

LINKED LIVES.

By Lady Gertrude Douglas.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BOAT RACE.

"So find I every pleasant spot In which we once were wont to meet, The field, the chamber and the street, For all is dark where thou art not."

—16th CENTURY.

When any sudden catastrophe has removed (sometimes without a moment's warning) a dearly loved one from our family circle, with what vivid anguish do our memories revert to the last associations, linking our lives with that of the departed friend. Too well do we remember every word, every look, every gesture. How sadly are we for ever repeating the maybe trivial remark he made at such a moment, the careless joke, in itself not worth recording. How every turn of the road where his feet were wont to tread...

With what terrible, minute reality does "our last meeting," the last day, the last hour, and, above all, the last word, the last look, reproduce itself on the canvas of our memory. Those who have known what it is to lose a beloved one, in this unexpected, awful manner, will not be at a loss to understand how it was that every moment of that same day was to remain engraven on Mabel's heart in characters of ineffaceable distinctiveness.

Guy accompanied his wife and sister to the station. He was in overflowing spirits. Never had his voice sounded more joyously, or his face looked more honestly happy and contented. The tone of his ringing merry laugh was gladness itself, and so it was that Mabel remembered him—remembered him as she saw him alive for the last time.

He stood on the platform as the train moved out of the station, the breeze playing lightly through his fair, curly hair, blowing it back from his bright face, as he slightly raised his cap, and shouted out a parting salutation—to Mabel last, for she put her head out of the window to watch him.

"Good-bye, Mabel. Bring the wedding dress back with you; and be sure you take care of Jessie and the child." The day of the sailing match dawned fair and promising, but Hugh, as he had foreseen, found himself obliged to spend it in the school with the inspector, who had come for the examinations. He cared less about the disappointment than he would have done had Mabel been at home; but as a letter had come from her saying that owing to the oculist's wish to see Eva again that morning, they could not leave London till 12 o'clock, he knew she knew she would not arrive till all was over, so Hugh consoled himself the more easily.

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without connecting it with the beginning of long years of trouble. As the first chime broke upon the still afternoon air, he caught sight of a man running full speed up the Vicarage avenue. Before the second stroke fell upon his ear, Hugh became aware that the man was Guy's valet, Maurice. With the third chime Hugh perceived that Maurice had no coat on, that his face was ghastly pale, and his eyes were full of terror. The last toll of Hugh's ears, as he dropped the letter from his hand, and with a beating heart turned to the door; for he knew that something dreadful must have taken place. He went downstairs quickly. Maurice was at the door; he had not had time to pull the bell before Hugh held it open and stood confronting him.

"My master—Sir Guy!" gasped the man; then he fell forward, nearly fainting. Hugh caught him, and supported him to a seat, by which time he found voice to exclaim: "Good God in Heaven! what has happened?"

Maurice groaned. "Has there been an accident?—is Sir Guy hurt?" asks Hugh again, hoarse with fear.

"Dead, sir!—drowned!—dead!—dead!—quite dead!" faltered the valet, and his head fell back—he had fainted.

A cry arose on all sides. Attracted by the sound of voices in the hall, Hugh's housekeeper had come, followed by another maid-servant and the gardener, two or three more—no one knew how they came there, but there they were, to receive the terrible news—helped to swell the wail of sorrow that broke forth. As for Hugh, he was like one stunned; bewildered, he leaned up against the wall, heedless of the weeping crowd around him, with his hand pressed against his throbbing temples, while he sought to persuade himself that he was under the influence of a bad dream.

"Dead!" he repeated mechanically—"dead!"—drowned!—what, Guy? Guy dead!—the young, handsome, noble Guy, Mabel's brother, from whom he had parted so short a time back in the strength of his beautiful manhood! Guy, the strong, brave, happy Guy! Guy, with his sunny laugh, his overflowing spirits, the pride of the county, the darling of his idolizing family! Guy, the husband, the father, so much needed by his own! Oh! impossible—anyone but Guy to be lying cold, dead, drowned, did they say? God in Heaven!"

