing so on purpose? I said to myself, for naturally I was in a suspicious mood. And as the thought struck me I half started up, determined to choose another compartment. Suddenly a peculiar sound made itself heard. My companion was coughing. He drew his head in, covering his face with his hand, as he coughed again. You never heard such a curious cough. It was more like a hen clucking than anything I can think of. Once, twice he coughed; then, as if he had been waiting for the slight spasm to pass, he sprang up, looked eagerly out of the window again, and, opening the door, jumped out, with some exclamation, as if he had just caught sight of a friend.

And in another moment or two—he could barely have had time to get in elsewhere—much to my satisfaction, the train moved off.

"Now," thought I, "I can make myself comfortable for some hours. We do not stop till M——: it will be nine o'clock by then. If no one gets in there I am safe to go through till to-morrow alone; then there will only be —— Junction, and a clear run to Calais."

I unstrapped my rug and lit a cigar—of course I had chosen a smoking-carriage—and, delighted at having got rid of my clucking companion, the time passed pleasantly till we pulled up at M——. The delay there was not great, and to my enormous satisfaction no one molested my solitude. Evidently the express to Calais was not in very great demand that night. I now felt so secure that, notwithstanding my intention of keeping awake all night, my innermost consciousness had not I suppose quite resigned itself to the necessity, for, not more than a hour or so after leaving M——, possibly sooner, I fell fast asleep.

It seemed to me that I had slept heavily, for when I awoke I had great difficulty in remembering where I was. Only by slow degrees did I realise that I was not in my comfortable bed at home, but in a chilly, ill-lighted railway-carriage. Chilly—yes, that it was—very chilly; but as my faculties returned I remembered my precious bag, and forgot all else in a momentary terror that it had been taken from me. No; there it was—my elbow had been pressed against it as I slept. But how was this? The train was not in motion. We were standing in a station; a dingy deserted-looking place, with no cheerful noise or bustle; only one or two porters slowly moving about, with a sort of sleepy "night duty," surly air. It could not be the Junction? I looked at my watch. Barely midnight! Of course, not the Junction. We were not due there till four o'clock in the morning or so.

What, then, were we doing here, and what *was* "here"? Had there been an accident—some unforeseen necessity for stopping? At that moment a curious sound, from some yards' distance only it seemed to come, caught my ear. It was that croaking, cackling cough!—the cough of my momentary fellow-passenger, towards whom I had felt an instinctive aversion. I looked out of the window—there was a refreshment-room just opposite, dimly lighted, like everything else, and in the doorway, as if just entering, was a figure which I felt pretty sure was that of the man with the cough.

"Bah!" I said to myself, "I must not be fanciful. I daresay the fellow's all right. He is evidently in the same hole as myself. What in Heaven's name are we waiting here for?"

I sprang out of the carriage, nearly tumbling over a porter slowly passing along.

"How long are we to stay here?" I cried. "When do we start again for ——?" and I named the Junction.

"For ——" he repeated in the queerest German I ever heard—was it German? or did I discover his meaning by some preternatural cleverness of my own? "There is no train for —— for four or five hours, not till——" and he named the time; and leaning forward lazily, he took out my larger bag and my rug, depositing them on the platform. He did not seem the least surprised at finding me there—I might have been there for a week, it seemed to me.

"No train for five hours? Are you mad?" I said.

He shook his head and mumbled something, and it seemed to me that he pointed to the refreshment-room opposite. Gathering my things together I hurried thither, hoping to find some more reliable authority. But there was no one there except a fat man with a white apron, who was clearing the counter—and—yes, in one corner was the figure I had mentally dubbed "The man with the cough".

I addressed the cook or waiter—whichever he was. But he only shook his head—denied all knowledge of the trains, but informed me that—in other words—I must turn out; he was going to shut up.

"And where am I to spend the night, then?" I said angrily, though clearly it was not the aproned individual who was responsible for the position in which I found myself.

There was a "Restauration," he informed me, near at hand, which I should find still open, straight before me on leaving the station, and then a few doors to the right, I would see the lights.

Clearly there was nothing else to be done. I went out, and as I did so the silent figure in the corner rose also and followed me. The station was evidently going to bed. As I passed the porter I repeated the hour he had named, adding: "That is the first train for —— Junction?"

He nodded, again naming the exact time. But I cannot do so, as I have never been able to recollect it.

I trudged along the road—there were lamps, though very feeble ones; but by their light I saw that the man who had been in the refreshment-room was still a few steps behind me. It made me feel slightly nervous, and I looked round furtively once or twice; the last time I did so he was not to be seen, and I hoped he had gone some other way.

The "Restauration" was scarcely more inviting than the station refreshment-room. It, too, was very dimly lighted, and



the one or two attendants seemed half asleep and were strangely silent. There was a fire, of a kind, and I seated myself at a small table near it and asked for some coffee, which would, I thought, serve the double purpose of warming me and keeping me awake.

It was brought me, in silence. I drank it, and felt the better for it. But there was something so gloomy and unsociable, so queer and almost weird about the whole aspect and feeling of the place, that a sort of irritable resignation took possession of me. If these surly folk won't speak, neither will I, I said to myself childishly. And, incredible as it may sound, I did *not* speak. I think I paid for the coffee, but I am not quite sure. I know I never asked what I had meant to ask—the name of the town—a place of some importance, to judge by the size of the station and the extent of twinkling lights I had observed as I made my way to the "Restauration". From that day to this I have never been able to identify it, and I am quite sure I never shall.

What was there peculiar about that coffee? Or was it something peculiar about my own condition that caused it to have the unusual effect I now experienced? That question, too, I cannot answer. All I remember is feeling a sensation of irresistible drowsiness creeping over me—mental, or moral I may say, as well as physical. For when one part of me feebly resisted the first onslaught of sleep, something seemed to reply: "Oh, nonsense! you have several hours before you. Your papers are all right. No one can touch them without awaking you."

And dreamily conscious that my belongings were on the floor at my feet—the bag itself actually resting against my ankle—my scruples silenced themselves in an extraordinary way. I remember nothing more, save a vague consciousness through all my slumber of confused and chaotic dreams, which I have never been able to recall.

I awoke at last, and that with a start, almost a jerk. Something had awakened me—a sound—and as it was repeated to my now aroused ears I knew that I had heard it before, off and on, during my sleep. It was the extraordinary cough!

I looked up. Yes, there he was! At some two or three yards' distance only, at the other side of the fireplace, which, and this I have forgotten to mention as another peculiar item in that night's peculiar experiences, considering I have every reason to believe I was still in Germany, was not a stove, but an open grate.

And he had not been there when I first fell asleep; to that I was prepared to swear.

"He must have come sneaking in after me," I thought, and in all probability I should neither have noticed nor recognised him but for that traitorous cackle of his.

Now, my misgivings aroused, my first thought, of course, was for my precious charge. I stooped. There were my rugs, my larger bag, but—no, not the smaller one; and though the other two were there, I knew at once that they were not quite in the same position—not so close to me. Horror seized me. Half wildly I gazed around, when my silent neighbour bent towards me. I could declare there was nothing in his hand when he did so, and I could declare as positively that I had already looked under the small round table beside which I sat, and that the bag was not there. And yet when the man, with a slight cackle, caused, no doubt, by his stooping, raised himself, the thing was in his hand!

Was he a conjurer, a pupil of Maskelyne and Cook? And how was it that, even as he held out my missing property, he managed, and that most cleverly and unobtrusively, to prevent my catching sight of his face? I did not see it then—I never did see it!

Something he murmured, to the effect that he supposed the bag was what I was looking for. In what language he spoke I know not; it was more that by the action accompanying the mumbled sounds I gathered his meaning, than that I heard anything articulate.

I thanked him, of course, mechanically, so to say, though I began to feel as if he were an evil spirit haunting me. I could only hope that the splendid lock to the bag had defied all curiosity, but I felt in a fever to be alone again, and able to satisfy myself that nothing had been tampered with.

The thought recalled my wandering faculties. How long had I been asleep? I drew out my watch. Heavens! It was

close upon the hour named for the first train in the morning. I sprang up, collected my things, and dashed out of the "Restauration". If I had not paid for my coffee before, I certainly did not pay for it then. Besides my haste, there was another reason for this—there was no one to pay to! Not a creature was to be seen in the room or at the door as I passed out—always excepting the man with the cough.

As I left the place and hurried along the road, a bell began, not to ring, but to toll. It sounded most uncanny. What it meant, of course, I have never known. It may have been a summons to the workpeople of some manufactory, it may have been like all the other experiences of that strange night. But no; this theory I will not at present enter upon.

Dawn was not yet breaking, but there was in one direction a faint suggestion of something of the kind not far off. Otherwise all was dark. I stumbled along as best as I could, helped in reality, I suppose, by the ugly yellow glimmer of the woebegone street, or road lamps. And it was not far to the station, though somehow it seemed farther than when I came; and somehow, too, it seemed to have grown steep, though I could not remember having noticed any slope the other way on my arrival. A nightmare-like sensation began to oppress me. I felt as if my luggage was growing momentarily heavier and heavier, as if I should *never* reach the station; and to this was joined the agonising terror of missing the train.

I made a desperate effort. Cold as it was, the beads of perspiration stood out upon my forehead as I forced myself along. And by degrees the nightmare feeling cleared off. I found myself entering the station at a run just as—yes, a train was actually beginning to move! I dashed, baggage and all, into a compartment; it was empty, and it was a second-class one, precisely similar to the one I had occupied before; it might have been the very same one. The train gradually increased its speed, but for the first few moments, while still in the station and passing through its immediate *entourage*, another strange thing struck me—the extraordinary silence and lifelessness of all about. Not one human being did I see, no porter watching our departure with the faithful though stolid interest always to be seen on the porter's visage. I might have been alone in the train—it might have had a freight of the dead, and been itself propelled by some supernatural agency, so noiselessly, so gloomily did it proceed.

You will scarcely credit that I actually and for the third time fell asleep. I could not help it. Some occult influence was at work upon me throughout those dark hours, I am positively certain. And with the daylight it was dispelled. For when I again awoke I felt for the first time since leaving home completely and normally myself, fresh and vigorous, all my faculties at their best.

But, nevertheless, my first sensation was a start of amazement, almost of terror. The compartment was nearly full! There were at least five or six travellers besides myself, very respectable, ordinary-looking folk, with nothing in the least alarming about them. Yet it was with a gasp of extraordinary relief that I found my precious bag in the corner beside me, where I had carefully placed it. It was concealed from view. No one, I felt assured, could have touched it without awaking me.

It was broad and bright daylight. How long had I slept?

"Can you tell me," I inquired of my opposite neighbour, a cheery-faced compatriot—"Can you tell me how soon we get to —— Junction by this train? I am most anxious to catch the evening mail at Calais, and am quite out in my reckonings, owing to an extraordinary delay at ——. I have wasted the night by getting into a stopping train instead of the express."

He looked at me in astonishment. He must have thought me either mad or just awaking from a fit of intoxication—only I flatter myself I did not look as if the latter were the case.

"How soon we get to —— Junction?" he repeated. "Why, my good sir, you left it about three hours ago! It is now eight o'clock. We all got in at the Junction. You were alone, if I mistake not?"—he glanced at one or two of the others, who endorsed his statement. "And very fast asleep you were, and must have been, not to be disturbed by the bustle at the station. And as for catching the evening boat at Calais!"—he burst into a loud guffaw—"why, it would be very hard lines to do no better than that! *We* all hope to cross by the mid-day one."

"Then—what train *is* this?" I exclaimed, utterly perplexed.

"The express, of course. All of us, excepting yourself, joined it at the Junction," he replied.

"The express?" I repeated. "The express that leaves"—and I named my own town—"at six in the evening?"

"Exactly. You have got into the right train after all," and here came another shout of amusement. "How did you think we had all got in if you had not yet passed the Junction? You had not the pleasure of our company from M——, I take it? M——, which you passed at nine o'clock last night, if my memory is correct."

"Then," I persisted, "this is the double-fast express, which does not stop between M—— and your Junction?"

"Exactly," he repeated; and then, confirmed most probably in his belief that I was mad, or the other thing, he turned to his newspaper, and left me to my extraordinary cogitations.

Had I been dreaming? Impossible! Every sensation, the very taste of the coffee, seemed still present with me—the curious accent of the officials at the mysterious town, I could perfectly recall. I still shivered at the remembrance of the chilly waking in the "Restauration"; I heard again the cackling cough.

But I felt I must collect myself, and be ready for the important negotiation entrusted to me. And to do this I must for the time banish these fruitless efforts at solving the problem.

We had a good run to Calais, found the boat in waiting, and a fair passage brought us prosperously across the Channel. I found myself in London punctual to the intended hour of my arrival.

At once I drove to the lodgings in a small street off the Strand which I was accustomed to frequent in such circumstances. I felt nervous till I had an opportunity of thoroughly overhauling my documents. The bag had been opened by the Custom House officials, but the words "private papers" had sufficed to prevent any further examination; and to my unspeakable delight they were intact. A glance satisfied me as to this the moment I got them out, for they were most carefully numbered.

The next morning saw me early on my way to—No. 909, we will say—Blackfriars Street, where was the office of Messrs. Bluestone & Fagg. I had never been there before, but it was easy to find, and had I felt any doubt, their name stared me in the face at the side of the open doorway. "Second-floor" I thought I read; but when I reached the first landing I imagined I must have been mistaken. For there, at a door ajar, stood an eminently respectable-looking gentleman, who bowed as he saw me, with a discreet smile.

"Herr Schmidt?" he said. "Ah, yes; I was on the look-out for you."

I felt a little surprised, and my glance involuntarily strayed to the doorway. There was no name upon it, and it appeared to have been freshly painted. My new friend saw my glance.

"It is all right," he said; "we have the painters here. We are using these lower rooms temporarily. I was watching to prevent your having the trouble of mounting to the second-floor."

And as I followed him in, I caught sight of a painter's ladder—a small one—on the stair above, and the smell was also unmistakable.

The large outer office looked bare and empty, but under the circumstances that was natural. No one was, at the first glance, to be seen; but behind a dulled glass partition screening off one corner I fancied I caught sight of a seated figure. And an inner office, to which my conductor led the way, had a more comfortable and inhabited look. Here stood a younger man. He bowed politely.

"Mr. Fagg, my junior," said the first individual airily. "And now, Herr Schmidt, to business at once, if you please. Time is everything. You have all the documents ready?"

I answered by opening my bag and spreading out its contents. Both men were very grave, almost taciturn; but as I proceeded to explain things it was easy to see that they thoroughly understood all I said.

"And now," I went on, when I had reached a certain point, "if you will give me Nos. 7 and 13 which you have already received by registered post, I can put you in full possession of the whole. Without them, of course, all I have said is, so to say, preliminary only."

The two looked at each other.

"Of course," said the elder man, "I follow what you say. The key of the whole is wanting. But I was momentarily expecting you to bring it out. We have not—Fagg, I am right, am I not—we have received nothing by post?"

"Nothing whatever," replied his junior. And the answer seemed simplicity itself. Why did a strange thrill of misgiving go through me? Was it something in the look that had passed between them? Perhaps so. In any case, strange to say, the inconsistency between their having received no papers and yet looking for my arrival at the hour mentioned in the letter accompanying the documents, and accosting me by name, did not strike me till some hours later.

