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For the Illustration,
A FRAGMENT.

BY AMY SOUDER.

Two hearts throbbed wildly, madly,
And longed for grief and weep;
Two storm-tossed souls looked sadly
Through eyes that could not weep.

Two hands met, clasped firmly,
Pulsing with nervous life;
Two lives were stripped, made barren
By Fate's keen pruning knife.

Two death-bed scenes made gloomy
By look of Love's sweet prayer,
And dimming eyes see only
The form of gaunt Despair.

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THE BEAD WITNESS; OR, LILLIAN'S PERIL.

BY MRS. LEPROHON.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CORAL EAR-DROP.

It may be asked what was the object or circumstance that had infused so new and intense a degree of horror into that which already overwhelmed Lillian Tremaine. It was this. Plainly visible on the white sheet beneath the skeleton frame, just where it had dropped from the mouldering ear in the slow process of mortal decay, lay a pink coral earring in the form of a heart; and carefully laid away in a casket containing the few little trinkets the young girl possessed was another pink coral earring—*the same!*

As Lillian stood in the vault recalled all this, and noted at the same time the long hair still adhering to the fleshless skull, hair similar in colour and texture to the rich tresses encompassing the face of Mrs. Tremaine in the portrait that hung in the sitting-room, there flashed across her mind the terrible fear or rather certainty that the ghastly relics of mortality before her, were the mortal remains of her poor young mother, foully murdered, perhaps by a husband's hand; and that this awful secret was the mysterious bond that united house-keeper and master.

Lillian, young and healthy, soon recovered consciousness, and then came after a time the full remembrance of her terrible situation, joined to a wild wish to see at once from this abode of horror. But could she? How trace her steps through the long suite of cellars, rooms, corridors, traversed for the first time that night? How many unknown pitfalls might beset her path! More than one gaping rent in the flooring had she noted on her way thither, more than one yawning opening leading down to unknown depths.

Al! Margaret was right in warning her against unlawful curiosity and her obstinacy had met its just reward. Her head was beginning to grow giddy with the terrors of her situation, and the close exclamations surrounding her were already asserting their strength even over her healthy frame. Strange lights flashed before her eyes—strange sounds, all she well know results of her excited disturbed imagination, sounded in her ears. Well if she did yield to the faintness again ineluctably stealing over her, and lie down there and die, was it a thing to be greatly feared? What had life left for her now, especially that this appalling discovery had been added to all its former intolerable troubles?

But the thought of how Margaret would grope and frot over her disappearance recurred to her recollection, and for the sake of that dear sister—the only being on earth who loved her—she would make an effort to preserve the life now nearly slipping from her grasp. Almost mechanically she commenced, groping for the lantern so as not to leave it behind her, a tell-tale evidence of her stolen visit that might betray her later to her father or Mrs. Stukely. Knocking on the ground she prosecuted her search perseveringly, though every mental faculty was steeped in the consciousness of that awful object beside her. Respiration steamed from every pore, the wild beating of the heart was audible in that solemn stillness, and flushes of heat, then icy chills ran through her frame, filling her with a sickness like that of death.



"AGAIN I WARN YOU TO THINK OF YOUR CHILDREN LESS, OF YOUR HUSBAND MORE, OR IT WILL BE WORSE FOR YOU."

Any noise now in the present fearful tension of her nerves even though it might arise from a harmless mouse scurrying behind the chest, or running across her foot, would, it seemed to her, end in madness or death. Al! would not God come to her help, even though, through her head-strung obstinacy, she had so little claim on His mercy! For Margaret's sake—Margaret who was so meek and holy—He would surely help her.

Heaven be praised, here was candle and lantern; but what was the tiny spirit that her fingers touched at the same time. A diamond, large as the Koh-i-noor would have been of less value to her just then. It was a match that had probably fallen out of the lantern, and if she could only light it she was saved. Her hand trembled at first so much that she scarcely dared make the attempt, but after a time she ventured, and was successful. The little blue flame leaped into life, faintly flickered, and just as she had succeeded in lighting the candle, went out, at-footed perhaps by the impure atmosphere of the vault.

Closing the lantern to prevent a similar accident to the candle it contained, she shut down with reverential fear the lid of the chest over its ghastly contents, locked it, and then passed out, breathing more freely when she had turned the key in the ponderous door behind her. Very slowly she pursued her way back, walking almost like one in a trance with light-set teeth and distended eyes, looking neither to right nor left, till the door opening into the east wing was reached, locked, and then with a long drawn breath she commenced mounting the stairs leading to her father's room. Well was it for her that his slumber was so heavy, for every faculty engrossed with one awful thought, she abruptly entered, walked over to the watch guard, took it down, placed the keys in the small drawer, locked it and restored the gold guard to its accustomed place without the slightest attempt at concealment; then with a look of shuddering horror at the unconscious sleeper left the room.