"Mr. Fortescue, sir!" Hugh started and stared, as one suddenly awakened from a dream. "What does he mean?" he asked, his voice sounding hollow and unnatural, as he pointed to the servant, who was slowly recovering his senses.

"Eh, Mr. Fortescue!" It was the housekeeper who spoke. "Won't you sit down, sir? You are the color of a dead man all over! Sit down, sir. He'll come to in a minute or two, and will tell us what it means. Eh, Lord, but it's a fearful visitation!"

A good many minutes had, however, elapsed before poor Maurice was able to tell the story. The old story one knows so well—real dangers passed through successfully, a moment of heedlessness, a slip, as it were, a fall, which might so easily have been avoided—one asks how it could ever have taken place? And during that unexpected moment a bright young life, full of every noble promise, is struck down by the way-side.

Such a death is a mystery—one of the mysteries some among us will be very eager to have solved for us when we reach the eternal home, where all sighing and sorrow will have fled away for ever. Until then we can only trust, remembering that if no sparrow falls unnoticed to the ground, how much more precious in the eyes of our Father must be the fresh, bright lives of the darling ones He sees fit to transplant, without warning, to the home where, all safe again some day, we shall assuredly find them.

The Fairy won the sailing race. Guy was on the way back to the harbor. The band on board the umpire's boat had struck up! "See the Conquering Hero comes!" the crowd along the shore were cheering lustily, the guns were firing salutes from the harbor, and Guy sat smoking a cigar, steering his victorious cut towards the land, distant about three-quarters of a mile. His companion, a village lad of some fourteen years of age (the only son of a widow in Elvanlee village, who was Guy's usual attendant on all his sailing excursions, was leaning over the side of the boat, and (no one ever knew exactly how it happened) fell into the sea. Only two days previously Guy had discovered that the lad could not swim, and upon that occasion had given orders that he should be taught without delay.

"For you know, my boy," Guy had laughingly observed, "if you fall overboard some of these days, and can't strike out for yourself, it will be 'kindness come' for you, and very likely for myself into the bargain."

When the accident took place Guy did not wait to think of danger to himself. It is more than probable he foresaw none. Had he done so, it would have made no difference. Letting go the rudder, he left the boat, with full sail on, to the mercy of wind and wave, and, without a moment's hesitation, sprang into the sea.

Guy was an expert swimmer; little danger beyond a good wetting was therefore apprehended for him by the lookers-on. He would in all probability have rescued the drowning boy, and have gained without difficulty one of the several rowing boats that put off at once in his assistance, had not a sudden gust of wind inflated, just at a

wrong moment, the already over-tightened sails of his little ship. There was no one to let go the cords, and so relieve the straining canvas. Just as Guy, having dived for the third time, reappeared above water, clutching the boy firmly in his grasp, the Fairy, dragged down by her surplus of sail, toppled over, and capsized completely. Guy was unfortunately close upon her at the moment; an agonized shriek from the still distant shore warned him too late of his danger; he tried to avoid the collision, but in vain, his head came in contact with the mast as she fell, and, to the horror of all the spectators, he uttered one cry, then sank, to rise no more. Many experienced swimmers were on the spot; all was done that human aid could accomplish, but it was only Guy's lifeless body which, after an hour's search, was brought ashore, together with that of his unfortunate companion, whose head had died to save. A deep wound on Guy's temple gave evidence that it was the blow which, by disabling him, had been the cause of his death.

Such was the account which, in broken sentences, Hugh gathered from the horror-stricken Maurice, himself a witness of the terrible catastrophe; and it was already nearly 5 o'clock before Hugh remembered that at 6 the train from London would come in, bringing back Lady Forrester and Mabel, with Guy's fatherless child. Some one must meet them. Hugh recoiled with horror, as he remembered that, of course, was the proper person to do so. It would be necessary to use precaution in breaking the terrible tidings to Lady Forrester, for she was then in a condition when such a shock, coming suddenly upon her, might prove fatal. The same thought apparently struck Maurice, for while Hugh was still revolving the matter in an agony of mind impossible to describe, the faithful servant exclaimed:

"Sir, you will go to meet my lady; the carriage is ordered. Sir Guy ordered it himself this morning," he concluded, with a choking sob.