I threw off what I believed to be my ridiculous mistrust, and it was not difficult to do so in my extreme annoyance.

"I cannot understand it," I said. "It is really too bad. Everything depends upon 7 and 13. I must telegraph at once for inquiries to be instituted at the post-office."

"But your people must have duplicates," said Fagg eagerly. "These can be forwarded at once."

"I hope so," I said, though feeling strangely confused and worried.

"They must send them direct *here*," he went on.

I did not at once answer. I was gathering my papers together.

"And in the meantime," he proceeded, touching my bag, "you had better leave *these* here. We will lock them up in the safe at once. It is better than carrying them about London."

It certainly seemed so. I half laid down the bag on the table, but at that moment from the outer room a most peculiar sound caught my ears—a faint cackling cough! I *think* I concealed my start. I turned away as if considering Fagg's suggestion, which, to confess the truth, I had been on the very point of agreeing to. For it would have been a great relief to me to know that the papers were in safe custody. But now a flash of lurid light seemed to have transformed everything.

"I thank you," I replied. "I should be glad to be free from the responsibility of the charge, but I dare not let these out of my own hands till the agreement is formally signed."

The younger man's face darkened. He assumed a bullying tone.

"I don't know how it strikes *you*, Mr. Bluestone," he said, "but it seems to me that this young gentleman is going rather too far. Do you think your employers will be pleased to hear of your insulting us, sir?"

But the elder man smiled condescendingly, though with a touch of superciliousness. It was very well done. He waved his hand.

"Stay, my dear Mr. Fagg; we can well afford to make allowance. You will telegraph at once, no doubt, Herr Schmidt, and—let me see—yes, we shall receive the duplicates of Nos. 7 and 13 by first post on Thursday morning."

I bowed.

"Exactly," I replied, as I lifted the now locked bag. "And you may expect me at the same hour on Thursday morning."

Then I took my departure, accompanied to the door by the urbane individual who had received me.

The telegram which I at once despatched was not couched precisely as he would have dictated, I allow. And he would have been considerably surprised at my sending off another, later in the day, to Bluestone & Fagg's telegraphic address, in these words:—

"Unavoidably detained till Thursday morning.—SCHMIDT."

This was *after* the arrival of a wire from home in answer to mine.

By Thursday morning I had had time to receive a letter from Herr Wilhelm, and to secure the services of a certain noted detective, accompanied by whom I presented myself at the appointed hour at 909. But my companion's services were not required. The birds had flown, warned by the same traitor in our camp through whom the first hints of the new patent had leaked out. With him it was easy to deal, poor wretch! but the clever rogues who had employed him and personated the members of the honourable firm of Bluestone & Fagg were never traced.

The negotiation was successfully carried out. The experience I had gone through left me a wiser man. It is to be hoped, too, that the owners of 909 Blackfriars Street were more cautious in the future as to whom they let their premises to when temporarily vacant. The re-painting of the doorway, etc., at the tenant's own expense had already roused some slight suspicion.

It is needless to add that Nos. 7 and 13 had been duly received on the second-floor.

I have never known the true history of that extraordinary night. Was it all a dream, or a prophetic vision of warning? Or was it in any sense true? *Had* I, in some inexplicable way, left my own town earlier than I intended, and really travelled in a slow train?

Or had the man with a cough, for his own nefarious purposes, mesmerised or hypnotised me, and to some extent succeeded?

I cannot say. Sometimes, even, I ask myself if I am quite sure that there ever was such a person as "the man with the cough"!

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## "HALF-WAY BETWEEN THE STILES."

### (A RIGHT-OF-WAY INCIDENT.)

By the road, Scarby village is good three miles from Colletwood, the nearest town and railway station. But there is a short cut over the hills for foot passengers. *Over* the hills they call it, but *between* the hills would be more correct, for there is a sort of tableland once you have climbed a short, steep bit up from the town, which extends nearly to Scarby, sloping gradually down to the village.

And on each side of this tableland the hills rise again, north and south, much higher to the north than to the south. So this flat stretch, though at some considerable height, is neither bleak nor exposed, being sheltered on the colder side, and fairly open to the sunshine south and west.

It is a pleasant place, and so it must have been considered in the old days; for a large monastery stood there once, of which the ruins are still to be seen, and of which the memory is still preserved in the name—"Monksholdings".

Pleasant, but a trifle inconvenient, as the only carriage-road makes a great round from Colletwood, winding along the base of the hill on the north side till it reaches the village, then up again by the gradual slope, half a mile or so—a drive in all of three to four miles, whereas, as the bird flies or the pedestrian walks, the distance from the town is barely a quarter of that.

In the old days there was probably no road at all, the hill-path doubtless serving all requirements. Naturally enough, therefore, it came to be looked upon as entirely public property, and people forgot—if, indeed, any one had ever thought of it—that though the monastery was a ruin, the once carefully kept land round about the old dwelling-place of Monksholdings was still private property.

And the sensation was great when suddenly the news reached the neighbourhood that this "unique estate," as the agents called it, was sold—sold by the old Duke of Scarshire, who scarcely remembered that he owned it, to a man who meant to live on it, to build a house which should be a home for several months of the year for himself and his family.

There was considerable growling and grumbling; and this rose to its height when a rumour got about that the hill-path—such part of it, that is to say, as lay within the actual demesne—was to be closed—*must* be closed, if the site already chosen for the new house was to be retained; for the house would actually stand upon the old foot-track, and there could be no two opinions that this position had been well and wisely selected.

Things grew warlike, boding no agreeable reception for the newcomers—a Mr. Raynald and his family, newcomers to England, it was said, as well as to Scarshire. Every one plunged into questions of right-of-way; the local legalities raised and discussed knotty points; Colletwood and Scarby were aflame. But it all ended, flatly enough, in a compromise!

Mr. Raynald turned out to be one of the most reasonable and courteous of men. He came, saw, and—conquered. The goodwill of his future neighbours was won e'er he knew he had risked its loss. Henceforward congratulations, reciprocated and repeated, on the charming additions to Scarby society were the order of the day, and the *détour*, skirting the south boundary of the Monksholdings grounds, which the footpath was now inveigled into making, was voted "a great improvement".

And in due time the mansion rose.

"A great improvement" also, to the aspect of the surrounding landscape. It was in perfectly good taste—unpretentious and quietly picturesque. It might have been there always for any jarring protest to the contrary.

And just half-way along the old foot-track, that is to say, between the two stiles which let the traveller to or from Scarby in or out of the Monksholdings demesne, stood Sybil Raynald's grand piano!

The stiles remained as an interesting survival; but they were made use of by no one not bound for the house itself. And beside each was a gate—a good oaken gate, that suited the place, as did everything about it; and beside each gate a quaint miniature dwelling, one of which came to be known as the east, and the other as the west, Monksholdings lodge.

The first time the Raynalds came down to their new home they made but a short stay there. It was already late in the season, and though the preceding summer had been a magnificent one for drying fresh walls and plaster, it would scarcely have done to risk damp or chilly weather in so recently-built a house.

They stayed long enough to confirm the favourable impression the head of the family had already made, and to lead themselves to look forward with pleasure to a less curtailed stay in Scarshire.

The last morning of their visit, Sybil, the eldest daughter, up and about betimes, turned to her father, when she had taken her place beside him at the breakfast-table, with a suspicion of annoyance on her usually cheerful face.

"Papa," she said, "I have seen that old man *again*, leaning on the stile by the Scarby lodge and looking in—along the drive—*so* queerly. I don't quite like it. It gave me rather a ghostly feeling; or else he is out of his mind."

Her brother, Mark by name, began to laugh, after the manner of brothers.

"How very oddly you express yourself!" he said. "I should like to experience 'a ghostly feeling'. A ghost is just what this place wants to make it perfect. But it should be the spirit of one of the original monks."

Mr. Raynald turned to his son rather sharply.

"I don't want any nonsense of that kind set about, Mark," he said. "It would frighten the younger children when they come down here. I will ask about the old man. It is quite possible he is half-witted, or something of that sort. I forgot about it when Sybil mentioned it before. But no doubt he is perfectly harmless. Has no one seen him but you, Sybil?"

The girl shook her head.

"None of *us*," she replied. "And I wasn't exactly frightened. There was something very pathetic about him. He looked at me closely, murmuring some words, and then shook his head. That was all."

But just then her father was called away to give some last directions, and in the bustle of hurry to catch their train the matter passed from the minds of the younger as well as the elder members of the family.

It returned to Sybil's memory, however, when she found herself in their London house again, and called upon by her younger sisters to relate every detail of Monksholdings and its neighbourhood. But mindful of her father's warning, she said nothing to Esther or Annis of the figure at the gate. It was only to Miss March—Ellinor March—the dearly-loved governess, who was more friend than teacher to her three pupils, that she spoke of it, late in the evening, when the younger ones had gone to bed, and her father and mother were busy with Indian letters in Mr. Raynald's study.

The two girls, we may say—for Ellinor was still some years under thirty—were alone in the drawing-room. Ellinor had been playing something tender and faintly weird—it died away under her fingers, and she sat on at the piano in silence.

Sybil spoke suddenly.

"That is *so* melancholy," she said, "something so long ago about it, like the ghost of a sorrow rather than a sorrow itself. I know—I know what it makes me think of. Listen, Ellinor."

For out of school hours the two threw formality aside. And Sybil told of the sad, wistful old face looking over the stile.

"Now it has come back to me," she said, "I can't forget it."

Ellinor, too, was impressed.

"Yes," she said, "it sounds very pitiful. Who knows what tragedy is bound up in it?" and she sighed.

Sybil understood her. Miss March's own history was a strange one.

"We must find out about it when we go down to Monksholdings next year," she said.

"And perhaps," added Ellinor, "even if he is half-witted, we might do something to comfort the poor man."

Sybil hesitated.

"Then you don't think he can be a ghost?" she said, looking half ashamed of the suggestion.

Miss March smiled—her smile was sad.

"In one sense, no, I should think it highly improbable; in another, yes, there must be the ghost of some great sorrow about the face you describe," she said.

So there was.

This is the story.

At the farther end of Scarby village—the farther end, that is to say, from Monksholdings and the path between the hills—the road drops again somewhat suddenly. Only for a short distance, however; Mayling Farm—"Giles's" as it is colloquially called—which is the first house you come to when you reach level ground again, being by no means low lying.

On the contrary, the west windows command a grand view of the great Scarshire plain beneath, bordered by the faint hazy blue, scarcely to be distinguished from clouds, of the long range of hills concealing the far-off glimmer of the ocean, which otherwise might sometimes be perceptible.

Mayling is a very old place, and the Giles's had been there "always," so to speak—steady-going, unambitious, save as regards their farming and its success; they had been just the make of men to settle on to their ground as if it and they could have no existence apart. A fine race physically as well as morally, though some twenty-five years or so before the Raynalds bought Monksholdings, a run of ill luck, a whole chapter of casualties, had brought them down to but one representative, and he scarcely the typical Farmer Giles of Mayling.

This was Barnett, the youngest of four stalwart sons; the youngest and the only survivor. He was already forty when his father died, earnestly commending to him the "old place," which even at eighty the aged farmer felt himself better fitted to manage than the somewhat delicate, sensitive man whom his brothers had made good-natured fun of in his youth as a "book-worm".

But Barnett was intelligent and sensible, and he rose to the occasion. Circumstances helped him. The year after old Giles's death Barnett for the first time fell in love, wisely and well. His affection was bestowed on a worthy object—Marion Grover, the daughter of a yeoman in the next county—and was fully returned.

Marion was years younger than her lover, fifteen at least, eminently practical, healthy, and pretty. She brought her husband just exactly what he was most in need of—brightness, energy, and youth. It was an ideal marriage, and everything prospered at Mayling. Four years after the advent of the new Mrs. Giles you would scarcely have recognised the farmer, he seemed another man.

He adored his wife, and could hardly find it in his heart to regret that their child was not a son, even though, failing an heir, the old name must die out; for if there was one creature the husband and wife loved more than each other it was their baby girl.

A month or two after this child's second birthday the singular catastrophe occurred which changed the world to poor Barnett Giles, leaving him but a wreck of his former self, physically and mentally.

Young Mrs. Giles was strong in every way, and from the first she took the line of saving her husband all extra fatigue or annoyance which she could possibly hoist on to her own brave shoulders. There was something quaint and even pathetic in the relations of the couple. For, notwithstanding Marion's being so much Barnett's junior, her attitude towards him had a decided suggestion of the maternal about it, though at times of real emergency his sound judgment and advice never failed her. It was within a week or two of Christmas; the weather was biting, raspingly cold. And though as yet no snow had fallen, the weather-wise were predicting it daily.

"I *must* go over to Colletwood this week," said Mrs. Giles, "and I must take Nelly. Her new coat is waiting to be tried at the dressmaker's, and I must get her some boots and several other things before Christmas. And there is a whole list of other shopping too—all our Christmas presents to see to."



Her husband was looking out of the window, it was still very early in the day.

"I doubt if the snow will hold off much longer," he said.

"And once it begins it may be heavy," his wife replied, "and then I might not be able to go for ever so long, even by the road,"—for a deep fall of snow at Scarby was practically a stoppage to all traffic. "I'll tell you what, Barnett, we'll go to-day and make sure of it. I will put other things aside and start before noon. A couple of hours, or three at the most, will do everything, and then Nelly and I will be back long before dark. You'll come to meet us, won't you?"

"Of course I will—if you go. But," and again he glanced at the sky. The morning was, so far, clear and bright, though very cold, but over towards the north there was a suspicious look about the blue-grey clouds. "I don't know," he said, "but that you'd better wait till to-morrow and see if it blows off again."

But Marion shook her head.

"I've a feeling," she said, "that if I don't go to-day, I won't go at all. And I really must. I'll take Betsy to carry the child till we're just above the town, and then send her home, so as not to be tired for coming back. Not that I'm *ever* tired, as you know," with a smile.

He gave in, only stipulating that at all costs they should start to return by a certain hour, unless the snow should have already begun, in which case Marion was to run no risks, but either to hire a fly to bring her home by the road, or to stay in the town with some of her friends till the weather cleared again.

"And I'll meet you," he added. "Let us set our watches together—I'll start from here so as to be at—let me see——"

"Half-way between the stiles," said Marion. "We can each see the other from one stile to the opposite one, you know, even though it's a good bit of a way. Yes, dear, I'll time it as near as I can to meet half-way between the stiles."

And with these words the last on her lips, she set off, a picture of health and happiness—little Nelly crouching back to "Dada" from over stout Betsy's shoulder.

Betsy was home again within the hour.

But the mother and child—alas and alas! It was the immortal story of "Lucy Gray" in an almost more pathetic shape.

Farmer Giles, as I have said, was a studious, often absent-minded man. There was not much to do at that season and in such weather, and what there was, some amount of supervision on his part was enough for. After his early dinner he got out his books for an hour or two's quiet reading till it should be time to set off to meet his darlings. No fear of his forgetting *that* time, but till the clock struck, and he saw it was approaching nearly, he never looked out—he was unconscious of the rapid growth of the lurid, steely clouds; he had no idea that the snowflakes were already falling, falling, more and more closely and thickly with each instant that passed.

