

increased in size, I could not divest myself of the fancy that it looked like a grave, an unblest, unhallowed grave. It was not the physical fatigue—though that was considerable—which overcame me most, nor yet, the close miasmatic exhalations of the cellar, so long closed up to air and sunshine, but it was the sufferings arising from my treacherously nervous organization, my constitutional pusillanimity of character, that rendered my task so painful, indeed so terrible a one. Countless times did I pause in my work, fancying I heard Dorothy or my father, roused from their slumbers by some untoward accident, descending the stairs. Then again, it sometimes seemed to me there were hushed breathings, whisperings at times in different parts of the place, and the wind made strange and lyric sounds down among the thick foundations of the old house. What, if on looking suddenly up, or round, I should see my father standing near me; or, Jim Warner himself, with glazed staring eyes and ghastly corpse-like face! Not Jim Warner either in body or spirit—my early practical training prevented my indulgence in supernatural fears of that sort—but merely some phantom figure, raised by my distempered fancy, and which would have as terrible an effect on my excited nerves as a real orthodox ghost. I had read often of optical illusions, and my actual state of mind was eminently suited to a visitation from them. Why, my hearing for some time past had been playing me false—why should not my sight soon do the same?

"Well, it would certainly kill me!" I inwardly said, as, having dug a sufficiently deep hole, I threw in the bundle and commenced filling in the earth again. At that moment a huge dark rat scurried across my feet, but they had been running in and out, and darting about since my first intrusion into their long undisturbed domain, and I had begun to grow callous to all such minor terrors. My task completed, I commenced stamping down the earth with my feet, in case the place, by some unforeseen chance should be visited, and then, having restored it to its former appearance, I dragged back the packing case to its place. Though all this time I felt a presentiment stealing over me, stronger and stronger every minute, that I was doomed that night, probably before I left the cellar, to see the phantom apparition, not ghostly but optical, of the dead man, I completed my task as carefully and minutely as possible. When I had closed the rusty padlock of the lumber room, I inwardly said: "I suppose he will meet me in one of the other cellars," but I waited, nevertheless, to remove the damp earth-stains from the spade by passing it several times through the bed of sand in which the vegetables lay, and to place it precisely as I had found it. "Perhaps, at the head of the stairs, I shall see him!" I then thought; but Providence mercifully spared me that last terrible shock, and I closed the heavy door—or, rather, despite my efforts it slipped from my grasp and fell with a sudden, prolonged echo—mounted the stairs and reached my own room more thoroughly worn-out and exhausted than I had ever yet felt in the course of my life. For some short time I sat motionless in the chair on which I had almost fallen, when a sharp, imperative knock at my room-door, broke suddenly on the dead stillness of the night.

"Heaven have mercy on me! Who is it? What is it?" I tremblingly thought, but my tongue refused to move. The knock was repeated, then the door opened, and my father, pale and stern-looking, stood before me.

"Ada! What is the meaning of this late vigil?" he asked. "You have not even lain down yet," and he glanced towards my bed which was still undisturbed.

I made no reply. The Dunmores were always awkward at privation of any sort.

"And what are those dark stains on your hands of earth, and—and—" he shudderingly averted his glance, unable to continue. Suddenly turning towards me again he laid his hand on my head and whispered:

"Child! I know all. Whilst you kept your lonely watch all through the evening down stairs, I kept mine above. When you rose to unbolt the porch for your brother, I descended the stairs and stationed myself near the door of the room where you both were, not as a spy on the actions of my children, but, to calm without exposing the great fear that had tormented my soul through the last two weary hours. When you passed up stairs, you brushed close against me—so close, that if you had been less hurried or agitated, you would have discovered me."

Ah, here was an explanation of the mysterious breathing that had terrified me so much in the passage.

My father went on: "I did not enter for I could not give my unfortunate a blessing, and I would not part from him with a curse. When the door closed on him and you descended with your burden to the cellar, I left my dark nook where I had suffered more than many martyrs have endured at the stake; and, utterly unable to make even an effort to assist you, went to my room. Where did you hide it?"

