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THE PANGS OF REMORSE
—OR—
A COMPLICATED TANGLE.

CHAPTER XV.

The horse had stopped once or twice to bait, and Clarence Clifford had dismounted, but he had eaten nothing and merely crawled to some leaning post and leaned there with the same stupefied face and want of purpose.

Once or twice rural policemen had looked after him meditatively and considered whether they were doing their duty in allowing such an evidently absent-minded man to risk his life.

But no one had stopped or interfered with horse or rider, and the lights of London were before them.

Then, towards dark, an incident, the solitary one of the journey, occurred, and Clarence Clifford received a fearful shock.

In a narrow part of the high road the horse had suddenly stopped.

Clarence Clifford looked up listlessly to see the obstruction and found that it was a large cart, drawn by two horses, which had stopped to allow a man to examine the harness.

It was an ordinary, heavily built cart, and the stricken mourner would have passed it without a glance had not something dark and bulky lying in the body of it attracted his dull eyes for a moment, but in that short time he knew that he was beside the cart of which he had heard the men in the parlor of the Rivershall Arms speak.

His eyes seemed glued to the dreadful, fever-tainted glass, and with a groan he put his hand up to them.

As he did so—that is to say, while his eyes were covered—he heard, or

fancied he heard, a deep-drawn sigh proceed from beneath the tarpaulin that covered the bundle.

With a start he took his hand from his face and looked back. He saw that the driver of the cart had turned his head in the direction of the inside and seemed listening.

"To what?" asked Clarence Clifford, hazily. "Had he heard the sigh, also?" He pulled up the tired horse and waited in the shadow.

The cart started and rumbled on. As it passed him he heard—or fancied he heard—the sigh again.

The cold perspiration started from his forehead and he seemed rooted to the ground.

Petrified in this way, he saw, the cart pass and once more heard the sigh, louder this time, and—horror of horrors—from the deadly heap a low, smothered cry. With his knees sticking to the horse's sides, he struck it with his whip, and bounded on, with one delirious desire, to fly from the dreadful thing which was sending him mad.

For, dizzy and benumbed, he was convinced that the sighs and the cry were the dreadful fancies of approaching insanity.

CHAPTER XVI.

In due course the Mistress of Rivershall arrived.

The Hall had been thoroughly cleaned and redecorated; many of the old servants had been dismissed as too old for the new owner, and a great many more had been sent away to make room for those she brought with her.

One old servant, if so she could be called, remained, and that was Miss Lucas.

Mr. Packer had, soon after his transmitting the news of Lady Melville's loss of her relatives and consequent gain of the estate, received instructions to make the aforesaid redecoration, and to hand an inclosure to Miss Lucas.

What that inclosure contained no one knew save the person to whom it was directed, but it was noticed that after its receipt the quiet governess, in a manner, assumed the charge of the house and that a tinge of authority was perceptible in her manner and voice.

The day of the funeral Dr. Bromwell had taken his departure.

He had superintended the disinfecting of the place, his work was done, he said, and he felt that he wanted a change.

It was generally understood that he had returned to that part of the continent whence he had come.

Lady Melville arrived quietly as be fitted a mourner.

Her travelling carriage had only two horses, and besides her maid and a courier there were no attendants.

It was dark when the carriage rolled into the drive and stopped before the door; but there was light enough left for Lady Melville to see the serene, composed look of triumph on the face of Miss Lucas, where she stood at the open door ready to receive her ladyship.

Lady Leonora Melville, Mistress of Rivershall, was a different person in appearance and bearing to Lady Melville of no place in particular and a small house in London in general.

Miss Lucas saw that at a glance, and scanned in great curiosity the pale face with its anxious eyes and uncertain lips, the slightly drooping figure attired in its deep mourning.

"Your ladyship is late and must be perfectly exhausted," said Miss Lucas, like the purring of a cat, as her ladyship gave her black-gloved hand to her with a cold smile.

"I am tired—and late. I will go to my room, please, at once. Marie, this lady will show you the rooms."

The French maid looked hard at the Englishwoman and followed in silence.