Then rose the storm spirit and issued his orders—all too quickly obeyed. Before Barnett Giles had left the village street he found himself in what now-a-days would be called a "blizzard". And his pale face grew paler, and his heart beat as if to choke him, when at last he reached the first stile and stood there panting, to regain his breath. It was all he could do to battle on through the fury of the wind, the blinding, whirling snow, which seemed to envelop him as if in sheets. Not for many and many a day will that awful snowstorm be forgotten in Scarshire.

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It was at the appointed trysting place they found him—"half-way between the stiles". But not till late that evening,

when Betsy, more alarmed by his absence than by her mistress's not returning, at last struggled out through the deep-lying snow to alarm the nearest neighbours.

"The missis and Miss Nell will have stayed the night in the town," she said. "But I misdoubt me if the master will ever have got so far, though he may have been tempted on when he did not meet them."

By this time the fury of the storm had spent itself, and they found poor Giles after a not very protracted search, and brought him home—dead, they thought at first.

No, he was not dead, but it was less than half *life* that he returned to. For his first inquiry late the next day, when glimmering consciousness had begun to revive—"Marion, the baby?"—seemed by some subtle instinct to answer itself truthfully, in spite of the kindly endeavour to deceive him for the time.

"Dead!" he murmured. "I knew it. Half-way between the stiles," and he turned his face to the wall.

They almost wished he had died too—the rough but kind-hearted country-folk who were his neighbours. But he lived. He never asked and never knew the details of the tragedy, which, indeed, was never fully known by any one.

All that came to light was that the dead body of Marion Giles was brought by some semi-gipsy wanderers to the workhouse of a town several miles south of Colletwood, early on the morning after the blizzard. They had found it, they said, at some little distance from the road along which they were journeying, so that she must have lost her way long before approaching the Monksholdings confines, not improbably, indeed, in attempting to retrace her steps to the town which she had so imprudently quitted. But of the child the tramps said nothing, and after making the above deposition, they were allowed to go on their way, which they expressed themselves as anxious to do; for reasons of their own, no doubt; possibly the same reasons which had prevented their returning to Colletwood with the young woman's corpse, as would have seemed more natural.

And afterwards no very special inquiry was made about the baby. The father was incapable of it, and in those days people accepted things more carelessly, perhaps. It was taken for granted that "Little Nell" had fallen down some cliff, no doubt, and lay buried there, with the snow for her shroud, like a strayed lambkin. Her tiny bones might yet be found, years hence, maybe, by a shepherd in search of some bleating wanderer, or—no more might ever be known of the infant's fate!

Barnett Giles rose from his bed, after many weeks, with all the look of a very old man. At first it was thought that his mind was quite gone; but it did not prove to be so. After a time, with the help of an excellent foreman, or bailiff, he showed himself able to manage his farm with a strange, mechanical kind of intelligence. It seemed as if the sense of duty outlived the loss of other perceptions, though these, too, cleared by degrees to a considerable extent, and material things, curious as it may appear, prospered with him.

But he rarely spoke unless obliged to do so; and whenever he felt himself at leisure, and knew that his work was not calling for him, he seemed to relapse into the half-dreamy state which was his more real life. Then he would pass through the village and slowly climb the slope to the stile, where he would stand for hours together, patiently gazing before him, while he murmured the old refrain: "'Half-way between the stiles,' she said. I shall meet them there, 'half-way between the stiles'."

Fortunately, perhaps, it was not often he attempted to climb over; he contented himself with standing and gazing. Fortunately so, for otherwise the changes at Monksholdings would have probably terribly shocked his abnormally sensitive brain. But he did not seem to notice them, nor the new route of the old right-of-way agreed to by the compromise. He was content with his post—standing, leaning on the stile, and gazing before him.

His, of course, was the worn, wistful face which had half frightened, half appealed to Sybil Raynald.

But she forgot about it again, or other things put it temporarily aside, so that when the Raynalds came down to Monksholdings again the following Easter it did not at once occur to her to remind her father of the inquiry he had

promised to make.

Miss March was not with her pupils and their parents at first. She had gone to spend a holiday week with the friends who had brought her up and seen to her education—good, benevolent people, if not specially sympathetic, but to whom she felt herself bound by ties of sincerest gratitude, though her five years with the Raynald family had given her more of the feeling of a "home" than than she had ever had before.

And her arrival at Monksholdings was the occasion of much rejoicing. There was everything to show her, and every one, from Mark down to little Robin, wanted to be her guide. It was not till the morning of the next day that Sybil managed to get her to herself for a *tête-à-tête* stroll.

Ellinor had some things to tell her quondam pupil. Mrs. Bellairs, her self-appointed guardian, was growing old and somewhat feeble.

"I fear she is not likely to live many years," said Miss March, "and she thinks so herself. She has a curious longing, which I never saw in her before, to find out my history—to know if there is no one really belonging to me to whom she can give me back, as it were, before she dies. She gave me the little parcel containing the clothes I had on when she rescued me from being sent to a workhouse. They are carefully washed and mended, and though I was a poor, dirty little object when I was found, they do not look really as if I had been a beggar child," with a little smile.

"You a beggar child!" exclaimed Sybil indignantly. "Of course not. Perhaps, on the contrary, you were somebody very grand."

"No, no," said Ellinor sensibly. "In that case I should have been advertised for and inquired after. No, I have never thought that, and I should not wish it. I should be more than thankful to know I came of good, honest people, however simple; to have some one of my very own."

"I forget the actual details," said Sybil, "though you have often told me about it. You were found—no, not literally in the workhouse, was it?"

"They were going to take me there," said Miss March. "It was at a village near Bath where Mr. and Mrs. Bellairs were then living, and one day, after a party of gipsies had been encamping on the common, a cottager's wife heard something crying in the night, and found me in her little garden. She was too poor to keep me herself, and felt certain I was a child the gipsies had stolen and then wanted to get rid of. I was fair-haired and blue-eyed, not like them. She was a friend or relation of some of Mrs. Bellairs's servants, and so the story got round to my kind old friend. And you know the rest—how they first thought of bringing me up in quite a humble way, and then finding me—well, intelligent and naturally rather refined, I suppose, I got a really good education, and my good luck did not desert me, dear, when I came to be your governess."

Sybil smiled.

"And can you remember *nothing*?"

Ellinor hesitated.

"Queer, dreamy fragments come back to me sometimes," she said. "I have a feeling of having seen hills long, long ago. It is strange," she went on, for by this time they had left the private grounds and were strolling along the hill-path in the direction of the town, "it is strange that since I came here I seem to have got hold of a tiny bit of these old memories, if they are such. It must be the hills," and she stood still and gazed round her with a deep breath of satisfaction, "I could only have been between two and three when I was found," she went on. "The only words I said were 'Dada' and 'Nennie'—it sounded like 'Nelly'. That was why Mrs. Bellairs called me 'Ellinor,' and 'March,' because it was in that month she took me to her house."

Sybil walked on in silence for a moment or two.

"It *is* such a romantic story," she said at last. "I am never tired of thinking about it."

They entered Monksholdings again from the east entrance, Ellinor glanced at the stile.

"By-the-bye," she said, "this is one of the two old stiles, I suppose. Have you ever seen your ghost again, Sybil? Have you found out anything about him?"

Sybil looked round her half nervously.

"It is the other stile he haunts," she said. "I rather avoid it, at least, I mean to do so now. It is curious you speak of it, for till yesterday I had not seen him again, and had almost forgotten about it. But yesterday afternoon, just before you came, there he was—exactly the same, staring in. I meant to speak to papa about it, but with the pleasure and bustle of your arrival, I forgot it. Remind me about it. I am afraid he is out of his mind."

"Poor old man!" said Ellinor. "I wish we could do something to comfort him. I feel as if everybody *must* be happy here. It is such a charming, exhilarating place. Dear me, how windy it is! The path is all strewn with the white petals of the cherry blossom."

"They have degenerated into wild cherry trees," said Sybil. "Long ago papa says these must have been good fruit trees of many kinds, and this is a great cherry country, you know."

The wind dropped that afternoon, but only temporarily. It rose again so much during the night that by the next morning the grounds looked, to use little Annis's expression, "quite untidy".

"And down in the village, or just beyond it," said Mark, who had been for an early stroll, "at one place it really looks as if it had been snowing. The road skirts that old farmhouse; you know it, father? I forget the name—there's a grand cherry orchard there."

"'Mayling Farm,' you must mean," said Mr. Raynald. "Farmer Giles's. Oh, by the way, that reminds me, Sybil," but a glance round the table made him stop short. They were at breakfast. He scarcely felt inclined to relate the tragic story before the younger children, "they might look frightened or run away if they came across the poor fellow," he reflected. "I will tell Sybil about it afterwards."

Easter holidays were not yet over, though the governess had returned, so regular routine was set aside, and the whole of the young party, Ellinor included, spent that morning in a scramble among the hills.

The children seemed untirable, and set off again somewhere or other in the afternoon. Sybil was busy with her mother, writing letters and orders to be despatched to London, so that towards four o'clock or so, when Miss March, having finished her own correspondence, entered the drawing-room, she found it deserted.

Sybil had promised to practise some duets with her, and while waiting on the chance of her coming, Ellinor seated herself at the piano and began to play—nothing very important—just snatches of old airs which she wove into a kind of half-dreamy harmony, one melting into another as they occurred to her.

All at once a shadow fell on the keys, and then she remembered having heard the door softly open a moment or two before—so softly, that she had not looked round, imagining it to be the wind, which, though fallen now, still lingered about.

Now her ideas took another shape.

"It is Sybil, no doubt," she thought with a smile. "She is going to make me jump," and she waited, half expecting to feel Sybil's hands suddenly clasped over her eyes from behind.

But this was not to be the mode of attack, apparently, though she heard what sounded like stealthy footsteps.

"You need not try to startle me, Sybbie," she exclaimed laughingly, without turning or ceasing to play, "I hear you."

It was no laughing voice which replied.

On the contrary, a sigh, almost a groan, close to her made her look up sharply—a trifle indignant perhaps at the joke being carried so far—and she saw, a pace or two from her only, the figure of an old man—a white-haired, somewhat bent form, a worn face with wistful blue eyes—gazing at her.

She had scarcely time to feel frightened, for almost instantaneously Sybil's "ghost" recurred to her memory.

"He has found his way in, then," she thought, not without a slight and natural tremor, which, however, disappeared as she gazed, so pathetically gentle was the whole aspect of the intruder.

But—his face changed curiously—the sight of hers, now fully in his view, seemed strangely to affect him. With a gesture of utter bewilderment he raised his hand to his forehead as if to brush something away—the cloud still resting on his brain—then a smile broke over the old face, a wonderful smile.

"Marion," he said, "at last? I—I thought I was dreaming. I heard you playing in my dream. It is the right place though, 'Half-way between the stiles,' you said. I have waited so long and come so often, and now it is snowing again. Just a little, dear, nothing to hurt. Marion, my darling, why don't you speak? Is it all a dream—this fine room, the music and all? Are *you* a dream?"

He closed his eyes as if he were fainting. Inexpressibly touched, all Ellinor's womanly nature went out to him. She started forward, half leading, half lifting him to a seat close at hand.

"I—I am not Marion," she said, and afterwards she wondered what had inspired the words, "but I am"—not "Ellinor," something made her change the name as he spoke—"I am Nelly."

He opened his eyes again.

"Little Nell," he said, "has she sent you down to me from heaven? My little Nell!"

And then he fell back unconscious—this time he had fainted.

She thought he was dead, but it was not so—her cries for help soon brought her friends, Mr. Raynald first of all. He did not seem startled, he soothed Ellinor at once.

"It is poor old Giles," he said. "I know all about him, he has found his way in at last."

"But—but——," stammered the girl, "there is something else, Mr. Raynald. I—I seem to remember something."

She looked nearly as white as their poor visitor, and as Mr. Raynald glanced at her, a curious expression flitted across his own face.

Could it be so? He knew all her story.

"Wait a little, my dear," he said. "We must attend to poor Giles first."

They were very kind and tender to the old man, but he seemed to be barely conscious, even after restoratives had brought him out of the actual fainting fit. Then Mrs. Raynald proposed that his servants—his housekeeper if he had one—should be sent for.

And when faithful Betsy, stout as of old, though less nimble, made her appearance, her irrepressible emotion at the sight of Ellinor, pale and trembling though the young governess was, gave form and substance to Mr. Raynald's suspicions.

Yes, they had met at last—father and daughter—"half-way between the stiles". He was "Dada," she was little "Nell". Might it not be that Marion's prayers had brought them together?

Every reasonable proof was forthcoming—the little parcel of clothes, the correspondence in the dates, the strong resemblance to her mother.

And—joy does not often kill. Barnett was able to understand it all better than might have been expected. He was never *quite* himself, but infinitely better both in mind and body than poor old Betsy had ever dreamt of seeing him. And he was perfectly content—content to live as long as it should please God to spare him to his little Nell; ready to go to his Marion when the time should come.

And Ellinor had her wish—a home, though not a "grand" one; some one of her "very own" to care for; a father's devoted love, and, to complete her happiness, the friends who had grown so dear to her close at hand.

More may yet be hers in the future, for she is still young. Her father may live to see his grandchildren playing about the farmstead at Mayling, so that, though the name be changed, the old stock will still nourish where so many generations of its ancestors have sown and reaped.

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## AT THE DIP OF THE ROAD.

Have I ever seen a ghost?

I do not know.

That is the only reply I can truthfully make to the question now-a-days so often asked. And sometimes, if inquirers care to hear more, I go on to tell them the one experience which makes it impossible for me to reply positively either in the affirmative or negative, and restricts me to "I do not know".

This was the story.

I was staying with relations in the country. Not a very isolated or out-of-the-way part of the world, and yet rather inconvenient of access by the railway. For the nearest station was six miles off. Though the family I was visiting were nearly connected with me I did not know much of their home or its neighbourhood, as the head of the house, an uncle of mine by marriage, had only come into the property a year or two previously to the date of which I am writing, through the death of an elder brother.

It was a nice place. A good comfortable old house, a prosperous, satisfactory estate. Everything about it was in good order, from the farmers, who always paid their rents, to the shooting, which was always good; from the vineries, which were noted, to the woods, where the earliest primroses in all the country side were yearly to be found.

And my uncle and aunt and their family deserved these pleasant things and made a good use of them.

But there was a touch of the commonplace about it all. There was nothing picturesque or romantic. The country was flat though fertile, the house, though old, was conveniently modern in its arrangements, airy, cheery, and bright.

"Not even a ghost, or the shadow of one," I remember saying one day with a faint grumble.

"Ah, well—as to that," said my uncle, "perhaps we——" but just then something interrupted him, and I forgot his unfinished speech.

Into the happy party of which for the time being I was one, there fell one morning a sudden thunderbolt of calamity. The post brought news of the alarming illness of the eldest daughter—Frances, married a year or two ago and living, as the crow flies, at no very great distance. But as the crow flies is not always as the railroad runs, and to reach the Aldoyns' home from Fawne Court, my uncle's place, was a complicated business—it was scarcely possible to go and return in a day.

"Can one of you come over?" wrote the young husband. "She is already out of danger, but longing to see her mother or one of you. She is worrying about the baby"—a child of a few months old—"and wishing for nurse."