"God help me!" articulated Hugh. "Yes, I will go, Maurice. Go, now, and say I will meet the carriage at the station; yet stay. What has become of the people—the men—Sir Guy's friends, I mean, who are staying at the Castle?"

"I think they intend to go, sir—to be out of the way before her Ladyship returns. Two of them went along with him—with the dear young master!—up to the Castle."

"God help us all!" repeated Hugh solemnly; then he took his hat, and set out to the village.

Having reached it, he found he had full half-an-hour to wait before the train was due, and while he was wondering how he should endure the interval, a message came, desiring his presence with the poor widowed mother, who had that day, too, lost her all on earth—her only son—the pride, the joy, the comfort of her heart, even as Guy was that of his devoted family. Hugh found her, bowed down under the weight of her sorrow indeed, as yet too much stunned to realize her loss.

"He was all I had on earth," she said meekly, as she uncovered the face of the dead boy for Hugh to look at.

"But God knows, maybe, he's better gone. I would not have him here alive, and the dear master dead as did die to save him."

Hugh said a few words of comfort to the bereaved mother, but his voice sounded to himself hollow and unnatural; he was obliged to hurry away, promising, if possible, to return later in the evening, for he felt that he must have broken down had he remained longer.

"Oh, it is you, Hugh, is it? Where's Guy? Who won the race?" It was Jessie who asked the question, as Hugh advanced to meet her and Mabel on the platform. He was paler than usual, but his manner was wonderfully composed.

"The Fairy is the winner. Let me take your bag, Jessie. Guy was not able to come, so I came in his place."

"Tired out, I suppose," remarked Jessie, unsuspectingly. "I am so relieved that horrid race is over!"

She turned aside to give directions about a basket which had come by train, and while she was talking to the porters, Hugh led Mabel apart.

"Mabel," he said—and to her dying day Mabel never forgot the sound of his voice or the expression of terror in his eyes—"Mabel, for God's sake be brave! There has been an accident. Guy is badly hurt."

"Guy! Oh, Hugh, what is it?" "She should not know till she is safe home," whispered Hugh, laying his hand firmly on Mabel's arm, as he led her towards the carriage. She looked at him fixedly.

"Is there any hope, Hugh?" He turned his head fearfully to see if Jessie were still at a safe distance; then his eyes met Mabel's. There was no need for further speech.

"I understand," gasped Mabel slowly—"Guy is dead!"

"For God's sake remember Jessie! She must not hear this suddenly," implored Hugh, as he put Mabel into the carriage, with a frightened glance at the death-like pallor of her face.

"No, no—don't be afraid! Here, give me Eva on my knee," muttered Mabel, her teeth chattering together, and a cold, damp sensation coming over her forehead.

Hugh, how dull you look! What is the matter? Mabel, you hiding your face too! Is anything wrong?" asked Jessie wonderingly, noticing, for the first time, Hugh's grave face and Mabel's averted countenance, which she was doing her best to hide in little Eva's curly head.

Then cautiously, with the utmost gentleness, Hugh tried to prepare the poor young wife for her sad misfortune. Unlike Mabel, Jessie was very slow to comprehend the extent of the calamity. It was even difficult to bring her gradually to realize that Guy was in great danger—very great danger. Hugh persisted, for Jessie's hopeful disposition always inclined her to make light of things. She did not seem to be able to take in that a heavy affliction should actually have fallen upon her. It was only as they turned the last corner of the winding avenue, which brought them in sight of the castle, that the truth dawned upon her.

A group of terrified servants stood about the portico, eagerly watching for the carriage. Jessie caught sight of them and turned pale; a look of deep horror came into her eyes. Turning to Mabel, she grasped her arm, and whispered:

"Don't let them come near me! Don't let them tell me he's dead—dead!—before I see him!"