Soon after she was sitting beside her sleeping sister's bed, pale and worn—looking as if ten additional years had been added to her life. Searchingly—eagerly she was recalling all that she had over heard related concerning her dear mother's last illness and death, and the more fully her mind went back on that page, the deeper became her perplexity. Had she not been often told by her sister Margaret, who was a clear, quick-witted child over seven years of

age when that sad event had happened, and consequently capable of close observation, that Mrs. Tremaine had died a few days after Lillian's birth, of malignant typhoid fever, then carrying desolation into countless homes throughout the county. Had not Margaret also related how the village doctor had tenderly and pityingly stroked her head on the occasion of his last visit to Tremaine Court after their mother's death; whispering her that she must not cry too much because God had taken her dear mamma to Heaven. Had not the child also caught a glimpse through the half open door of that bed-room into which she was not allowed to enter for fear of contagion of the coffin lying in state with tapers burning at head and foot; and did she not remember clearly the pomp attending the funeral bedding in all things the mistress of Tremaine Court? Lastly, had not Lillian herself knelt and prayed with Margaret in Brampton church-yard, in the family vault, where her mother's mortal remains lay with those of so many generations of dead Tremaine's.

And what was there against all this mass of evidence? Nothing save a tiny coral ear-drop, and a similarity in texture and colour of a tress of hair. Surely there might be many coral earrings of similar design, and color as there had certainly been many women with long blonde hair in the world. Ah, what a relief if she could take this bell to her home! It would deliver her from a palpable horror that would otherwise haunt her through life. The remembrance of that skeleton form in the vault below would lose half of its terrors if she could only remove the terrible suspicion that had taken possession of her.

Dreamily she awoke, took from a drawer a casket and drew forth a coral earring. After earnestly scrutinizing it she put it back with a sick shudder, whispering: "Fearfully alike!" Again she relapsed into reverie. The clergyman who had attended her poor mother during the closing months of her life had eloquently spoken to Margaret of that mother's sublime resignation, her courageous offering of her life to God, asking only that He should guard her orphaned daughters.

Suddenly the girl raised her head with a light of determination in her luminous eyes, and she murmured: "Yes, I will visit that vault again, compare the ear-drop there with this, see if there be no surer clue to identification of those mortal remains than those of a poisonous. To live in this un-

certainly would madden me. Should my worst fears be realized, I will reveal all to Margaret, and together we will secretly depart from this house which will then be to us as a curse. If any new discovery leads me to hope I have been needlessly torturing myself with unreal fears, I will keep the secret of the vault and never shock or grieve my gentle sister with it, at least not for long years to come. There is the dawn breaking. Lillian, Lillian, where is the thoughtless girl that looked out from the same window yesterday morning, longing for a piece of gay ribbon to be amid her hair? Oh, I must throw open the window, I am suffocating! The pure morning air will do poor Margaret no harm."

Taking the precaution of throwing an additional covering over the sleeper, she unlocked the casement, and throwing back her hair, bared her burning, throbbing brow to the pure, fresh breeze that came rustling over the meadows freighted with the sweet odors and sounds of early morning.

CHAPTER V.

THE EARLY DAYS OF ROGER TREMAINE.

The Tremaine family was one of the oldest in the county to which it belonged, and the male representatives of the line had long been famed for their good looks, spendthrift qualities and lack of principle. For four or five successive generations each heir, on attaining his majority, had found himself in possession of nothing save his ancient name and the ancestral mansion, Tremaine Court, kept in the family by a strict entail. Regularly each succeeding heir had at once turned his thoughts to matrimony as the only means of salvation, looked about for an heiress, wooed, and—aided by his handsome person and elegant manners—won her; then, as a sequence, either broke the new Mrs. Tremaine's heart, or varied the programme before that end was quite accomplished, by dying prematurely; in all cases taking care, however, to spend every available shilling, and to leave the next heir as poor as he had been himself.