We looked at each other.

"Nurse must go at once," said my uncle to me, as the eldest of the party. Perhaps I should here say that I am a widow, though not old, and with no close ties or responsibilities. "But for your aunt it is impossible."

"Quite so," I agreed. For she was at the moment painfully lamed by rheumatism.

"And the other girls are almost too young at such a crisis," my uncle continued. "Would you, Charlotte——" and he hesitated. "It would be such a comfort to have personal news of her."

"Of course I will go," I said. "Nurse and I can start at once. I will leave her there, and return alone, to give you, I have no doubt, better news of poor Francie."

He was full of gratitude. So were they all.

"Don't hurry back to-night," said my uncle. "Stay till—till Monday if you like." But I could not promise. I knew they would be glad of news at once, and in a small house like my cousin's, at such a time, an inmate the more might be inconvenient.

"I will try to return to-night," I said. And as I sprang into the carriage I added: "Send to Moore to meet the last train, unless I telegraph to the contrary."

My uncle nodded; the boys called after me, "All right;" the old butler bowed assent, and I was satisfied.

Nurse and I reached our journey's end promptly, considering the four or five junctions at which we had to change carriages. But on the whole "going," the trains fitted astonishingly.

We found Frances better, delighted to see us, eager for news of her mother, and, finally, disposed to sleep peacefully now that she knew that there was an experienced person in charge. And both she and her husband thanked me so much that I felt ashamed of the little I had done. Mr. Aldoyn begged me to stay till Monday; but the house was upset, and I was eager to carry back my good tidings.

"They are meeting me at Moore by the last train," I said. "No, thank you, I think it is best to go."

"You will have an uncomfortable journey," he replied. "It is Saturday, and the trains will be late, and the stations crowded with the market people. It will be horrid for you, Charlotte."

But I persisted.

It *was* rather horrid. And it was queer. There was a sort of uncanny eeriness about that Saturday evening's journey that I have never forgotten. The season was very early spring. It was not very cold, but chilly and ungenial. And there were such odd sorts of people about. I travelled second-class; for I am not rich, and I am very independent. I did not want my uncle to pay my fare, for I liked the feeling of rendering him some small service in return for his steady kindness to me. The first stage of my journey was performed in the company of two old naturalists travelling to Scotland to look for some small plant which was to be found only in one spot in the Highlands. This I gathered from their talk to each

other. You never saw two such extraordinary creatures as they were. They both wore black kid gloves much too large for them, and the ends of the fingers waved about like feathers.

Then followed two or three short transits, interspersed with weary waitings at stations. The last of these was the worst, and tantalising, too, for by this time I was within a few miles of Moore. The station was crowded with rough folk, all, it seemed to me, more or less tipsy. So I took refuge in a dark waiting-room on the small side line by which I was to proceed, where I felt I might have been robbed and murdered and no one the wiser.

But at last came my slow little train, and in I jumped, to jump out again still more joyfully some fifteen minutes later when we drew up at Moore.

I peered about for the carriage. It was not to be seen; only two or three tax-carts or dog-carts, farmers' vehicles, standing about, while their owners, it was easy to hear, were drinking far more than was good for them in the taproom of the Unicorn. Thence, nevertheless—not to the taproom, but to the front of the inn—I made my way, though not undismayed by the shouts and roars breaking the stillness of the quiet night. "Was the Fawne Court carriage not here?" I asked.

The landlady was a good-natured woman, especially civil to any member of the "Court" family. But she shook her head.

"No, no carriage had been down to-day. There must have been some mistake."

There was nothing for it but to wait till she could somehow or other disinter a fly and a horse, and, worst of all a driver. For the "men" she had to call were all rather—"well, ma'am, you see it's Saturday night. We weren't expecting any one."

And when, after waiting half an hour, the fly at last emerged, my heart almost failed me. Even before he drove out of the yard, it was very plain that if ever we reached Fawne Court alive, it would certainly be more thanks to good luck than to the driver's management.

But the horse was old and the man had a sort of instinct about him. We got on all right till we were more than half way to our journey's end. The road was straight and the moonlight bright, especially after we had passed a certain corner, and got well out of the shade of the trees which skirted the first part of the way.

Just past this turn there came a dip in the road. It went down, down gradually, for a quarter of a mile or more, and I looked up anxiously, fearful of the horse taking advantage of the slope. But no, he jogged on, if possible more slowly than before, though new terrors assailed me when I saw that the driver was now fast asleep, his head swaying from side to side with extraordinary regularity. After a bit I grew easier again; he seemed to keep his equilibrium, and I looked out at the side window on the moon-flooded landscape, with some interest. I had never seen brighter moonlight.

Suddenly from out of the intense stillness and loneliness a figure, a human figure, became visible. It was that of a man, a young and active man, running along the footpath a few feet to our left, apparently from some whim, keeping pace with the fly. My first feeling was of satisfaction that I was no longer alone, at the tender mercies of my stupefied charioteer. But, as I gazed, a slight misgiving came over me. Who could it be running along this lonely road so late, and what was his motive in keeping up with us so steadily. It almost seemed as if he had been waiting for us, yet that, of course, was impossible. He was not very highwayman-like certainly; he was well-dressed—neatly-dressed that is to say, like a superior gamekeeper—his figure was remarkably good, tall and slight, and he ran gracefully. But there was something queer about him, and suddenly the curiosity that had mingled in my observation of him was entirely submerged in alarm, when I saw that, as he ran, he was slowly but steadily drawing nearer and nearer to the fly.

"In another moment he will be opening the door and jumping in," I thought, and I glanced before me only to see that the driver was more hopelessly asleep than before; there was no chance of his hearing if I called out. And get out I could not without attracting the strange runner's attention, for as ill-luck would have it, the window was drawn up on the right side, and I could not open the door without rattling the glass. While, worse and worse, the left hand window was down!



Even that slight protection wanting!

I looked out once more. By this time the figure was close, close to the fly. Then an arm was stretched out and laid along the edge of the door, as if preparatory to opening it, and then, for the first time I saw his face. It was a young face, but terribly, horribly pale and ghastly, and the eyes—all was so visible in the moonlight—had an expression such as I had never seen before or since. It terrified me, though afterwards on recalling it, it seemed to me that it might have been more a look of agonised appeal than of menace of any kind.

I cowered back into my corner and shut my eyes, feigning sleep. It was the only idea that occurred to me. My heart was beating like a sledge hammer. All sorts of thoughts rushed through me; among them I remember saying to myself: "He must be an escaped lunatic—his eyes are so awfully wild".

How long I sat thus I don't know—whenever I dared to glance out furtively he was still there. But all at once a strange feeling of relief came over me. I sat up—yes, he was gone! And though, as I took courage, I leant out and looked round in every direction, not a trace of him was to be seen, though the road and the fields were bare and clear for a long distance round.

When I got to Fawne Court I had to wake the lodge-keeper—every one was asleep. But my uncle was still up, though not expecting me, and very distressed he was at the mistake about the carriage.

"However," he concluded, "all's well that ends well. It's delightful to have your good news. But you look sadly pale and tired, Charlotte."

Then I told him of my fright—it seemed now so foolish of me, I said. But my uncle did not smile—on the contrary.

"My dear," he said. "It sounds very like our ghost, though, of course, it may have been only one of the keepers."

He told me the story. Many years ago in his grandfather's time, a young and favourite gamekeeper had been found dead in a field skirting the road down there. There was no sign of violence upon the body; it was never explained what had killed him. But he had had in his charge a watch—a very valuable one—which his master for some reason or other had handed to him to take home to the house, not wishing to keep it on him. And when the body was found late that night, the watch was not on it. Since then, so the story goes, on a moonlight night the spirit of the poor fellow haunts the spot. It is supposed that he wants to tell what had become of his master's watch, which was never found. But no one has ever had courage to address him.

"He never comes farther than the dip in the road," said my uncle. "If you had spoken to him, Charlotte, I wonder if he would have told you his secret?"

He spoke half laughingly, but I have never quite forgiven myself for my cowardice. It was the look in those eyes!

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**"—— WILL NOT TAKE PLACE."**

"'Lingard,' 'Trevannion,'" murmured Captain Murray, as he ran his eye down the column of the morning paper specially devoted to so-called fashionable intelligence, "Lingard, Arthur Lingard; yes, I've met him; a very good fellow. And Trevannion; don't you know a Miss Trevannion, Bessie?"

Mrs. Murray glanced up from her teacups.

"What do you say, Walter? Trevannion; yes, I have met a girl of the name at my aunt's. A pretty girl, and I think I

heard she was going to be married. Is that what you are talking about?"

"No," her husband replied. "It's the other way—broken off, I wonder why."

"What an old gossip you are," said Mrs. Murray. "No good reason at all, I daresay. People are so capricious now-a-days."

"Still, they don't often announce a marriage till it's pretty certain to come off. This sort of thing," tapping the paper as he spoke, "isn't exactly pleasant."

"Very much the reverse," agreed Mrs. Murray, and then they thought no more about it.

"I wonder why," said a good many people that morning, when they caught sight of the announcement. For the two principals it concerned—Arthur Lingard, especially—had a large circle of friends and acquaintances, and their engagement had been the subject of much and hearty congratulation. It seemed so natural and fitting that these two should marry. Both young, amiable, good-looking, and sufficiently well off. Even the most cynical could discern no cloud in the bright sky of their future, no crook in the lot before them.

And now—

No marvel that Captain Murray's soliloquy was repeated by many.

But who would have guessed that in one heart it was ever ringing with maddening anguish?

"I wonder why, oh, I wonder why he has done it. Oh, if he would but tell me, it could not surely seem quite so unendurable."

And Daisy Trevannion pressed her aching head, and her poor swollen eyes on to her mother's loving bosom in a sort of wild despair.

"Mamma, mamma," she cried, "help me. I cannot be angry with him. I wish I could. He was so gentle, so sweet—and he is so heartbroken, I can see by his letter. Oh, mamma, what can it be?"

But to this, even the devoted mother, who would gladly have given her own life to save her child this misery, could find no answer.

This was what had happened.

They had been engaged about three months, the wedding day was approximately fixed, when one morning the blow fell.

A letter to Daisy's father, enclosing one to herself—a letter which made Mr. Trevannion draw his brows together in instinctive indignation, and then as the first impulse cooled a little, caused him to turn to his daughter with a movement of irritation, underneath which, hope had, nevertheless, found time to reassert itself.

"Daisy," he exclaimed sharply, "what is the meaning of all this nonsense? Have you been quarrelling with Lingard? You're a bit of a spoilt child I know, my dear, but I don't like playing with edged tools—a man like Arthur won't stand being trifled with. Do you hear, Daisy—eh, what?"

For the girl had scarcely caught the sense of his words, so absorbed was she in those of the short, all too short, but terrible letter she had just read—the letter addressed to herself, which began "Daisy, my Daisy, for the last time," and ended abruptly with the simple signature, "Arthur Lingard".

She gazed up at her father—her white face all drawn, and as it were, withered with that minute's agony—her eyes dulled and yet wild. Never was there such a metamorphosis from the happy, laughing girl who had hurried in with some

pretty excuse for her unpunctuality.

"Daisy, my child! Daisy," her father repeated, repenting already of his hasty remarks, "don't take it so seriously. Margaret," to his wife, "speak to her."

And Mrs. Trevannion, as pale almost as her daughter, drew the sheet of note-paper from the girl's unresisting hands, while her husband held out to her his own letter.

"Some complete mistake," she said, "some misplaced quixotry. Daisy, my own darling, do not take it so seriously. Your father will see him—you will, will you not, Hugh?" detecting the proud hesitation in her husband's face. "It is not as if we did not know him well, and all about him. Your father will find out, Daisy, and make it all right."

Mr. Trevannion did not contradict her, but murmured some consolatory words, and then the mother led Daisy away, and to a certain extent the girl allowed herself to be reassured.

"I will consult Keir if necessary," said the father when out of hearing of his daughter. "He is the natural person, both as our own connection and because he introduced Lingard, and thinks so highly of him. But first I will see Arthur alone. The fewer mixed up in such a case the better."

Mrs. Trevannion agreed. She was constitutionally sanguine, but a painful idea struck her as her husband spoke.

"Hugh," she said hesitatingly, "you don't think—it surely is not possible that his—that Arthur's brain is affected?"

"His brain—tut, nonsense! What a woman's idea!" replied Mr. Trevannion irritably. "Why, he is receiving compliments on every side, from the very highest quarters, too, on that article of his on the Capricorn Islands. Brain affected, indeed!"

And to a whisper of, "I was thinking of over-work," which followed him apologetically, he vouchsafed no reply.

Some intensely trying days passed. Mr. Trevannion's interview with his recalcitrant son-in-law-to-be, proved a complete failure. Nothing, absolutely nothing was to be "got out of the fellow," he told his wife in mingled anger and wretchedness, for the poor man was a devoted father. Arthur was gentleness itself, respectful, deferential even, to the man whose peculiarly disagreeable position he felt for inexpressibly. But he was as firm, as hard in his decision that all should be, must be, over between Miss Trevannion and himself, as if his own heart had suddenly turned to iron, as if he possessed no feelings at all. He grew white to the lips, with a terrible death-like whiteness, when he named her; he said with a quiet, deliberate emphasis, more impressive by far than any passionate declaration, that never, never while he lived, would he forgive himself for the trouble he had brought into her young life, but that he was powerless to do otherwise, he was absolutely without a choice. As to the reason for the breaking off of the engagement to be given to the world, he left it entirely in the Trevannions' own hands; he would contradict nothing they thought it best to say; but, if possible, he grew still whiter when his visitor from under his shaggy eyebrows glanced at him with a look of contempt while he replied cuttingly that he had no love of falsehood. For his part he would tell the truth, and in the end he believed it would be best for Daisy that all the world should know the way in which she had been treated.

"Best for her and worst for you," he repeated.

And Arthur only said:—

"I hope so. It must be as you think well."

Then Trevannion softened again a little.

"I shall say nothing to any one at present," he went on. "I must see Keir; possibly he may understand you better than I can."

But, "No, it will be no use," the young man repeated coldly, though his very heart was wrung for the father, crushing

down his own pride while he thought he saw still the ghost of a hope. "It will be no use. No one can do anything."

"And you adhere to your determination not to see my—not to see Daisy again?"

Lingard bowed his head.

And Mr. Trevannion left him.

Philip Keir was no blood relation of the Trevannions, but a cousin by marriage and a very intimate friend. He was some years older than Mr. Lingard, and it was through him that the acquaintance resulting in Daisy's engagement had begun. He was a reserved man, with a frank and cordial manner. Daisy thought she knew him well, but as to this she was in some directions entirely mistaken.

He was away from home when Mr. Trevannion called on him, driving straight to his chambers from the fruitless interview with Lingard. Philip did not return for a couple of days, and had left no address. Hence ensued the painful interval of suspense alluded to.

But on the third evening a hansom dashed up to the Trevannions' door, and Mr. Keir jumped out. It was late, but there was no hesitation as to admitting him.

"I found your note," he said, as he grasped his host's hand, "and came straight on. I have only just got back. What is the matter? Tell me at once."

He was a self-controlled man, but his agitation was evident. "Daisy?" he added hastily.