I briefly told him.

He shuddered, but soon resumed: "Ada, you have shown a wonderful degree of heroism and forethought, and have proved yourself worthy of your race, but, all is not done yet. Time must be given your wretched brother to escape from the country, and to effect that, we must understand and agree upon what we both shall say if questioned. I will express no surprise to-morrow, when informed of his absence, but carelessly remark that I had given him instructions to proceed to G——— to transact some little business for me in case there should have been no letter to my address in the Danville post-office. When you are questioned by the servants, or, indeed any one else, about him, say merely that you sat up waiting till eleven o'clock, as I had omitted mentioning to you his probable prolonged absence, and that you had then retired to rest, of course, without having seen or heard anything from him."

"Oh, father! if I should stammer or look guilty whilst telling so deliberate a falsehood?"

"It must be done!" was the low stern reply. "Think you, girl, I have not as shuddering an abhorrence of a lie as yourself? Have you ever known me during your seventeen years of life, tell you a falsehood once? But we must force ourselves to dishonour the name of Dunmore in private, in order that it may not be dragged through the mire of a public trial, and perhaps, public execution. Now, listen. Swear, you must and shall, in the form of words which I shall dictate, that all the events of this night shall for ever remain secret!"

"But, father!" I remonstrated, "no oath to that effect is necessary. For my own, for poor George's sake."

"Ada, you must do as I bid you. 'Tis too solemn a point to be trusted solely to the discretion of any of your sex. You may marry hereafter, and then, I know well what temptations

would beset your path, if you loved your husband. Swear, as I command you, at once!"

With ashen lips I repeated the solemn oath which he pronounced so clearly and unflinchingly. He then added: "Remember, we must both meet at the breakfast table, to-morrow, as if nothing unusual had happened!" and left the room.

I rose at once, bolted my door, and then carefully washed off those terrible stains from my hands and wrists. That done, I walked mechanically to the window and looked forth. Snow had fallen during the last two hours. So much the better, at least in one sense, for the hapless fugitive. It would retard all discovery by concealing the dreadful traces near the lonely pool in the wood, and the tell-tale tracks about our own door.

Day was just dawning—the anniversary of that ever blessed day on which the Babe of Bethlehem brought "Glory to God on high and peace on earth to men of good-will." Inexpressibly calm and tranquil earth looked in that soft harmonious light—a strange contrast to my own troubled, agitated breast. With a cry of anguish, I fell on my knees, waiting forth: Oh! my Heavenly Father, do Thou give peace also to this tortured breaking heart!

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

My father and myself met at the breakfast table after that momentous night, as calm and unmoved in outward appearance, as if nothing unusual had happened. True, we were both pale, even to ghastliness, and the unusually dainty fare tempted neither of us to eat, but, Dorothy, never an acute observer, took no note of either circumstance, and seemed quite relieved when my father mentioned the probable cause of George's absence. What a Christmas that was! I nerved myself to go to the morning service at the little church, to meet the smiling festive faces around me, above all, the eager curious glances of Nellie Carr, so often directed to our seat, in speculation probably as to the cause of poor George's absence. The effort was a painful one, but it brought its reward, for some of the peace I implored with such agonized earnestness descended into my breast, and the very act of praying for my hapless outcast brother, was a consolation in itself. Wearily the day dragged on, every little circumstance reminding us of that still dear one whom we might never see on earth again. As I looked at the evergreens with which he and myself had decorated the chimney, and the smoke discoloured portraits on the walls, the day previous; and recalled the merry jests and laughter with which he had enlivened our pleasant labour, I sprang to my feet with a sudden sense of suffocation, and threw open a window.

"Be prudent, Ada!" said my father, as he laid his hand impressively on my shoulder. The calmness of the tone did not deceive me, for the gray ashen features spoke of a misery even greater than my own, and I saw him mount the stairs to his room with a new and strange feeling of pity towards him awakening in my heart.