Mabel roused herself with the energy which despair alone can give. The one glance at Hugh told her there was no hope, and all the way from the station she remained like one stupefied, stunned by the violence of a heavy blow. Heart, brain, and sense fairly sickened before the overwhelming misery of that half-hour's drive; but here again her naturally strong moral courage came to her aid, serving her to put aside her own grief, to think only of Jessie.

"Send them all away, except old nurse," whispered Mabel to Hugh, as she jumped out of the carriage, and put Eva into her arms, while she turned her attention to Jessie.

"Now, Jessie, come. Do, darling. They are all gone. Go one shall speak to you—no one but the children. Oh! Jessie, won't you speak to Wilfrid?"

The mention of her boy's name roused Jessie from her stupor, and she allowed Mabel to help her out of the carriage into the entrance-hall. There a painful scene awaited her—perhaps, however, the one best calculated to prepare her for the truth. The hall door stood open, likewise the door leading into the great salon; and there, on one of the ottoman sofas, his head buried in the cushions, sobbing as if his heart would break, crouched little Wilfrid, Guy's eldest son, moaning forth in piteous accents, "Papa! Papa!"

Jessie led Mabel's arm and flew to his side. Sinking down by him she laid her face against his, and grasping his little hands, the fingers of which twined themselves convulsively round hers, she whispered:

"My boy! my darling! where is papa?—where have they put him?" "Oh! papa, papa!" wailed the child again. "Don't you know, mother?—he is dead, quite dead, lying up in his dressing-room! Nurse says he will not come back any more. Oh! mother, he is so white, so cold!"

How Mabel would have interposed, fearful lest the child's words should cause additional anguish to his mother; but the old nurse—the same who had brought Guy up from his cradle and was still the head of his children's nursery—called Mabel aside and whispered:

"Let them be, Miss Mabel dear. It's the best thing for her, poor lamb, to hear the awful truth out of them angel's mouths."

"Nurse, do let us get her upstairs," said Mabel, wringing her hands. "She looks the picture of death! Oh! if she would only cry."

"Leave her to me, dear," returned the faithful old woman, as she wiped away the streaming tears from her own eyes. "Go you and look at him—he is so beautiful, it does one's heart good."

"Not till she is safe, not till I am sure she does not want me," said Mabel, for while nurse was speaking, Jessie's eyes had turned towards her young sister-in-law with a look of imploring misery that went to Mabel's heart, recalling, oh! so vividly, Guy's last words, in which he had recommended his wife so specially to her care.

Hugh had ample opportunity for judging, during the next few hours, of Mabel's powers of self-control and fortitude. Her presence of mind never for a single moment forsook her; and she had truly need of all her courage, for it seemed for awhile as though Lady Forrester's strength and reason had utterly given way.

Once only during the long terrible evening Mabel left her. Hugh, who was sitting below in the library to be at hand if he were wanted, saw the door open softly, and Mabel glide in, pale as a ghost.

"Hugh, I want to see him. Will you take me to his room?" "Jessie," asks Hugh, anxiously—"is she better?"

"No—very ill; but she does not need me just now; she does not know anyone. Nurse and the doctor are both there. Will you come, Hugh?" "Yes, darling, I will; but first come here and let me tell you what a brave, good, darling little woman you have been all along."

"Thank you, Hugh," she answered quietly, as pleased with his commendation as she could be with anything just then; after which she knelt down by his chair, and laid her head on his hand. "It is all a fearful dream, Hugh! I cannot realize it yet. Sometimes I do just for a moment, and feel as if I must scream—it is so awful.

Then I remember it is worse for Jessie—that stops me, but, Hugh," she added, suddenly, "tell me how it all happened. I have heard nothing yet. Wilfrid said something about poor old Wilfrid Jones's son being drowned too. How did the accident take place?" Then Hugh put his arm around her, drawing her close to him, while he told all the particulars of the sad story; and Mabel, in her misery, was not without consolation. She had that which can temper the rudest blast of sorrow. There was light gilding the edge of the cloud which had fallen upon her, for Hugh's arm supported her; her head was pillowed on his breast; her heart, sorely as it ached, was leaning upon another heart, a brave heart, well acquainted with pain such as hers. Bitter was the cup of suffering dispensed to her, crushing the trial which overwhelmed her, nevertheless there was wanting the bitterest drop, that which fills the chalice to the brim, that drop which never can be tasted so long as there are two to drink of the cup together.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A CONVENT EPISODE.