"Yes," replied the father. The two were alone in his study. "Poor Daisy!" And then he told the story.

Keir listened, though not altogether in silence, for broken exclamations, which he seemed unable to repress, broke out from him more than once.

"Impossible—inconceivable!" he muttered, "Lingard, of all men, to behave like a——" he stopped short, at a loss for a comparison.

"Then you can throw no light upon it—none whatever?" said Mr. Trevannion. "We had hoped—foolishly, perhaps—I had somehow hoped that you might have helped us. You know him well, you see, you have been so much together, your acquaintance is of old date, and you must understand any peculiarities of his character."

His tone still sounded as if he could not bring himself finally to accept the position. Keir was inexpressibly sorry for him.

"I know of none," he said. "Frankly, I know of nothing about him that is not estimable. And, as you say, we have been much and most intimately associated. We have travelled together half over the world, we have been dependent on each other for months at a time, and the more I have seen of him the more I have admired and—yes—loved him. If I had to pick a fault in him I would say it is a curious spice of obstinacy—I have seen it very strongly now and then. Once," and his face grew grave, "once, we nearly quarrelled because he would not give in on a certain point. It was in Siberia, not long ago," and here Philip gave a sort of shiver, "it was very horrible—no need to go into details. He, Arthur, got it into his head that a particular course of action was called for, and there was no moving him. However it ended all right. I had almost forgotten it. But he was determined."

Mr. Trevannion listened, but vaguely. Keir's remarks scarcely seemed to the point.

"Obstinate!" he repeated. "Yes, but that doesn't explain things. There was no question of giving in. They had had no quarrel. Daisy was perfectly happy. The only thing she can say on looking back over the last week or two closely, is that Arthur had seemed depressed now and then, and when she taxed him with it he evaded a reply. You don't think, Philip,

that there is anything of that kind—melancholia, you know—in his family?"

"Bless you, no, my dear sir. He comes of the healthiest stock possible. People one knows all about for generations. No, no, it's nothing of that kind," Keir replied. "And—what man ever had such happy prospects?"

"Then what in heaven's name is it?" said Mr. Trevannion, bringing his hand down violently on the table beside which they were sitting. "Can you get it out of him, if you can do nothing else for us, Philip? It is our right to know; it is—it is due to my child, it is——" he stopped, his face working with emotion. "He won't see her, you know," he added disconnectedly.

"I will try," said Philip. "It is indeed the least I can do. If—if I could get him to see her—Daisy; surely that would be the best chance."

Mr. Trevannion looked at him sharply, scrutinisingly.

"You—you are satisfied then—entirely satisfied that there is nothing we need dread her being mixed up in, so to say? Nothing wrong—nothing to shock a girl like her? You see," half apologetically, "his refusing to see her makes one afraid——"

"I am as sure of him as of myself—surer," said Philip earnestly. "There is nothing in his past to explain it—nothing."

"An early secret marriage; a wife he thought dead turning up again," suggested the father. "It sounds absurd, sensational—but after all—there must be some reason."

"Not that," said Keir, getting up as he spoke. "Well then, I will see him first thing in the morning, and communicate with you as soon as possible after I have done so. You will tell Mrs. Trevannion and—and Daisy that I will do my best?"

"My wife is still in the drawing-room. Will you not see her to-night?"

Philip shook his head.

"It is late," he said, "and I am dusty and unpresentable. Besides, there is really nothing to say. To-morrow it shall be as you all think best. I will see Mrs. Trevannion—and Daisy," here he flushed a little, but his host did not observe it, "if you like and if she wishes it. Heaven send I may have better news than I expect."

And with a warm pressure of his old friend's hand, Mr. Keir left him.

The two younger men met the next morning. There was no difficulty about it, for Lingard, knowing by instinct that the interview must take place, had determined to face it. So of the two he was the more prepared, the more forearmed.

The conversation was long—an hour, two hours passed before poor Philip could make up his mind to accept the ultimatum contained in the few hard words with which Arthur Lingard first greeted him.

"I know what you have come about. I knew you must come. You could not help yourself. But, Philip, it will save you pain—I don't mind for myself; nothing can matter now—if you will at once take my word for it that nothing you can say will do the least shadow of good. No, don't shake hands with me. I would rather you didn't."

And he put his right arm behind his back and stood there, leaning against the mantelpiece, facing his friend.

Philip looked up at him grimly.

"No," he said, "I've given my word to—to these poor dear people, and I'll stick to it. You've got to make up your mind to a cross-examination, Lingard."

But through or below the grimness was a terrible pity. Philip's heart was very tender for the man whose inexplicable conduct was yet filling him with indignation past words. Arthur was so changed—the last week or two had done the work of years—all the youthfulness, the almost boyish brightness, which had been one of his charms, was gone, dead. He was pale with a strange indescribable pallor, that told of days, and worse still, of nights of agony; the lines of his face were hardened; the lips spoke of unalterable determination. Only once had Philip seen him look thus, and then it was but in expression—the likeness and the contrast struck him curiously. The other time it had been resolution temporarily hardening a youthful face; now—what did it remind him of? A monk who had gone through a life-time of spiritual struggle alone, unaided by human sympathy? A martyr—no, there was no enthusiasm. It was all dull, dead anguish of unalterable resolve.

There was silence for a moment. Keir was choking down an uncomfortable something in his throat, and bracing himself to the inquisitorial torture before him to perform.

"Well," said Arthur, at last.

And Philip looked up at him again.

How queer his eyes were—they used to be so deeply blue. Daisy had often laughed at his changeable eyes, as she called them—blue in the daytime, almost black at night, but always lustrous and liquid. Now, they were glassy, almost filmy. What was it? A sudden thought struck Philip.

"Arthur!" he exclaimed, "Arthur, old fellow, are you going blind? Is that the mystery? If it is that, good Lord, how little you know her, if you think that——"

Arthur's pale lips grew visibly paler. He had been unprepared for attack in this direction, and for the moment he quailed before it.

"No," he whispered hoarsely, "it is not that. Would to God it were!"

But almost instantly he had mastered himself, and from that moment throughout the interview not even the mention of Daisy's name had power to stir him.

And Philip, annoyed with his own impulsiveness, stiffened again.

"You are determined not to reveal your secret," he began, "but I want to come to an understanding with you on one point. If I guess it, if I put my finger on it, will you give me the satisfaction of owning that I have done so."

Lingard hesitated.

"Yes," he said, "I will do so on one condition—your word of honour, your oath, never to tell it to any human being."

"Not to—her—Daisy?"

"Least of all."

Philip groaned. This did not look very promising for the meeting with Daisy, which at the bottom of his heart he believed in as his last—his trump card.

Still, he had gained something.

"Then, my first question seems, in the face of that, almost a mockery. I was going to ask you," and he half gasped—"it is nothing—nothing about her that is at the root of all this misery? No fancy," again the gasp, "that—that she doesn't care for you, or love you enough? No nonsense about your not being suited to each other, or that you couldn't make a girl of her sensitive, high-strung nature happy?"

"No," said Arthur, and the word seemed to ring through the room. "No, I know she loves me as I love her. Oh, no, not quite like that, I trust," and his voice was firm through all the tragedy of the last sentence. "And I believe I could have made her very happy. Leave her name out of it now, Phil, once for all. It has nothing to do personally with the woman who is, and always will be, to me my perfect ideal of sweetness and excellence and truth and beauty."

"Then it has to do with yourself," murmured Keir. "Come, the radius is narrowing. I flew out at poor Trevannion when he suggested it, but all the same, it's nothing in your past you're ashamed of that's come to light, is it? The best fellows in the world make fools of themselves sometimes, you know. Don't mind my asking."

"I don't mind," said Arthur wearily, "but it's no use. No, it's nothing like that. I have done nothing I am ashamed of. I am not secretly married, nor have I committed forgery," with a very ghastly attempt at a smile.

"Then," said Philip, "is it something about your family. Have you found out that there's a strain of insanity in the Lingards perhaps? People exaggerate that kind of thing now-a-days. There's a touch of it in us all, I take it."

"No," said Arthur, again "my family's all right. I've no very near relations except my sister, but you know her, and you know all about us. We're not adventurers in any sense of the word."

"Far from it," agreed Philip warmly. Then for a moment or two he relapsed into silence. "Does your sister—does Lady West know about—about this mysterious affair?" he asked abruptly, after some pondering.

"Nothing whatever. I, of course, was bound by every consideration not to tell her—to tell no one anything till it was understood by—the Trevannions. And I had no reason for consulting her or—any friend," Arthur replied.

He spoke jerkily and with effort, as if he were putting force on himself to endure what yet he was convinced was absolutely useless torture.

But his words gave Keir a new opening, which he was quick to seize.

"That's just it," he exclaimed eagerly. "That's just where it strikes me you've gone wrong. You should have consulted some one—not myself, not your sister even; I don't say whom, but some one sensible and trustworthy. I believe your mind has got warped. You've been thinking over this trouble, whatever it is, till you can't see it rightly. You've exaggerated it out of all proportion, and you shouldn't trust your own morbid judgment."

Lingard did not answer. He stood motionless, his eyes fixed upon the ground. For an instant a wild hope dashed through Philip that at last he had made some impression. But as Arthur slowly raised his dim, worn eyes, and looked him in the face, it faded again, even before the young man spoke.

"To satisfy you, I will tell you this much. I have consulted one person—a man whom you would allow was trustworthy and wise and good. From him I have hidden nothing whatever, and he agrees with me that I have no choice—that duty points unmistakably to the course I am pursuing."

Again a flash of suggestion struck his hearer.

"One person—a man," he repeated. "Arthur, is it some priest? Have they been converting or perverting you, my boy? Are you going over to Rome, fancying yourself called to be a Trappist, or a—those fellows at the Grande Chartreuse, you remember?"

For the second time during the interview, Arthur smiled, and his smile was a trifle less ghastly this time.

"No, again," he said. "You're quite on a wrong tack. I have not the slightest inclination that way. I—I wish I had. No, my adviser is no priest. But he's one of the best of men, all the same, and one of the wisest."

"You won't tell me who he is?"

"I cannot."

"And"—Philip was reluctant to try his last hope, and felt conscious that he would do it clumsily—"Arthur," he burst out, "you will see her—Daisy—once more? She has a right to it. You are putting enough upon her without refusing this one request of hers."

He stood up as he spoke. He himself had grown strangely pale, and seeing this, as he glanced at him, Lingard's own face became ashen.

He shook his head.

"Good God!" he said, "I think this might have been spared me. No, I will not see her again. The only thing I can do for her is to refuse this last request. Tell her so, Philip—tell her what I say. And now leave me. Don't shake hands with me. I don't wish it, and I daresay you don't. If—if we never meet again, you and I—and who knows?—if this is our goodbye, thank you, old fellow, thank you for all you have tried to do. Perhaps I know the cost of it to you better than you imagine. Good-bye, Phil!"

Keir turned towards the door. But he looked back ere he reached it. Arthur was standing as he had been—motionless.

"You're not thinking of killing yourself, are you?" he said quietly.

Arthur looked at him. His eyes had a different expression now—or was it that something was gleaming softly in them that had not been there before?

"No, no—I am not going to be false to my colours. I—I don't care to talk much about it, but—I am a Christian, Phil."

"At least I can put that horrid idea out of the poor child's head, then," thought Keir to himself. Though to Arthur he did not reply, save by a bend of his head.

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Time passed. And in his wings there was healing.

At twenty-four, Daisy Trevannion, though her face bore traces of suffering of no common order, was yet a sweet and serene woman. To some extent she had outlived the strange tragedy of her earlier girlhood.

It had never been explained. The one person who might naturally have been looked to, to throw some light on the mystery, Lingard's sister, Lady West, was, as her brother had stated, completely in the dark. At first she had been disposed to blame Daisy, or her family; and though afterwards convinced that in so doing she was entirely mistaken, she never became in any sense confidential with them on the matter. And after a few months they met no more. For her husband was sent abroad, and detained there on an important diplomatic mission.

Now and then, in the earlier days of her broken engagement, Daisy would ask Philip to "try to find out if Mary West knows where he is". And to please her he did so. But all he learnt was—what indeed was all the sister had to tell—that Arthur was off again on his old travels—to the Capricorn Islands or to the moon, it was not clear which.

"He has promised that I shall hear from him once a year—as near my birthday as he can manage. That is all I can tell you," she said, trying to make light of it.

And whether this promise was kept or no, one thing was certain—Arthur Lingard had entirely disappeared from London society.



At twenty-five, Daisy married Philip. He had always loved her, though he had never allowed her to suspect it; and knowing herself and her history as he did, he was satisfied with the true affection she could give him—satisfied, that is to say, in the hope and belief that his own devotion would kindle ever-increasing response on her side. And his hopes were not disappointed. They were very happy.

Now for the sequel to the story—such sequel, that is to say, as there is to give—a suggestion of explanation rather than any positive *dénouement* of the mystery.

They—Philip and Daisy—had been married for two or three years when one evening it chanced to them to dine at the house of a rather well-known literary man with whom they were but slightly acquainted. They had been invited for a special reason; their hosts were pleasant and genial people who liked to get those about them with interests in common. And Keir, though his wings were now so happily clipt, still held his position as a traveller who had seen and noted much in his former wanderings.

"We think your husband may enjoy a talk with Sir Abel Maynard, who is with us for a few days," Mrs. Thorncroft had said in her note.

And Sir Abel, not being of the surly order of lions who refuse to roar when they know that their audience is eager to hear them, made himself most agreeable. He appreciated Mr. Keir's intelligence and sympathy, and was by no means indifferent to Mrs. Keir's beauty, though "evidently," he thought to himself, "she is not over fond of reminiscences of her husband's travels. Perhaps she is afraid of his taking flight again."

During dinner the conversation turned, not unnaturally, on a subject just at that moment much to the fore. For it was about the time of the heroic Damien's death.

"No," said Sir Abel, in answer to some inquiry, "I never visited his place. But I have seen lepers—to perfection. By-the-by," he went on suddenly, "I came across a queer, a very queer, story a while ago. I wonder, Keir, if you can throw any light upon it?"

But at that moment Mrs. Thorncroft gave the magic signal and the women left the room.

By degrees the men came straggling upstairs after them, then a little music followed, but it was not till much later in the evening than was usual with him that Philip made his appearance in the drawing-room, preceded by Sir Abel Maynard. Philip looked tired and rather "distract," thought Daisy, whose eyes were keen with the quick discernment of perfect affection, and she was not sorry when, before very long, he whispered to her that it was getting late, might they not leave soon? Nor was she sorry that during the interval before her husband made this suggestion, Sir Abel, who had been devoting himself to her, had avoided all mention of his travels, and had been amusing her with his criticism of a popular novel instead. She could never succeed altogether in banishing the painful association of Arthur Lingard from allusion to her husband's old wanderings.

Poor Arthur! Where was he now?

"Philip, dear," she said, slipping her hand into his when they found themselves alone, and with a longish drive before them, in their own little brougham, "there is something the matter. You have heard something? Tell me what it is."

Keir hesitated.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose it is best to tell you. It is the strange story Sir Abel alluded to before you left the room."

"About—about Arthur? Is it about Arthur?" whispered she, shivering a little.

Philip put his arm round her.