Roger Tremaine, of whom our story treats, was true to the traditions of his race, so much so, that the reckless reputation he had at an early age won for himself interfered with his project of building up the fortunes of his house anew, as so many of his predecessors had done by a wealthy matrimonial alliance. Tremaine Court was the resort of wild, gay spirits, who

seemed to think the turf and chase the chief aims of man's existence; and his imprudent follies were matters of public comment. A prim, straight-necked personage, a Miss Rodway, who had, as she averred, seen better days, an assertion supported by an apparently good education, filled the post of housekeeper, chortling in her heart all the while the chimera hope that she might yet become mistress where she was now only manager. This expectation was derived in a great measure from the singular influence her firm, calm nature, cold and impassable as her mind was shrewd and calculating, had obtained over her employer. She came to the latter with the highest recommendations, which she so far proved worthy of, that slender or gossip never meddled with her name, and the reckless visitors at Tremaine Court would as soon have thought of paying court to Medusa in person as of addressing a complimentary note to this stern model of propriety.

Roger Tremaine at length finding out that Miss Rodway and her friends looked coldly on him, suddenly one morning packed up his wardrobe and announced his intention of visiting the Continent. Before a week, perfect stillness had fallen on Tremaine Court, and Miss Rodway was left undisturbed mistress of the establishment.

From one fashionable watering place to another Mr. Tremaine carried his handsome person and stylish wardrobe, eschewing with commendable prudence cards and wine, and conducting himself, at least outwardly, in an irreproachable manner. His projects were at length successful. At Spa he met an invalid lady travelling with her only daughter, a young, light-hearted girl of nineteen. Not trusting to the tokens of wealth surrounding them on all sides, he made secret enquiries, and found that Mrs. O'Halloran was the widow of a wealthy Belfast merchant, who had left a large fortune divided between his wife and child, the mother's share reverting to the daughter after her decease. Part of Mrs. O'Halloran's fortune consisted in an estate in England, Hillingdon Manor, which brought a comfortable yearly revenue.

Yes, the girl was wealthy without a doubt, if not of aristocratic birth, at least of respectable standing, with no troublesome friends to contend against her and a husband's claims and duties; so Roger Tremaine set himself to the task of winning the heiress. The enterprise was an easy one. Both mother and daughter were simple, kind-hearted women, and dazzled by the suitor's brilliant, personal gifts and high social standing, as well as favorably impressed by the strict regularity of his conduct and his insidious professions of kind and noble feelings, they accepted his suit without taking the precaution of making close enquiries into his antecedents. They were married quietly, Mrs. O'Halloran's weak health preventing any attempt at pomp or ceremony. It was arranged that the now-married couple should return at once to Tremaine Court, where Mrs. O'Halloran should also proceed when her health was in some measure re-established, to take up her permanent residence with them.

A few lines from Mr. Tremaine himself informed Miss Rodway of the destruction of her presumptuous hopes, and filled her heart with the most intense hatred of the now mistress of Tremaine Court before she had ever seen her.

The bride and groom arrived, festivities and visiting were the order of the day; but even in the midst of the bridal gaieties, so heavily on the ill-matched pair; the father taking a dislike, from the first, to the plain, sickly little being who had disappointed his hopes of a son.

Letters came from abroad previous to this, announcing first the increasing illness, then the death of Mrs. O'Halloran; and her daughter, unwilling to sadden the mother's last days on earth by hints of her own unhappiness, allowed the sick woman to die in the delusion that the great aim of her latter years had been won, and that her child was united to a man worthy of her affection and trust.

Though young Mrs. Tremaine had arrived a stranger in her new home, unsupported by the countenance of wealthy friends or aristocratic relations, she soon won the respect and sympathy of the members of the circle in which she now moved; and first among those was Mrs. Atherton, who soon learned to esteem and pity the wife as thoroughly as she despised the husband. But the master of Tremaine Court could not to receive much society within its precincts, apart from the old fox-hunting, turf-loving set, who clung to him all the more closely since his wife's collar was well stocked, kenneled and stabled in aristocratic orders, and the young wife yielded in this point as she had done in so many others, and repaid but slightly to the overtures of friendship made by Mrs. Atherton and the other ladies of the neighborhood.

After a lapse of seven years, whose sad tale of sorrow, strife and unkindness poor Mrs. Tremaine revealed to none, a promise of maternity was again vouchsafed her; but from the very first the anticipated event filled her with the saddest forebodings, and she looked on her days on earth as numbered. Amid the many anxious thoughts that harassed her was the fear that despite the large fortune she had brought her worthless husband, her children might yet come to know the pangs of poverty or be despoiled of their rights to favor the children of a second wife. To prevent this she resolved on privately making a will protecting them as much as possible, and leaving for their benefit the greater part of the inheritance derived from