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**THE PANGS OF REMORSE
—OR—
A COMPLICATED TANGLE.**

CHAPTER XV.

Clarence Cliford, lying on the floor, with his head leaning upon his arm against the bed, was conscious of this, but for some time the guests of voices came upon his ears unmeaningly.

Presently, however, as his grief became deadened and numbed by its very intensity, the words grew into shape and signification, and he found himself listening in a stupefied, half-conscious way, as if he were dead and the still living were talking over his grave.

How benumbed his faculties were can be understood; the conversation did not draw a groan from him.

A rough voice was speaking with a broken, thoughtful tone, and a pause every now and then filled up with sighs.

"Ah, and so the squire be gone, and the mistress, too, Jim! It's a bad day for Rivershall—this. He was short and testy sometimes—which of us beant?—but a good one at heart. There's none of us here wanted for anything while the Squire Ralph owned the Hall."

"Ay, ay," was the sad response; "he was good at heart, and Miss Lily was an angel."

"Angel!" repeated the man, who had spoken first; "that beant the word for her. It be used too often to please me, Jim; find summot more uncommon like. Bless her sweet heart and send her peace, say I."

"Amen!" came heartily and tearfully.

"These be sad days altogether for all of us, Mike," said another. "The undertaken have had it all his own way in t' village for a good bit now. The churchyard a-nigh full, a-nigh full. The angel o' death have been among us."

"Ay," said some of the voices again, but there were many remained silent. Mike among them.

"Mike," said the man called Jim, speaking with a slightly lowered voice, "you bore a hand at t' hearse, didn't ee?"

"I did," replied Mike.

"Did—did you go to notice anything, now?" continued Jim, and stopped.

Mike puffed at his pipe.

"Notice what?" he asked.

"Anything peculiar and out of the way?"

"I noticed nothin' out of the way, did you?" replied Mike, but with a certain reservation.

There was a pause in which the stupefied listener up above knew that the man was looking round at his companions with cautious timidity before he committed himself to speech.

"Well," he said, at last, slowly, and in a still lower voice, "if I do speak the truth, I did. Now, Bill Somers, you lent a hand, was one of them as lifted the coffins. Didn't you go to notice nothing rum like?"

"N-o," said a thin, quavering voice; "what should I 'a' noticed at such a time? I was all for carryin' on for the poor squire."

"Ay, ay," came the response again.

"About the coffins?" said Mike, taking up the subject suddenly. "Well, Jim, now you reminds me, I did. I did notice summot, but I'd forgot it."

"Ah!" said Jim; "I'm glad on't. Some of ye 'u'd 'a' said it were my fancy, but it warn't. Them coffins were as heavy as lead."

"They was lead, perhaps," suggested a voice.

"No, they weren't," said Mike, instantly; "there weren't no time to make them. Don't I know, for I lended a hand to carry 'em to the lodge. More by token they was made by the new doctor's orders, and most particular he were. They weren't lead, Bill, but they was as heavy as lead, none the more for that, when the squire and the young mistress were inside."

"Ay, and there's summot else as is most peculiar, Mike," said Jim, encouraged by the general look of interest and awe. "Beant it strange for a slim young lass like Miss Lily to weigh more nor a big-boned man like Sir Ralph?"

"It's impossible that, man," commented Mike, curtly.

"But it beant," retorted Jim, with grim triumph. "Ask Bill and Jack if Miss Lillian's coffin didn't weight nigh again as much more than the squire's."

"Ay, that be the straight truth," said two voices, assenting, "and so it did, Jim."

"Ah," said Jim, triumphantly, "you don't think as I can be five pound out in my reckoning, Mike Sullivan? Weren't I at the mill at Cheriton, a liftin' bags and weights all day, and couldn't I tell a bale within a couple of pounds?"

"Ay, you did ought to, that's certain," said several.

"I should think so," said Jim; "nor I haven't been and gone and carried so many of 'em to the churchyard for nothing, mates. I knows the weight they generally run—man, and gal, and woman—and I says that there were never such a lumpin' weight as the squire nor the dear lass."

There was a dead silence, broken only by the puffing of the smoker and the occasional setting down of a pewter pot upon the plain deal table.

Presently the sound of a horse's feet and wheels came one of them to look up with a:

"What be that?"

"That's the strange doctor's cart," replied Jim, who seemed to be the best informed of the company.

"What's he doing?" asked the same questioner.