"I can't say. We shall perhaps never know certainly," he replied. "But it looks very like it. Listen, dear. Some little

time ago—two or three years ago—Maynard spent some days at one of those awful leper settlements—never mind where. I would just as soon you did not know. There, to his amazement, among the most devoted of the attendants upon the poor creatures he found an Englishman, young still, at least by his own account, though to judge by his appearance it would have been impossible to say. For he was himself far gone, very far gone in some ways, in the disease. But he was, or had been, a man of strong constitution and enormous determination. Ill as he was, he yet managed to tend others with indescribable devotion. They looked upon him as a saint. Maynard did not like to inquire what had brought him to such a pass—he, the poor fellow, was a perfect gentleman. But the day Sir Abel was leaving, the Englishman took him to some extent into his confidence, and asked him to do him a service. This was his story. Some years before, in quite a different part of the world, the young man had nursed a leper—a dying leper—for some hours. He believed for long that he had escaped all danger, in fact he never thought of it; but it was not so. There must have been an unhealed wound of some kind—a slight scratch would do it—on his hand. No need to go into the details of his first misgivings, of the horror of the awful certainty at last. It came upon him in the midst of the greatest happiness; he was going to be married to a girl he adored."

"Oh, Philip, Philip, why did he not tell?" Daisy wailed.

"He consulted the best and greatest physician, who—as a friend, he said—approved of the course he had mapped out for himself. He decided to tell no one, to break off his engagement, and die out of her—the girl's—life; not once, after he was sure, did he see her again. He would not even risk touching her hand. And he believed that telling would only have brought worse agony upon her in the end than the agony he was forced to inflict. For he was a doomed man, though they gave him a few years to live. And he did the only thing he could do with those years. He set off to the settlement in question. Maynard was to call there some months later on his way home, and the young man knew he would be dead then, and so he was. But he showed Maynard a letter explaining all, that he had got ready—all but the address—*that*, he would not add till he was in the act of dying. There must be no risk of her knowing till he was dead. And this letter Maynard was to fetch on his return. He did so, but—there had been no time to add the address—death had come suddenly. All sorts of precautions had been ordered by the poor fellow as to disinfecting the letter and so on. But it did not seem to Maynard that these had been taken. So he contented himself by spreading out the paper on the sea-shore and learning it by heart, and then leaving it. The sum total of it was what I have told you, but not one name was named."

Daisy was sobbing quietly.

"Was it he?" she said.

"Yes, I feel sure of it," Philip replied. "For I can supply the missing link. The one time I really quarrelled with Arthur was when we were in Siberia. He *would* spend a night in a dying leper's hut. I would have done it myself, I believe and hope, had it been necessary. But by riding on a few miles we could have got help for the poor creature—which indeed I did—and more efficient help than ours. But Lingard was determined, and no ill seemed to come of it. I had almost forgotten the circumstance. I never associated it with the mystery that caused you such anguish, my poor darling."

"It was he," whispered Daisy. "Philip, he was a hero after all."

"Not even you can feel that, as I do," Keir replied.

Then they were silent.

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A few weeks afterwards came a letter from Lady West, in her far-off South American home. Daisy had not heard from her for years.

"By circuitous ways, I need not explain the details," she wrote, "I have learnt that my darling brother is dead. I

thought I had better tell you. I am sure his most earnest wish was that you should live to be happy, dear Daisy, as I trust you are. And I know you have long forgiven him the sorrow he caused you—it was worse still for him."

"I wonder," said Daisy, "if she knows more?"

But the letter seemed to add certainty to their own conviction.

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## THE CLOCK THAT STRUCK THIRTEEN.

"You misunderstand me wilfully, Helen. I neither said nor inferred anything of the kind."

"What did you mean then, for if words to you bear a different interpretation from what they do to me, I must trouble you to speak in *my* language when addressing me," angrily retorted a young girl, with what nature had intended to be a very pretty face with a charming expression, but which at the present moment was far from deserving the latter part of the description. Eyes flashing, cheeks burning and hands clenched in the excess of her indignation, stood Helen Beaumont by the window of her pretty little sitting-room, or "studio" as she loved to call it, presenting a striking contrast to the peaceful scene without; where a carefully tended garden still looked bright with the remaining flowers of late September. Her companion, standing in the attitude invariably assumed now-a-days by novelists' heroes, namely, leaning against the mantelpiece, was a young man of equally prepossessing appearance with her own. At first glance no one would have suspected him of sharing any of the young lady's excitement, for his expression was so calm as almost to merit the description of sleepy. Looking more closely, however, the signs of some unusual disturbance or annoyance were to be descried, for his face was slightly flushed and his blue eyes had lost the look of sweet temper evidently their ordinary expression.

"What I meant to say, Helen, was not, as you choose to misinterpret it, that I blame you for proper womanly courage and spirit, than which, I consider few things more admirable, nor as you are well aware do I admire the sweetly silly and affectedly timid order of young ladies. But this I do mean and repeat, that I think your persistence in this foolish scheme a piece of sheer bravado and foolhardiness, totally unworthy of any sensible person's approval, and what is more——"

"Thank you, Malcolm, or rather Mr. Willoughby, I have heard quite enough,"—and as she spoke, Helen turned from the window out of which she had been gazing while Malcolm spoke, with, it must be confessed, very little interest in the varied tints of the dahlias blooming in all their rich brilliance on the terrace,— "I have heard quite enough, and think myself exceedingly fortunate in having heard it now before it is too late. You may imagine," she continued, "that I am speaking in temper, but it is not so. I have for some time suspected, and now feel convinced, that we are not suited to each other. Your own words bear witness to your opinion of me, 'self-willed, foolhardy, unwomanly,' and I know not what other pretty expressions you have applied to me, and for my part I tell you simply that I cannot and will not marry a man whose opinion of what a woman should be is like yours; and who insults me constantly as you do, by telling me how far short I fall of his ideal. Marry your ideal, Malcolm Willoughby, and I shall wish you joy of her. Some silly little fool who dares not move a step alone in her bewitching helplessness. But do not think to convert *me* into such a piece of contemptible inanity," and so saying she turned towards the door.

"Helen," said Malcolm quietly, so quietly that Helen was arrested in spite of herself, "you are unjust, unreasonable and ungenerous. You know that I never cared for any woman but you, you know that nothing pleases me more than to witness your superiority in numberless particulars to the general run of girls, and you know too the pride and pleasure I take in your skill as an artist; but blinded by self-will you will not see the perfect reasonableness of my request that you will abandon this absurd expedition. If not for your own sake, at least do so for Edith's, who is as you know left in your special charge by Leonard."

The first part of this speech seemed, to judge by Helen's transparent countenance, likely to soften and move her, but the unlucky word "absurd" and the tone in which Malcolm spoke, as if it was necessary to remind her of her duty, effectually did away with any good result that his remonstrance might have worked. She turned, with her hand on the door, and saying, "I have told you my decision, Mr. Willoughby, and I wish you good-evening," left the room. Malcolm remained behind, lost in thought of no pleasurable nature. At last he too left the little sitting-room, after first ringing the bell and ordering his horse to be brought round. Making his way to the front entrance he there "mounted and rode away," his spirits, poor fellow, by no means the better for his visit.

It is time, I think, to explain the cause of the lovers' quarrel above described. Helen and Edith Beaumont were orphans, left to the guardianship of their brother Leonard, in whose house we have seen the former. Delicacy, induced by a severe illness some months previously, had obliged Mr. Beaumont, accompanied by his wife, to go for the autumn and winter months to the south of France, leaving his sisters at home under the nominal chaperonage of an elderly aunt, who performed her duty to the perfect satisfaction of her nieces by letting them do exactly as they liked. More correctly speaking, perhaps, exactly as Helen liked, for the younger of the two, Edith, a girl of seventeen and four years her sister's junior, could hardly be said to have likes or dislikes distinct from those of Helen. Possibly Mr. Beaumont might not have left the two to their own devices with so easy a mind, had he not quitted home happy in the knowledge of Helen's engagement to his friend and neighbour Malcolm Willoughby. The gentleman in question lived within a few miles of our heroine's home, having succeeded some years before to his father's property. His only sister, Mrs. Lindsay, was at this time living with him for a few months while awaiting her husband's return from India, and though some years older, was, next to her sister, Helen's most valued friend and companion. Malcolm Willoughby was a man of high character, peculiarly fitted, by his unusual amount of sterling good sense, to be the guide of an impulsive, enthusiastic girl like pretty Helen Beaumont, whom to know was to love, and who would have been altogether charming but for her inordinate amount of self-will and inveterate dislike to being, as she expressed it, "ordered" to do or not to do whatever came into her head. She and her sister had real talent as artists, and their spirited and well-executed landscapes bore but little resemblance to the insipid productions of most young lady painters. To improving herself in this direction Helen had devoted much time and labour. Unfortunately, it had so absorbed her thoughts and desires that in its pursuance she was inclined sometimes to forget what were for her more important avocations. Helen's fortunate engagement to Mr. Willoughby had for some time past corrected these only objectionable tendencies in her character, and all had gone smoothly and happily till the date at which our story commences, when, unluckily, some artist friends had filled her head with their descriptions of the exquisite autumn scenery, "effects of foliage," etc., to be seen in a mountainous and hitherto little explored part of Wales. Her imagination, and through her that of her sister Edith, ran wild on the subject, and now nothing would satisfy her but a journey to the spot in question, by themselves, in order that they might enjoy their freedom to the utmost, and revel in the delight of painting some of the wonderful Welsh scenery described to them. The idea had at first been mooted half in joke, but an impolitic expression of strong disapprobation on the part of Mr. Willoughby had done more to determine Helen on carrying it out than all the anticipated artistic enjoyment.

"It will be just the opportunity I wanted," thought the foolish girl, "of showing him that I do not intend to be a silly nonentity of a wife with no opinion of my own, and hedged in by all the absurd old-fashioned conventionalities which will not allow a woman to have an existence of her own or give her opportunity to cultivate what talents she may possess."

And once determined, Miss Helen remained inflexible. In vain Mr. Willoughby remonstrated, in vain even their indulgent old aunt expressed her horror at the idea of "two young girls scouring the country by themselves," her own feebleness rendering her accompanying them out of the question. Go to Wales Helen and Edith must, and go they would, till at last the discussion with her *fiancé* terminated in the disastrous manner above recorded.

I will not undertake to describe Helen's feelings, when, in the solitude of her own room, she thought over what she had done. Had she herself been obliged to put them into words, I believe she would have repeated that she had not acted in temper and that the stand she had made for her womanly freedom, as she would have expressed it, had been an act of supreme heroism and devotion to the cause of right. She said all this to herself and tried hard, very hard to believe it; and to stifle the little voice at the very bottom of her heart which whispered that she had behaved like a silly, self-willed, petted child, and shown herself undeserving of so good a gift as the love of a man like Malcolm Willoughby. The little

voice was smothered for the time by exaggerated anticipations of the delights of their tour and attempted self-congratulations at her newly regained liberty to do as she chose; for Malcolm did not come near her again, and it took all her pride to hide from herself and others the shock she felt through all her being when, in the course of a few days, she heard accidentally that Mr. Willoughby was leaving home for an uncertain length of time.

"He has taken me at my word," thought she, "but of course I meant him to do so," and she hurried on the preparations for their journey which they were now on the eve of.

"You will at least take Maxwell," said Aunt Fanny timidly.

"Maxwell, aunt! No, thank you," said Helen ironically; "she would be crying for her spring mattress the first night and thinking she was going to die if she heard the wind howl. No, thank you, I mean to be independent for once in my life, and so does Edith."

Other twenty-four hours saw our two young ladies on their way. Unaccustomed as they were to travelling alone they got on very well for the greater part of their journey, till they arrived at a certain railway station in Wales, of name unpronounceable by civilised tongue, but which sounded to them like that of the place where they were to leave the railway. Never doubting but what they were right in so doing Helen and Edith calmly descended from their carriage, watched the train disappear in the tunnel hard by, and then began to make inquiries for a conveyance to transport themselves and their luggage, white umbrellas, easels and all, the five or six miles which they imagined were all that divided them from their destination. A colloquy ensued with the most intelligible of two or three fly-drivers, carmen, or whatever these personages are called in Wales; but what was Helen's consternation on learning that fifteen miles at least remained to be traversed; they having left the railway at Llanfar, two stations too soon, instead of remaining in it till they reached Llanfair, the point nearest to the farm-house where lodgings had been taken for them. No chance of a train to Llanfair till to-morrow morning, for the line was a new one, and the traffic as yet but small. No prospect of a night's accommodation where they were. Nothing for it but to trust to the driver's assurance that he and his unpromising-looking horse could easily convey them to the farm-house, with the inevitably unpronounceable name. With some unconfessed misgivings Helen and Edith mounted the vehicle awaiting them, and drove off along a muddy, jolting lane into the quickly gathering gloom.

Shivering on her uncomfortable seat, did Helen wish herself at home again in her own little sitting-room, with Aunt Fanny peacefully knitting, Edith kneeling on the hearth-rug, and Malcolm's face bright with the reflection of the ruddy log fire so welcome in autumn evenings; all together as was their wont, enjoying "blind man's holiday"?

I think we had better not press the question too closely. However, "it's a long lane that has no ending," and even this dreary journey gradually drew to a close. They passed but few houses of any kind, one or two straggling hamlets were left behind, and for some two or three miles the road had been perfectly solitary, when they suddenly heard wheels advancing to meet them, and in a few minutes a car like their own drove towards them, and being hailed by their driver, drew up at their side. A jabbering ensued of directions asked and given, and they again drove on.

"Are you sure you know the way?" said Helen timidly.

"Oh yes, miss," the driver answered confidently, and further informed them that the car they had met, had just returned from their own destination (being translated), the Black Nest Farm, having there deposited a traveller who had taken the middle course of leaving the railway at the intermediate stoppage between Llanfar and Llanfair. Other three-quarters of an hour and they pulled up at last before a house which the darkness prevented their seeing more of than that it was long and low. They stumbled up the rough garden path, and in answer to their knock, the door was opened by a tidy, clean-looking old woman, with a flickering candle in her hand, evidently surprised at their appearance. She had, she said, quite given up thoughts of their coming that night, and feared the fire in the sitting-room was out. Thankful to have reached the Black Nest at last, a chilly room seemed a smaller evil than the two girls would have considered it at home; and after all, things were not so bad, for the fire in the little farmhouse parlour, to which their landlady conducted them, was not quite out, and a little judicious coaxing soon brought it round.

Their hostess's and their own first idea was of course *tea*. What a blessing, by the way, it is that British womankind in general, high and low, rich and poor, old and young, have this *one* taste in common! Refreshed by the homely meal speedily set before them, Helen and Edith proceeded, under the guidance of the old woman (apparently the only inhabitant of the house), and the flickering candle, to inspect their sleeping apartment. The result was not eminently satisfactory, for it struck them as gloomy, ill-ventilated, and a long way from their parlour, though but few rooms appeared to intervene between the two. This puzzled them at the time, but was afterwards explained by the fact that Black Nest Farm-house had originally consisted of two one-storeyed cottages standing at some yards distance from each other, and which, on becoming the property of one owner, had been united by a long passage; which arrangement was looked upon in the neighbourhood as a triumph of architectural ingenuity. On returning to their sitting-room Helen's eye fell on a door beside their own which she had not before noticed, and she inquired if that was a bedroom. To which the old woman replied in the affirmative, but added that they could not have it, as it and a small sitting-room opening out of it were engaged by a "strange gentleman". And besides this, she added, the bedroom was not so desirable for ladies, having a second, or rather third door to the outside of the house. The only other room they could have was so small that she did not think they would like it, but they should see for themselves, and so saying she turned towards a recess in the passage. Helen followed her, but the flickering candle suddenly throwing light in a new direction, she gave a little exclamation of alarm at what appeared at the first moment to be a very ugly grinning portrait high up on the wall.

