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A TRAGIC HALLOW-EVE.

BY RUTH MORTIMER.

A GRAY, lowering sky; sodden earth matted with wet leaves; lines of melancholy trees bent away from the east by blasts of fierce wind laden with chilly rain; in the distance, masses of black evergreens; framing in this picture, skeleton vines that clung around the window and wrestled dismally with the wind. It is no wonder that a pair of blue eyes gazing out on the scene were turned discontentedly away, or that their owner drew near the fire for comfort, as she said with a shiver:

"Oh, Bertha, what an afternoon! It seems sixteen years long! When do you suppose papa will be well enough to go to the city?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Lucy. This kind of weather won't benefit rheumatism." And the young lady who spoke went on energetically reeling off her crimson wools. "The doctor says he's improving; but he can't move about much; he still lets Martin dress him."

"He'd be better away from here; these country places are enough to give anyone the horrors when autumn storms begin. And this place is so isolated! I do wish papa would sell it," she concluded, with another disconsolate glance at the long line of rain-washed avenue.

"Why, Lucy Morris! Sell the place he was born and brought up in! I believe papa reverences every timber in this old house."

"There are plenty to reverence, then. It's the biggest and ghostliest and dustiest place that ever was. I hate great dusky rooms all finished in oak, with black massive pieces of furniture, and perfect shrouds of curtains, and tiers of family portraits painted in the year one!"

"Stop railing, Lucy. While papa lives he will always spend his summers here. You and I can endure it if it is a little dismal."

"It's winter now almost. It's the very last day of October to-day, and still storming as hard as ever."

"Yes; if it rains and blows like this, the servants' Hallow-eve will be rather tempestuous."

"What are the servants going to do?" was the interested query.

"Oh, they're going to a Hallow-eve celebration in the village, to be gone all night. I suppose they would go in the face of a tempest. Even Martin was asking leave of papa this morning."

"Why, Bertha, I don't think it's safe. Only papa and we two left in this lonesome place, and papa laid up—"

"Don't be a goose, Lucy. Nothing ever happens here. In all my experience of T—village it has been as peaceful as Eden."

"That's because it's so far out of the world," was the rather spiteful rejoinder.

"Maybe. It did occur to me that Martin had better stay, but papa laugh-

ed at the idea. 'Let him get me to bed,' he said, 'and come back in time to get me out in the morning, and I want nothing more of him.' So that was decided."

"Oh, see here!" and Lucy sat upright in sudden eagerness; "wouldn't it be fun to try some Hallow-eve magic? Did you ever do it?"

"Never but once—at school," said her sister, with a laugh. "We got five marks apiece then for being found heating lead over the gas at eleven o'clock at night."

"Heating lead? Oh, I know; you drop it in cold water, and it hardens into shape. What shape did yours have?"

"I don't know if it had any. I suppose we were all to be old maids."

"Bertha, don't be so dreadfully practical. Put down your work, and help me think of some magic for this evening. It will amuse me, at any rate."

"Why, my dear, I'm perfectly willing. And I'm more than willing to put away my work, for it's five o'clock; time to dress for dinner."

"Bertha, don't you believe any of this magic ever came true afterwards?"

Miss Morris turned round and laughed at her sister's solemn countenance. "I've heard girls say it did. Of course I didn't believe it."

"Don't you know Aunt Alice tells a story of spreading a supper table at midnight, and lighted candles with nine pins stuck in them at regular distances; and before the flame reached the ninth pin, Uncle Jasper walked in and sat down opposite."

"Oh, that's true enough. He knew she was going to do it. He almost frightened her out of her wits, though. And, Lucy, if it's all the same to you, I don't think I'll leave the doors unlocked to-night for our future husbands to walk in."

"Oh, no, no, Bertha!" and Lucy turned pale at the very idea. "But we might try something. I don't want to eat eggs full of salt, or burn ears of corn; it's not exciting. One of the girls at Madame Durange's school told me she went down cellar backward at midnight with a hand-mirror and a candle. When she reached the foot of the stairs she was to look in the glass and see—"

"The irresistible he, of course. What did she see—the cellar walls?"

"No; she declares she saw Henry Marvell's face. And she was married to him in less than a year."

"That was a marvel indeed. Do you want me to try the cellar experiment?"

"I'd try it myself if I dared," and Lucy's pretty face looked doubtful, as

she sat tapping the rug with her slipper. "Don't you dare? I'll mount guard at the head of the stairs."

"That would spoil it. There must be no one in the room above. And the descent is begun at the first stroke of twelve. I believe I will try it."

"You'll feel less inclined at midnight, with the wind wailing round the house. What am I to do?"

"Why, let me see. Milly Durell told me some other things. One was something like the cellar one—to eat an apple before a mirror in an empty room while the clock is striking twelve."

"What, finish the apple before the twelve strokes are done?"

"No, no; don't finish at all unless you like, but eat while the clock is striking."

"Very good. I won't attempt gastronomic feats, but the rest is easy. There's no mirror in the kitchen, however."

"Don't I tell you you mustn't be in the kitchen? The cellar opens in the kitchen, and that's the scene of my experiment. You must be in a lonely room. The east parlor would do. Go eat your apple before one of the big mirrors there."

"Very well. If your courage holds out long enough to attempt the cellar feat, I'll try the other. Now get dressed if you mean to. I must go to papa."

Since Mr. Morris's last attack of rheumatism, dinner had been served in his sitting-room up stairs. There, as usual, it was laid tonight.

A social dinner they had, so pleasant that when dessert was removed, and the clock struck eight, Mr. Morris showed no inclination to retire. He was unusually loquacious that evening. Stories of college life and travels succeeded one another, until Bertha's attention was attracted by the evident impatience of Martin.

"Papa," she said, finally, "I suppose Martin wants to go. The servants are to be off at half-past nine, and it will take an hour to get you to bed."

Rather testily the old gentleman agreed to be wheeled back to his chamber.

"Hallow-eve parties are foolery," he grumbled. "Well, well, Bertha, let the servants see that everything is fast, and bring you the keys. Good-night, good-night, my dears. I'll ring if I want anything. Now that deuced wind has gone down, I expect a quiet night."

At half-past ten the house was still. And the two young ladies sat by their dressing-room fire ready to begin what Bertha called "conjurations."

"See what a calm night it is," the latter remarked, going to the window and drawing back the curtain. The sky was still filled with ragged masses of cloud, but, high above, a white October moon shone through watery mists. Below, the avenue and thickly wooded grounds stretched quiet and dim.

"Bertha, if we had some pieces of lead we might try melting them. It's

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