W. H. Thorne, in the Globe.

All persons making any pretension to familiarity with English literature have read and admired Wordsworth's beautiful poem, "An Incident at Bruges," beginning:

In Bruges town is many a street, Whence busy life had fled; Where without hurry noiseless feet, The grass grown pavement tread. There heard we, halting in the shade Flung from a convent tower, A harp that tuneful music made To a voice of thrilling power. The measure, simple truth to tell, Was fit for some gay throng; Though from the same gray turret fell The shadow and the song.

And all the readers of Wordsworth are familiar with the well-known illustration of a nun sitting by her harp and singing while she plays, that always accompanies his poem.

Perhaps for a quarter of a century, perhaps for a generation, I had known the poem, and had dreamed and wondered if I should ever realize in my own experience an incident similar to the one here recorded by the master of our English meditative poets; and I think it was just a year from the day of this writing, viz., on the first Sunday of the month of May, 1892, when I had the honor of being the guest of Very Rev. Father Walker, Chaplain of the Dominican Convent of St. Clara, at Sinsinawa Mound, Wis., that my long cherished dream was more than realized.

From the first day of my visit I had noticed a beautiful harp in the beautiful dining-room where, waited on by a nun, as by an angel, I had taken my meals; and occasionally as I sat in the adjoining parlor I had heard the harp as if it were being played by pupils at their lessons. So when Sunday came, having now learned which of the Sisters was the music teacher, I asked if I might have the honor and pleasure of listening to some selections on the harp. I would gladly mention this Sister's name, but I know that she, being as modest as she is gifted, would feel hurt rather than complimented; so, simply leaving this hint for the million-fold Protestant girl so anxious to get her name in the newspapers, I go on with my story.

My request was granted, and, together with some visiting priest and one or two Sisters of the convent, I listened for the first time in my life to a nun, clothed in the white and beautiful garments of her order, as she, with firm and thrilling touch, awakened those harp strings from their still slumbers to strains of music that would have brought tears of joy and gladness to the eyes of a far less sensitive Protestant nature than mine.

First there were a few strains from some classic Catholic composers; then as if all the better soul of Protestantism had united with the true soul of the Church, this dear nun—God bless her!—played the air that all Protestants know and love to sing to their beautiful hymn,

"Nearer my God to Thee."

I need not say that I was amazed and glorified. I had time and again wept to the same music in the family devotions of one of the loveliest Protestant families I had known in my boyhood and young manhood. I had wept to this music in many a Protestant prayer meeting; while the heart rose within me to newer and stronger pledges of consecration; and now, to sit in this lovely room and actually listen to the same music on the harp, played by a nun of the Catholic Church, was a beautiful and heavenly pleasure far beyond my utmost earthly dreams.

In a moment the harp ceased its devotional strains, and the room was filled with the dear old air of "Annie Laurie," and so on, for half an hour, which marks for me one of those pure, white, star-lit, sun-clothed episodes of existence, all too few of which come to bless the daily toil and stress of this busy world. And all this, I said to myself, is what we Protestants have thought of and condemned as Catholic bigotry and the mother of sin! Ladies and gentlemen, I need not tell you that in one heart at least that Sunday afternoon there was a temple, and in it an altar and a holy of holies, in the innermost shrine of which some worship was attempted although mayhap utterly unworthy of the altar and the hour.

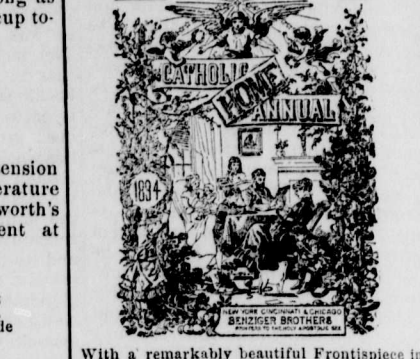
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