"It's only the clock, miss," said the old woman. "Though, to be sure, it is quare," and as she spoke she threw the light more fully upon the object that had startled Helen, which she now perceived to be a very antique clock, standing high in a dark wooden case, and with the face she had seen, peeping at you as it were from behind the dial-plate. An ugly, coarsely painted face, with a disagreeably mocking expression it seemed to Helen; nor was it the only repulsive feature in this very remarkable clock, for the artist appeared to have outdone himself in the grotesquely hideous devices at the bottom of the dial. Death's heads, cross-bones, and other equally unpleasant objects of various kinds, curiously intermingled with a condensed solar system, in which sun, moon and stars appeared jumbled together haphazard. The general object of the whole evidently being to bring before the spectator the ghastly side of his future, and to read him a wholesome, but certainly not attractive, homily on the shortness of life, and the speed with which time was ticking away. Helen felt half fascinated by its hideousness.

"Dear me, what a very curious clock!" she ejaculated, and the old woman repeated, with a little inward chuckle at what she evidently considered the admiration drawn forth by her heirloom:—

"Yes, sure it *is* quare."

An uncanny object it certainly was, and Helen felt relieved that the room in its immediate vicinity was so small as to be out of the question for the accommodation of her sister and herself. Re-entering the sitting-room she found poor Edith looking so utterly worn-out that she proposed that they should at once go to bed; which they accordingly did, followed by the old woman with offers of assistance. Passing the door of "the strange gentleman's" room, they heard sounds of some one moving inside, and Edith sleepily remarked that she wondered what could have brought a gentleman to an outlandish place like the Black Nest, unless, like themselves, he came to take views in the neighbourhood. Helen pricked up her ears at this and inquired of Mrs. Jones if their fellow-lodger was an artist. Mrs. Jones thought not, but seemed unwilling to pursue the topic of the strange gentleman further. In rather a forced manner she changed the subject by inquiring if the young ladies would like to hire her pony while there, as it was rough walking, and her grandson Griffith, the only other inhabitant of the cottage, a little lad of twelve, could lead it for them, and show them the way whenever they chose. Helen gladly closed with the offer.

"Dear me, Mrs. Jones," she exclaimed "how very lonely you must be living here with no one but a little boy. Have you no near neighbours?"

"None nearer than three miles ma'am, for the farm-men live at a distance, save old Thomas in the last cottage you passed, but he is bed-ridden. My widow daughter, Griffith's mother, was with me till she took ill, two winters ago, and died before the doctor could get to her. Yes, it is lonesome like in winter to be sure. It's not often that gentry like you, miss, care to be in these parts so late in the year."

Further inquiries elicited that the nearest church was a good five miles off, that there was no doctor nearer than Llanfar, that the butcher only came in the winter once a fortnight and that irregularly; in consequence of which the Black Nesters had often to depend upon their own scanty resources, the roads being almost impassable in stormy weather.

"Don't you think it feels rather dreary, Helen?" said Edith, as she was falling asleep.

"*Eerie*, rather, I should say," replied her sister, "but that, you know, is the beauty of it. In the morning, I daresay, it will look bright enough, but I confess I do not like that clock. Listen, can't you hear its ticking, faintly, even here, at the end of that long passage?"

"What clock do you mean? I saw no clock," said Edith, but almost before Helen could answer, her soft regular breathing told that she was asleep. Helen however, could not so quickly compose herself. She felt excited and vaguely uneasy; and when she at last fell asleep, it was only to have her discomfort increased, by absurd, yet alarming dreams. With them all the ugly clock was grotesquely intermingled. Sometimes it was herself, sometimes Edith, and once Malcolm, whom she fancied in some position of terrible peril, always associated with the clock, and at last she awoke with a half-smothered scream of horror at the most frightful dream of all; in which the "strange gentleman," their fellow-lodger, was pursuing her with a veil over his face, which just as he caught her fell off, and disclosed, horrible to relate, the face on the clock.

Edith started up as Helen convulsively clutched her, and exclaiming, "What in the world is the matter?" really thought Helen was going out of her mind when she replied, "That horrible clock;" and as she spoke, as if invoked, the clock began to strike: "One, two, three, four," and so on. "Is it never going to stop?" said Helen. Poor Edith, half asleep still, listened with her.

"Edith, I am almost certain that clock struck *thirteen*," said Helen in an awe-struck voice; and then they heard a door shut at the end of the passage.

"Helen, you have been dreaming, and you are only half awake now," said Edith. "It is not like you to waken me in this frightening way, please let me go to sleep."

"I am very sorry," said Helen penitently, and she too closed her eyes and tried hard to go to sleep, which of course she did, as soon as she left off trying, and had made up her mind to lie awake till daylight.

The morning broke clear and fresh; and, as Helen had said, things in general bore a very different aspect to that of the night before. Indoors, the quaint old house now looked simply picturesque, and Mrs. Jones the *beau idéal* of a cheery old hostess. Even the face of the clock, when Helen pointed it out to Edith, seemed to have lost its mocking grin, and to be merely bidding them good-morning, with a comical smile at the consternation it had awakened the night before.

Out-of-doors they soon turned their steps. There was no view from the house, but a short voyage of discovery quickly explained to them their locality. Black Nest Farm stood at the foot of a hill close on to the high road, or what passed for such in that hitherto little frequented neighbourhood. On the opposite side of the road but little was to be seen, as the meadows were soon lost in a thick belt of wood; but immediately behind the house was a tempting prospect, for there a little winding path led up the hill to one of the spots Helen and Edith most ardently desired to paint, and of which their friends had given them a glowing description. It was rather a long walk to the Black Lake, Mrs. Jones informed them, but their enthusiasm knew no bounds, and hardly permitted them to do justice to their breakfast of ham and eggs, home-made bread and home-churned butter. See them then starting on their expedition,—their painting materials, and some creature comforts in the shape of sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, safely packed on the pony's back, Griffith leading him and acting as guide. A pretty stiff pull it was, enthusiasm notwithstanding, and rather hard work for the little feet, sensibly shod in good strong boots it is true, but unaccustomed nevertheless to mountain scrambling. But at last their circuitous path brought them to the summit, and there a curious prospect broke upon them. They stood at the edge of the great Welsh tableland. There it stretched away before them, miles and miles beyond their view; a vast expanse of wild, brown moor, unrelieved by tree or shrub, but here and there dotted by great patches of what Edith at first sight took to be "lovely emerald moss". Treacherous loveliness, for it told, as they learnt from Griffith, of fearful bog-pits, down whose slimy

sides once slipped no man or beast could ever regain firm ground.

"What a horrible death that would be," said Helen, shuddering, "far worse than regular drowning in clean water. It would be slow suffocation in nasty, dirty mud."

A few minutes' careful walking brought them in sight of the Black Lake, the special object of their excursion. And it certainly was well worth coming to see, if not to paint; probably too, better seen in the greyness of a late autumn day than in the summer sun, whose bright rays reflected on its surface would have little harmonised with its character of gloom and loneliness. The lake was equal to several acres in extent, but from where they stood could not all be seen, as its farther end was hidden by the undulations of the land. In colour it was a dull, leaden grey, and looking at it, one's mind spontaneously reverted to travellers' descriptions of the Dead Sea, for *dead* was essentially the word by which to describe it. There were no fish to be caught in it Griffith told them, and as for its depth he had never heard tell of any one's sounding it. The effect of the whole scene was very peculiar, and so Helen and Edith felt it to be, as they stood gazing at the leaden water and the great, apparently boundless moorland. It was difficult to realise that they were so far above the ordinary haunts of men, for there was nothing in that great plain to remind them of the existence even of hills and mountains, except a steady-blowing breeze of that peculiar freshness pertaining only to sea or mountain air. Pleasantly invigorating at first, but soon becoming too chilly to make one care to stand about, or, worse still, to *sit*, as our young ladies now prepared to do.

"We are very lucky in the weather," remarked Helen, as they prepared for their sketching. "I should fancy it is just the day to see the lake to the best advantage."

"Or disadvantage," said Edith, "for I do think it is the most horrible place I ever saw. I don't know," added she dreamily, "but what it would seem even more desolate on a bright, sunny day. I don't know why."

"I understand how you mean," replied her sister, "the contrast would be so strange. Like a skeleton dressed in a golden robe. Dear me, I am becoming quite poetical. But look, Edith, how do you like this?" And a consultation on their work ensued.

Very cold work it became, as it grew to afternoon, notwithstanding the pleasurable excitement of their occupation, and Edith, for one, was not sorry when Helen at last thought it time to pack up their painting materials and turn homewards. A drizzling rain began to fall as they neared the foot of the hill, and they both felt thankful to reach the farmhouse,—tired, muddy and damp, and in not *quite* such high spirits as when they set off on their expedition. A savoury odour meeting them on their entrance, Helen suddenly bethought herself that she had utterly forgotten to order anything for their "high tea," or whatever one likes to call the said incongruous meal. It was therefore an agreeable surprise to her after remembering her neglect to see on entering their little sitting-room the brightest of fires, and the table daintily set out with evident preparation for a tempting repast; part of which, in the shape of a delicious-looking ham, "a new-made pat of butter and a wheaten loaf so fine," had already made its appearance. Damp clothes and muddy boots discarded, they sat down with an excellent appetite to their meal, and the savoury odour which had greeted them was soon explained by the appearance of Mrs. Jones bearing a chicken stewed in mushrooms.

"Mushrooms!" exclaimed Helen, "the thing of all others I like. How clever you are, Mrs. Jones, to get us all these good things! I shall leave our food to your providing, I think, in future."

Mrs. Jones laughed and said a friend had sent some things from Llanfar, and a friend also had gathered the mushrooms, the last of their season, thinking the young ladies might like them.

"Your friends are as good as yourself then, Mrs. Jones," said Helen; but as she spoke she was startled by what sounded like a half-smothered laugh or exclamation of some kind just outside the door. Almost at the same moment her friend the clock began to strike, and she therefore fancied the sound she had heard must have come from it. "Its internal arrangements are, I daresay, as peculiar as its outside," thought she to herself, and refrained therefore from mentioning to Edith what she thought she had heard. All the rest of the evening, however, though she would hardly have owned it to herself, she felt a little nervous and uneasy, particularly when she heard the clock strike.



"I wonder what our fellow-lodger does with himself all day," said Edith that evening.

"I am sure I don't know, or care either," said Helen, "indeed, I hardly believe there is such a being at all."

They went early to bed, and fell quickly asleep. After having slept, it seemed to her for several hours, Helen woke suddenly with the feeling that something had wakened her, and found that the clock was busy striking, and to her confused fancy had been striking for ever so long before she woke. Its strokes ceased before she was sufficiently awake to count them, but a moment or two afterwards she heard a door shut as it had done the night before.

"It is very annoying that I can't get a good night's rest here," thought she. A whispered "Helen," told her that Edith too was awake.

"The clock *did* strike thirteen," said Edith, "and there *must* be somebody in that room, for I heard the door shut again."

"And so did I," said Helen, whereupon they lay still in awe-struck silence, till they both fell fast asleep again.

The next day was Saturday, and though somewhat stiff and tired with their exertions, Friday's programme was repeated. The sketches proceeded satisfactorily, but our heroines were less fortunate in other respects, for just as they were about to leave the Black Lake in the afternoon, the rain came on in torrents. Long before they got back to the farmhouse the poor girls were thoroughly drenched. Edith escaped with no ill results, but Helen sat shivering over the fire all the evening, passed an uneasy night in which it seemed to her that the clock never left off striking at all, and woke on Sunday morning with every symptom of a delightfully bad cold. The prospect outside was not cheering. Rain, rain, rain. Down it came in torrents. No chance of making their way to the five miles' off church, no chance even of a quiet stroll along the lanes; and, worst of all, no books to read, for such a possibility as a whole day in the house had never presented itself to their inexperienced imaginations! It was very dull. Helen was almost cross with Edith for being so exceedingly sympathetic. It was kind of course, but provoking nevertheless, as to Helen's sensitiveness it seemed to convey a tacit reproach. She would not allow to herself that they were at all to be pitied. All the same she was not sorry when the time came at last for them to go to bed.

"I wish we had brought some sherry with us," said Edith. "A little white wine whey would have been the very thing for your cold."

"What's the good of wishing," replied her sister rather snappishly, "you had better call Mrs. Jones and ask her to make me some gruel." But on Mrs. Jones's appearance, and when the request had been made, both the girls felt rather surprised at her volunteering the very thing they had been wishing for.

She had, she said, "some very nice sherry wine, given her by a friend," and many years ago, when she was in service in Chester, she had learnt to make white wine whey. Sure enough a tempting-looking basinful shortly after made its appearance.

Thanks to its soporific influence Helen soon fell asleep, but woke (as she had got strangely into the habit of doing) just at midnight, or as Edith had taken to calling it, "thirteen o'clock". The clock was half-way through its striking when she woke, and a sudden impulse seized her to jump up, and, opening the door slightly, to peep out and either see who it was that always shut a door after the clock struck, or, by seeing nothing, satisfy herself that the sound had all along been merely the creation of her own and Edith's imagination.

She opened the door very cautiously, and instantly perceived that there was a light at the end of the passage in the recess where stood the clock. Helen's heart beat more loudly, and she wished devoutly that she had allowed her curiosity to remain unsatisfied, when to her horror the light moved out of the recess, and she saw that it was held by a tall dark figure with its back turned towards her. The passage was so long and the light flickered so much that it was impossible for her to distinguish anything but the general outline of the person who held it. Not Mrs. Jones or Griffith, assuredly, but poor Helen was too frightened to do more than lock the door with her trembling fingers and leap back into bed, thereby awakening Edith, who on hearing Helen's story calmly assured her that she had either been dreaming, or had

seen the strange gentleman their fellow-lodger whose existence Helen had rashly dared to question. Oddly enough she had forgotten all about him, and felt somewhat relieved by Edith's matter-of-fact solution.

"Only what should he be doing at the clock at this time of night? I hope he is not out of his mind;"—to which Edith replied:—

"I do believe he gets up to make it strike thirteen on purpose to tease us."

Monday morning wore a more promising aspect than Sunday, for such clouds as there were, bespoke nothing worse than showers, and our young ladies succeeded in obtaining an hour or two's sketching at the lake. Helen, however, felt still considerably the worse of her terrible wetting, and was actually the first to propose that they should return to the farm-house. Somewhat weakened by her cold, and tired too, she mounted the little pony at Edith's suggestion, and they were proceeding cheerily enough on their way—Griffith, loaded with their painting materials, some little distance behind—when a stumble on the pony's part brought him suddenly to the ground. Helen had been paying little attention to her steed, and, unprepared for the shock, fell on her side with some little force. A most undignified procedure had there been any one to witness it, but which would have drawn forth nothing but a laugh had it not been that in the fall her foot caught in the stirrup. Her sharp cry of pain terrified Edith, who, however, soon succeeded in disentangling her, as the poor little pony remained perfectly quiet, but a moment's examination, and a vain attempt to stand, showed them that the ankle was badly sprained. All that could be done was to mount Helen again as well as Edith and Griffith could manage, and to make the best of their way home. Arrived there, hot applications soon reduced the pain, but it was easy to be seen, even by their inexperienced eyes, that Helen must not attempt to move for several days to come.