"Goin' to London with the poor squire's things."

"What, the Hall things, the furniture?"

"No," retorted Jim, scornfully; "d'you think as one cart 'u'd take 'em, soft? No, the linen and furniture out of the squire and Miss Lillian's rooms, what's been hinfected as they calls it."

"Ah," said the man, "gett' to London. Everything goes to London, even them deadly things."

"Whose cart's the doctor got?" asked Mike.

"I dunno," said Jim. "Bill Yardley offered his, but t' doctor says no, as he wouldn't go t' risk spoiling 'em, as he wouldn't go t' risk spoiling 'em with the infection, and as he should get a cart from London as was kept o' purpose like. And that be it a-goin' along."

"Who drives it?" asked Mike.

"Dunno; one o' doctor's chaps, same as came w' it."

"Anyone know 'em?" asked Mike.

"Not as I'm aware on," replied Jim, as ready to answer as the other to question. "Yardley seed one of 'em and said as he was the ugliest chap as he'd ever set eyes on. For all t' world like a furriner."

"Ah!" said Mike. "T' doctor's summot of a foreigner himself. Them for eigners stick together, I've heard. And whose a-comin' t' the Hall, Jim?"

"Lady Melville," replied Jim, "the old Squire William's young widow. She's to come when the house is done up and set t' rights. Ah! who'd 'a' thought we should ever see t' old stock die out!"

There was a groan and a sigh of sympathy.

Then Clarence heard his own name mentioned, but footsteps ascending the stairs prevented him from discovering in what connection.

The landlord, who had only just returned from the church, where he held some office, entered and offered his assistance in undressing the poor, gentleman, but the poor, young gentleman was now a stern, broken-hearted man and refused every offer.

He wanted to rest, undisturbed, for another half hour. A horse was then to be saddled and brought to the door for him. He intended returning to London.

To the perplexed and sympathetic landlord's question, if he would not stay the night, or at least take some refreshment before starting, he gave no answer; indeed, seemed not to have heard it.

In a half hour the best horse in the stable was brought to the door and Clarence Clifford rose and walked heavily downstairs.

There was a small knot of men at the door, as usual on such occasions, and they turned aside with a shake of the head, and a smothered exclamation of pity.

When most of them had seen this man last he was in the glory of his youth and vigor; now this heavily galled, bentback, listless figure and drawn face were worse than age.

"Poor Master Clifford!"

At the word he started as if in sleep and roused, with his hand upon the bridle. But he did not speak, and handing the landlord a sovereign with shaking fingers, started Londonwards.

"Ah!" said one of the spectators. "There goes a broken heart if ever I seed one."

"Ye can't break your heart, man," said one, sadly, but with a view to argument. "T' new doctor says so."

"I know he do," retorted the first speaker. "Nor t' neck, neither. But, mark me, if the poor, young gentleman don't contradict that both ways. He's broken his heart and 'ull break his neck, I warrant, afore he gets to London. Did he look as if he could sit in t' saddle?"

Bent in body and broken at heart, the horseman rode on indifferent to the road or the pace.

The horse was a good one, and, with a generosity that must have sprung from something higher than instinct, did not stray from the London road nor break his rider's neck, as it most assuredly might have done; but it chose its pace, a slow one, and trotted on with leisurely contentment. In this way the pair reached London.

GAFFER GRAY.

"You are looking sick and seedy, Gaffer Gray; you are looking poor and needy," so I say; "yet your eye still smiles a n d twinkles, though your face is full of wrinkles, and your m o u t h forever sprinkles sayings gay. Now your years are almost eighty, if-not quite, and your troubles must be weighty, poor old wight; yet I always see you grinning as you did in the beginning, shedding smiles serene and winning, bland and bright. I am richer I am younger, dear old dad; yet I feel no urge or hunger to be glad; every day I view with sorrow, looking for worse luck to-morrow; if there's any grief to borrow, 'twill be had." "Everything becomes a habit," he replied; "when I see a hope I grab it by the hide; I have always looked and squinted for the good things rosy tinted and behind me griefs have sprinted till they died. I have always lamped the blessing, not the woe, and the gods are me crossing as I go; I have always said to trouble, 'You're a table, you're a bubble, and if you would bend me double you're no show.' If you're bound to live serenely you'll be gay, though the world may treat you meanly every day; every jolt is sent us merely to impress the truth more clearly; oh, believe me, yours sincerely, Gaffer Gray."

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