Meanwhile, Jim Warner's disappearance had created no surprise. It was supposed he had gone to the neighbouring town on business connected with his approaching marriage, and as he was usually abrupt and uncertain in his movements, no one wondered at the fact of his leaving without giving any notice of his intended departure. When, after the lapse of a few days, however, it was discovered that he had never made his appearance there, people began to look grave and to hint at foul-play. Search was instituted—the wood examined, Robb's Water dragged, and poor Jim Warner, as well as his rifle, were found. Suicide, in one of his peculiar circumstances, was most improbable, not to speak of the unlikelihood of his having forethought enough to station himself before the committal of such an act, close to the edge of a pond, in order that he might fall or crawl in afterwards; so, at the inquest held over his remains, the verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown, was returned.

Some time after it began to be bruited about that my brother was also missing, had in fact, disappeared on the same night, and commentaries and suppositions were freely made. One morning a wealthy, kind-hearted proprietor, who resided some miles from us, and who had known my father from his first arrival in the country, rode up to the house and, after asking for its master, was closeted a long time with him. Prompted by the kindest motives, he had come to tell that Nellie Carr, who by the way, seemed but very little grieved by the death of her betrothed, had acknowledged the fact of having met my brother and conversed a long time with him in the wood, on the very day that Jim Warner had disappeared; also, repeating the expressions of contempt indulged in by George towards the latter.

My father listened impassably, told the story he had resolved on the night of my brother's flight, and declared that if the latter—about whom he began to feel very anxious, having received no word from him yet—were not at G——— it was probable some accident had also happened to him. He then, unsolicited, summoned Dorothy—it was useless questioning Peter, as he had only lately returned—and interrogated her before the visitors, but she had gone to bed at her usual hour on the night in question, being tired with her day's work, and that Master George had not arrived then.

Soon after our guest, with kind but still anxious countenance, took his departure. Public opinion now set in strongly against George, and there were but few in the village who did not either openly or secretly accuse him of the deed. If he were really innocent, people asked, why did he not come forward and assert it? In what other light could his absence be regarded than as a tacit avowal of guilt? Search was instituted for him at home—abroad—but ineffectually, for the interval of time which had elapsed—between his departure and the period at which suspicion settled on him, had given him time to carry out all his plans of flight.

From that memorable Christmas, my studies, so far as my father's discretion was concerned, were entirely abandoned. He told me he had no longer heart or energy for the task, and that I knew sufficient, of at least any knowledge he could impart, for any position in life I might hereafter be called on to fill. He became, if possible, more reticent and solitary in his ways than ever, and repulsed with unwavering firmness, the timid attempts I occasionally ventured on to win his confidence or to evince the sympathy I felt for his lonely, hopeless grief.

News, of course, had come long since from G———, stating that my brother had never been there, and it was often now roundly stated that "when Master Dunmore had escaped, the gallows had been cheated of their lawful prey."

It was not without a terrible inward struggle that I made up my mind to present myself in the village church, after learning that common report named my brother as the murderer of Jim Warner. I could willingly, joyfully, have shut myself up as my father had so long done, from all contact with my kind, except the members of the household; but conscience whispered that in me, at least, such a course would be inexcusable. I was too young to shrink from the battle of life—to throw down my armour and weapon ere they had been even tried in the fight. What, if curious or insolent glances were directed towards me—if scornful wounding words fell on my ear—if I were pointed out as the sister of the run-away criminal and assassin, I still had obligations and duties which must be fulfilled. Keen was the anguish I experienced, as kneeling down in our lonely pew, I remembered that he who had knelt beside me for so many long years, was now a wanderer on the earth, the brand of Cain upon his brow. Well for me I had taken the precaution of wearing a thick veil, for during the commencement of the service, my tears flowed, indeed rained down my face. Calmer, holier thoughts, after a time succeeded, and I found comfort in offering up earnest petitions for my poor outcast brother. With my veil still down, shielding me alike from pitying or scornful glances, I passed out from the church at the conclusion of the service, and took my lonely homeward way. Many weary solitary walks had I known during the course of my young life, but, none equal in bitterness to that one. Some Sundays afterwards it happened that on leaving the sacred edifice, I found myself close to Nellie Carr. She was as pretty and coquettish looking as ever, no difference, save that bright red bows and ribbons had replaced the former rose-coloured ones. Our eyes met, and as I remember all the shame and misery her light, vain coquetry had brought on me and mine, something of what I secretly thought and felt, perhaps betrayed itself in my countenance. She was not one to bear in patience with any provocation, however slight, and tossing her head and its scarlet ribbons, she exclaimed aloud, addressing herself to a group near her.