Here was a charming ending to their expedition! Helen, even, felt woefully disconcerted, and poor Edith fairly began to cry.

"If it were not that you would not like it, I would write to Mrs. Lindsay to come and nurse you," said Edith, "she is so good and kind, and I know she would come in a minute, for she has nothing to prevent her."

"Mrs. Lindsay! Edith," exclaimed Helen indignantly, "the very last person I would apply to, however good and kind she may be. Do you really think that I would put myself under such an obligation to the sister of the man I have——" "Quarrelled with for nothing at all," said the little voice at the bottom of her heart. Edith said nothing, but for the first time in her life took an independent resolution and acted upon it. Her love for Helen conquered her fear of displeasing her. What this resolution was we shall not disclose, nor shall we tell whose hand addressed a letter to Mrs. Lindsay carried that evening by the post-boy to Llanfar. The strangest coincidence was that *two* letters bearing the same direction left the Black Nest Farm that evening.

Tired out with the pain of her ankle, Helen, for the first time since their arrival, slept past midnight and only woke to hear the clock strike five. All too soon for her comfort, for her thoughts were none of the brightest, as she lay waiting for the daylight. Her folly, her headstrong determination, right or wrong, to carry out her own way, began to show themselves to her more clearly; or rather, she began to allow herself to see them in their true light. And when at last the morning came, and she was established for the day on the hard little horse-hair sofa in their sitting-room, her spirits were not improved by the perusal of a letter from her Aunt Fanny. The good old lady, after deploring their absence and pathetically describing her anxiety on their behalf, made mention of a visit from Mrs. Lindsay, who had come to tell her how unhappy she was about her brother. "He left home," wrote Aunt Fanny, "two days after that unfortunate conversation with you without telling his sister what was the matter. At least she only gathered that something unpleasant had happened from his saying that you were leaving home, and that he did not expect to see you before you went. He left no direction beyond telling her to write to his club, which she has done two or three times, but got no answer. She says he looked so unlike himself that she fears he has fallen ill somewhere and cannot write to tell her. Oh, Helen, I do wish you had never thought of this expedition."

"How very silly Mrs. Lindsay is to be so fanciful," said Helen, in which view of the case tender-hearted little Edith did not at all agree, though she hardly dared to say so. They spent a dull day, for Edith would not consent to leave her sister, and their paintings were at a standstill for want of another day's sketching from the original.

"To-morrow, Edith," said Helen, "you might go to the lake for an hour or so without me and finish your sketch, and I might go on with mine from yours," to which Edith made no objection.

By night Helen's feverish uneasiness had increased, and Edith secretly congratulated herself on her resolute step of the day before. And a wretched night followed. In reality Helen was very anxious and unhappy about Malcolm Willoughby, and her dreams were full of terrors that something had befallen him. Through all, the disagreeable clock again thrust forward its ugly face, and she woke in an indescribable state of horror, fancying that the clock was standing by her bedside, striking loudly in her ears to a kind of "refrain" of the words: "I told you so. I told you so." Of course the clock *was* striking, and had evidently awakened her by so doing.

"Thirteen again," whispered Edith, "it is really very disagreeable."

"It sounds to *me* like the voice of my conscience," said Helen, "warning me that some terrible punishment is coming upon me for my wicked folly. Yes, Edith, I see it all now, and as soon as ever I can move we shall go home, and I shall ask poor Aunt Fanny to forgive me. I wish every other consequence of my wrong-doing could be done away with as easily as her displeasure." And all her pride broken down, poor Helen burst into tears, and Edith's affectionate words of soothing were of no avail to stop her sobs. She felt rather better in the morning however, partly, perhaps, because the day was bright and sunny. About mid-day she fell into a doze on her sofa, and waking after an hour's sleep was surprised to miss Edith. A note in pencil pinned to the table-cover caught her attention. It bore these words: "You are so nicely asleep I don't like to waken you. I shall come back as early as I can, but don't be alarmed if I am a little later than you expect."

"She has gone to finish the sketch," thought Helen uneasily. "I wish I had not asked her to do so, it looks dull and overcast."

She rang the hand-bell for Mrs. Jones, who appeared with a basin of soup, and told her that the young lady had set off a quarter of an hour before.

"It can't be helped now," said Helen, "but I wish I had not proposed it."

The afternoon seemed long and dull, and yet Helen felt sorry when it began to close in, for no Edith had yet appeared. Still it was not later than they had been out together more than once. Helen tried to think it was not yet dusk outside, but felt this comfort fail her when it gradually grew so indisputably dark that Mrs. Jones brought in candles without her asking for them.

"Are you not uneasy about my sister and Griffith, Mrs. Jones?" said Helen; but her anxiety was tenfold increased when Mrs. Jones replied calmly:—

"Griffith is not with the young lady to-day. I had to send him a message to Llanfair, and as like as not he will stay at his uncle's till the morning. The young lady said it did not matter, and I saddled the pony for her myself."

"Griffith not with her!" exclaimed Helen. "Oh, Mrs. Jones, what will become of her?"

"Don't be alarmed, miss," said the old woman, "the pony is very steady, and the darkness comes on so sudden-like, it seems later than it is."

And with this scanty consolation Helen was obliged to remain satisfied. Mrs. Jones stirred up the fire and set the tea all ready, but Helen grew sick at heart as the time went on, and still no Edith. Six, struck the clock, and ticked on again to seven. Helen could bear it no longer.

"Mrs. Jones," cried she, "can you not get any one to go to look for my sister? She may be on her way down the hill, and have got into some difficulty with the pony."

"Indeed, miss, I don't know what I can do. There's no one nearer than old Thomas and he can't move."

"The strange gentleman!" said Helen suddenly; "your other lodger. Would he not help me?"

"He has been out since early this morning," replied Mrs. Jones, "and he told me he was not sure of being back to-night. He has gone to meet a friend."

Helen felt more in despair than before. It seemed an aggravation of her anxiety to have to lie still on the sofa doing nothing. Indeed had she been able to do so, nothing would have prevented her making her way to the Black Lake, and too probably losing her own life in the endeavour to save her sister's. As it was, she managed at last to drag herself to the door in hopes of hearing footsteps up the path, but nothing broke the silence save the tick, tick of the clock. It wore on to nine, despite her wretchedness and indescribable anxiety. She pictured to herself her sister, her dear little Edith, left so specially in her charge, cowering on the moor, alone in that dreary darkness, sobbing in despair of ever finding her way out of that frightful desert. Or, worse still, lying cold and dead in one of those fearful pits under the mockingly beautiful moss; whence, in all probability, her poor body even would never be recovered. It was too frightful. Helen almost shrieked aloud: "Oh, my darling, my little sister, come back, do come back. Oh, Malcolm, if only you were here. How terribly I am punished for my self-will!" And terribly punished she was, for the memory of that night's suffering was too painful to recall in after years without a shudder. Mrs. Jones was in helpless distress, though in hopes of every moment hearing the pony and the young lady at the gate, and she returned to her own domains saying she had better have hot water ready as Miss Edith would be fainting for her tea. Helen remained alone at the window of the sitting-room.

The night was fine but very dark. Darker than she had ever seen a night before, it seemed to Helen. She was almost in a stupor of despair. She sank down half-unconsciously before the fire and never knew how long she had lain there when she was roused by the clock striking. "One, two, three, four,"—she counted aloud as if bewitched, till when it got to the fatal *thirteen*, her over-strained nerves gave way, and with a scream she ran or stumbled, she knew not how, along the passage to seek for Mrs. Jones. As she passed the front-door she was arrested by the sharp sounds of steps coming quickly up the garden path. The door was pushed open. The only light was what came through the open door of the room she had just left, and she could distinguish nothing but a tall dark figure hurrying towards her. She screamed with terror but stood, unable to move, when to her intense relief a voice from behind the person she saw, exclaimed eagerly: "Helen, dearest Helen, don't be frightened. I am quite safe," and some one rushed past the tall person, now close to her, and kissing her passionately, Helen felt, rather than saw, that it was Edith.

"Malcolm! Malcolm! she is fainting!" called Edith, and the tall person pressed forward, caught her up in his arms like a baby, and, unconscious now of everything, Helen was carried back into the sitting-room, laid on the hard little sofa, and there held tenderly by the strong yet gentle arms whose protecting care she, poor foolish child, had fancied she could so well dispense with.

It was the first time in her life that Helen Beaumont had ever fainted, and it was not long before she began to recover.

"Malcolm! oh, Malcolm!" were her first words on returning consciousness (and it seemed to her afterwards as if some one else had spoken them for her, her good angel perhaps!), "can you ever forgive me?"

"My darling," was the whispered answer, "you know you need not ask it." And then Helen felt as if she were just going to die, but was too happy to care, and too languid to ask even how all this had come about. But now a third person came forward saying:—

"Malcolm, let me stay beside her," and, wonderful to tell, the sweet voice and kind face were Mrs. Lindsay's. Helen thought she must be dreaming, but lay still as she was told, and then drank something or other Mrs. Lindsay brought her; so before long she was able to sit up and begin to wonder what was the meaning of it all.

"Are you not amazed, Helen?" said Edith; "but first of all you must forgive me for frightening you so, for indeed I have been nearly as wretched as you, thinking of what you must have been feeling." And before Helen could reply the eager girl ran on with her explanations. "Who do you think has been our fellow-lodger all this time, Helen? Who do you think is the 'strange gentleman'? Only fancy Malcolm's having been here ever since we came! It was he that travelled by the same train, and seeing as it moved off at Llanfar that we had got out, he did so at the next station, and arrived here

before us. He had inquired about Mrs. Jones, and heard what a good creature she was; and he had time to have a talk with her, and to take her to some extent into his confidence."

Helen looked at first, as this recital went on, as if she were wavering between a return to her old dislike to being interfered with, and gratitude to Malcolm for his undeserved devotion. The good angel triumphed, as Malcolm, who was watching her anxiously, quickly perceived.

"I did not interfere with you, Helen," he said in a low voice, "but it was the greatest comfort to me to be able to protect and care for you, even though you did not know it."

The tears started to Helen's eyes.

"Oh, Malcolm, I know how good you are, but——"

"Never mind any 'buts,'" said Mrs. Lindsay brightly, catching the last word. "'All's well, that ends well.'"

"I know now who foraged for us so successfully," said Edith. "Who was the mysterious friend that gave Mrs. Jones the mushrooms!"

"And nearly betrayed myself by laughing at the door, when passing I heard Helen's enthusiastic thanks to Mrs. Jones," said Malcolm.

"Yes, and frightened me horribly by so doing," added Helen, "as I really began to think that clock was bewitched, and had a special ill-will against me. In fact it took the place of my conscience for the time being."

"I have the very greatest regard for the clock," said Malcolm demurely, "and I intend to make Mrs. Jones an offer for it forthwith."

"Please don't," said Helen piteously. "I daresay it is very silly, but I really don't quite like that clock, though, after all, its warning of ill-luck has brought the very reverse to me. But I have not heard yet what kept Edith out so late, or how in the world you and Mrs. Lindsay met her at the Black Lake."

"The Black Lake?" said Mrs. Lindsay, "what do you mean?"

Whereupon Edith hastened on with that part of her story relating to her own adventures. She, it appeared, feeling confident in Mrs. Lindsay's ready kindness, and never doubting but what she would at once respond to her appeal by coming to nurse Helen, instead of going to the Black Lake to sketch, as Helen imagined, set off on the pony to meet her friend at the station, having proposed to her to come by a certain train. Overtaking Griffith on the road to Llanfair, as she expected from Mrs. Jones's account, he accompanied her to the village, where she gave over the pony to his care. As she entered the station she saw a return train about to start for the Junction about half an hour's journey from where she was. Finding by her watch that she was in ample time, it struck her that she might as well go so far to meet her friend, but on arriving at the Junction she was startled to find that with the new month a change had taken place in the trains, and that consequently Mrs. Lindsay could not arrive till late in the evening. Worse still she herself could not now get back to Helen till she was frightened to think what hour, the evening train in question not going farther than Llanfar, the station near the Junction at which she and her sister had by mistake got out on their arrival, and which was fifteen miles from the Black Nest. It is needless to describe her distress of mind all the long hours she had to sit in the little waiting-room at the Junction; or her corresponding delight when, on the train coming up, she descried looking out of a window the familiar face of Malcolm Willoughby, and found that he was accompanied by his sister whom he had gone to meet half-way on her journey.

Helen woke at noon the next day feeling indescribably happy, she could not tell why till the sight of Mrs. Lindsay's sweet face recalled to her mind all her misery of the night before and the relief and happiness with which it had ended.

"How little I deserve it!" thought she humbly and gratefully, "and how can I ever repay Malcolm for his goodness?"

Their dull little parlour looked very different now that it was enlivened by the presence of the two newcomers; and Helen could scarcely believe it to be the same room in which, but yesterday, she had passed hours of such agonising suspense. So thoroughly penitent and softened did she feel that she offered no opposition to anything proposed, and it was therefore arranged that as soon as Helen was well enough to travel they should all return home together to relieve poor Aunt Fanny's anxiety.

"I wonder," said Helen, with a little sigh, a few days afterwards, when they were packing up their painting materials, "I wonder if I shall ever finish my sketch of the Black Lake."

"I don't like to make rash promises," said Malcolm, "but if somebody I know is *very* good perhaps next summer she may see the Black Lake again, provided she will neither catch cold nor tumble off her pony."

Edith laughed and Helen blushed.

"But there's one thing still," said Edith, "which I don't understand. Why, Malcolm, did you always shut your door as the clock struck thirteen?"

"Very simply explained," replied he. "The first night I was here I was sitting up reading till midnight and thought I heard it strike thirteen. I thought it very odd, and for a night or two I listened till it began to strike and then opened my door to make sure I was not mistaken. And one night I went out with my candle to examine the clock, trying to make out the cause of it, and to see if I could put it right. No man, they say, can resist meddling with a clock even though he is no mechanical genius."

"All the same," said Edith triumphantly, "notwithstanding your examinations, you and no one else can tell the reason why that clock does strike thirteen."

**THE END.**

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#### TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Hyphenation is inconsistent; in a small number of instances, missing punctuation has been added. A duplicated word "than" was removed from the sentence "...of a "home" than she had ever had before." Several obvious misspellings have been corrected. The following additional change was made to punctuation in keeping with the logic of the plot (original is on the left):

The more I thought it over the more striking grew the <i>coincidences at Finster</i> . It had been on one of the closed doors that the shadow seemed to settle, as again here in our own hall.	The more I thought it over the more striking grew the <i>coincidences</i> . <i>At Finster</i> it had been on one of the closed doors that the shadow seemed to settle, as again here in our own hall.
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