

"You know the lumber room that leads from the stable-loft to the house?"

"Yes."

"And the back stairs that lead from the lumber room to the sitting room?"

"Every inch of them."

"Well, what more easy than to get into the lumber room—You and I know how to do that, old fellow, don't we?"

"I should think so," said he with a grin.

"And," I continued, "to creep down the stairs, open the door and show oneself. One peep will be enough for them I guess. The old fogies are sure to be alone, and if they are not, I can but come back again."

"Good, very good," said Jack enthusiastically.

And so it was proposed, seconded, and unanimously carried, that the plan should be put into operation that very night.

At nine o'clock, according to arrangement, I proceeded *in personâ diaboli* on the expedition.

Jack stood in the lane to hold the top-coat with which I had covered my satanity while going through the village. I was not long in reaching the lumber room; this feat I accomplished easily enough; but the difficulty was to find my way in the dark to the top of the stairs.

I am not naturally timid, but that night I seemed to feel a shivery sensation as I crept through the blackness, perhaps occasioned by the strange stories I had heard about the inhabitants of the place. Once I paused determining to give up the adventure, when to my horror I heard a wild, unearthly shriek, so piercing, so agonizing, that my heart stopped beating and I was frozen to the spot with terror.

All round me was black as a plague of Egypt, and you know well what cowards darkness makes of us. Then in an utterance broken with sobs came a pitiful, wailing, woman's voice, imploring forgiveness and pardon. The tone was so plaintive, so despairing, and yet so sweet, that the words entranced me. It was an agonized appeal, and was succeeded by a heavy fall.

There was murder being done. I could hear the scuffling of feet, the dragging of a heavy body, and then came the fierce, stern voice of a man, "Traitor, you shall die!"

"Die," cried the sweet voice "Oh, my father, not yet, not yet. So young, so unprepared, spare me, spare me."

Unable to endure it any longer I rushed to the stairs, crept cautiously down them, and with beating heart, gazing through a chink in the door, beheld a sight that chilled the very blood in my veins.

A young and beautiful woman lay upon the ground, grasping Garston's hand, who tried to throw her off. Her dishevelled hair fell loosely over her shoulders, and her face looked up with an expression of agony and terror I shall never to my dying day forget. He stood like a maniac over her, his eyes starting from their sockets in the wildness of his fury. In his right hand gleamed an open knife. One wild flourish and he plunged it into her breast.