Lady Melville stopped a moment to give some instructions to the coachman and brought up the rear.

A few servants stood at the head of the stairs and bowed low.

Lady Melville bowed absently and seemed to have no eyes for anything living, so absorbed was she in the great hall and the corridor above.

At the picture gallery, notwithstanding her exhaustion, she stopped short and with one hand upon a tall, carved chair, gazed up and down it with speechless admiration and awe.

Suddenly her eyes were arrested by the vacant place where her portrait had hung before Sir Ralph had caused it to be removed. Then the pale face flushed redly and the small hand clutched one chair passionately.

"Took my portrait down!" she muttered, between her teeth; "left a vacant spot for every idiot to gaze and chatter at! It is like them. Ah, but I have had my revenge. They made a few feet of oak vacant of me, but I have made the whole house vacant of them."

It was a dreadful reflection, and nothing but the malice of the moment would have given it birth. Immediately it left her lips she shuddered and hurried on.

The London upholsters had been given carte blanche, and they had availed themselves of it.

Lady Melville's suite of rooms was a wonder of tasteful luxury; a soft light revealed marvels of the room, the artist's studio, and the greatest manufactures of the day.

An exclamation of genuine delight burst from her lips, and she turned to express her pleasure to Miss Lucas, who had waited a moment, but turned so suddenly that she was in time to

see a sinister smile upon the thin lips and to catch the listless gray eyes fixed upon her face with a cat-like watchfulness.

The pleasant words died from her ladyship, a cold dampness fell upon her breast, and with an imperceptible shudder she walked to the mirror, saying, coldly:

"It is all very pretty; you must have had an infinity of trouble, Miss Lucas, for which I thank you very much, very much."

"Your ladyship makes me very happy," murmured Miss Lucas, humbly. "What time would you like dinner served?"

"In an hour," said Lady Melville. And Miss Lucas withdrew. But as if remembering some other question necessary she opened the door, and so suddenly that Lady Melville started with a half exclamation and dropped the bracelet from her hand.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," said Miss Lucas. "I had forgotten to ask if you would have it served in the grand hall?"

"No, no," was the reply. "In the small room, please."

Miss Lucas retired for good this time but waited outside for a moment with a smile.

"Then, her ladyship is nervous," she murmured, showing her teeth, and stole, in her usual noiseless way, down the stairs.

Her ladyship was nervous—exceedingly nervous, and her falling became a by-word in Rivershall.

If a servant dropped a brush or any other equally simple and ordinary article within her hearing, she started with a suppressed scream. If the wind moaned a little through the great hall or the upper corridors, she shuddered. And once the house had been terribly alarmed by finding her in the picture gallery lying in a hysterical fainting fit, asserting that the portraits of Sir Ralph and his unfortunate daughter, Lillian, had moved from their panels.

All this was shocking and lamentable.

If your lady be nervous, then it is only proper that your maid should follow suit.

(To be continued.)

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ANCESTRY.

If I'm descended from an ape, I am not much depressed by that; I shed no tears, I pin no crape upon my coat sleeve or my hat. If some gorilla was the sire of my proud race I do not care; I'm nobly tolling at my lyre to settle for the bill of fare. I herd my hens and plow and sow, and do not care a tinker's oath what chanced a million years ago to either apes, or men, or both. I do my work in proper shape, I milk the cow and spray the tree, and if my grand-sire was an ape it surely cuts no grass with me. I worry over many things connected with the present day; my silver has two broken springs, I've found some midew in my hay. The hair is falling from my dome, which makes me murmur and repine; my aunt is coming to my home, to visit for six weeks or nine. The chair I sit on falls apart, and lets me down and makes me swear; the cost of living fills my heart with indignation and despair. When I have concrete griefs like these, why should I fill the air with wails because my forebears sat in trees, or swung from branches by their tails? I strive to dodge the bogie, four-eyed savants sweat o'er problems of the long ago. It may be they are talking bunk, it may be what they say is true, but there's no prehistoric monk can stop me when I've work to do.

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