To be continued.

PLANTS IN SLEEPING ROOMS.

The following is from the pen of Dr. J. C. Draper, in the January number of the *Galaxy*:

"Though the air is dependent for the renewal of its oxygen on the action of the green leaves of plants, it must not be forgotten that it is only in the presence and under the stimulus of light that these organisms decompose carbonic acid. All plants, irrespective of their kind or nature, absorb oxygen and exhale carbonic acid in the dark. The quantity of noxious gas thus eliminated is, however, exceedingly small when compared with the oxygen thrown out during the day. When they are flowering, plants exhale carbonic acid in considerable quantity, and at the same time evolve heat. In this condition, therefore, they resemble animals as regards their relation to the air; and a number of plants placed in a room would, under these circumstances, tend to vitiate the air.

"While the plant-rogamia, or flowering plants, depend on the air almost entirely for their supply of carbon, and are busy during the day in restoring to it the oxygen that has been removed by animals, many of the inferior cryptogamia, as the fungi and parasitic plants, obtain their nourishment from material that has already been organized. They do not absorb carbonic acid, but, on the contrary, they act like animals, absorbing oxygen and exhaling carbonic acid at all times. It is, therefore, evident that their presence in a room cannot be productive of good results.

"Aside from the nightly deleterious action that plants may exert on the atmosphere of a sleeping room, by increasing the proportion of carbonic acid during the night, there is another and more important objection to be urged against their presence in such apartments. Like animals, they exhale peculiar volatile organic principles, which in many instances render the air unfit for the purposes of respiration. Even in the days of Andronicus this fact was recognized, for he says, in speaking of Arabian Felix, that 'by reason of myrrh, frankincense, and hot spices there growing, the air was so obnoxious to their breath, that the very inhabitants at some times cannot avoid its influence.' What the influence on the brains of the inhabitants may have been does not at present interest us; we have only quoted the statement to show that long ago the emanations from plants were regarded as having an influence on the conditions of the air; and, in view of our present ignorance, it would be wise to banish them from our sleeping apartments, at least until we are better informed regarding their true properties."

FIRE-PROOF FURNITURE.—Every now and then loud noises are heard about the importance of rendering the dresses of ballet girls incombustible, but no one seems to think that there are other things to which it would be equally important to apply a fire-avert. Why should we not make our houses unflammable, and our furniture fire-proof? It can easily be done—or rather could be—if there were some sort of compulsion put upon builders and upholsterers. Timber is the material that needs the preservative, and it may be prevented from firing by simply impregnating it with a concentrated solution of rock-salt. The fact has just been announced by a German chemist, who was commissioned to solve the question by a fire insurance company. Water-glass will act as well, but it is expensive; rock-salt is dirt cheap. The salt, too, renders wood proof against dry rot and the ravages of insects. Its antagonism to fire might be turned to account in extinguishing flames, for a solution of it pumped out of a fire engine upon burning matter, would be vastly more efficient than plain water. Our system of fire extinction needs revision. We now often do as much damage by indiscriminate watering as the fire would if left to burn itself out—only who will initiate improvements?—*Court Journal*.

A Pittsburg thief, who had been shop-lifting, when asked whether he had anything to say, replied that he had taken the goods, but had intended to return them after a few days and "astonish the proprietors."