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For the Hearstone.

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE LARK.

BY ISABELLA VALANCY GRAYFORD.

A Lark sprang from her nest as the day rose in the East,
And she shook the glancing dewdrop from her wing;
And as shrilly, clear and gay, rose her glad song
And as shrilly, clear and gay, rose her glad song
A Nightingale, enraptured, heard her sing,
"Come, Lark, and dwell with me," thus he sang
melodiously,
"And nestle in the pink and perfumed thorn;
In the dim and shady brake, such melody we'll
wake,
As will charm again to sleep the bold eye's morn."

"And while in silver streams, down pour the pale
moonbeams,
We'll chaunt to fairy revellers of the night;
The Lark's plaint we'll hear, framed for his mis-
trous ear,
And we'll mourn with the melancholy sprite.
The Lark and the stream will harken to our thorn,
And strike her golden harp in sweet joy;
And the Zephyr on its way, round the night prin-
cess to play,
Will bear us sweetest perfumes passing by!"

"Nay, nay, sweet Philomel," sang the Lark, "I love
the well,
Yet I may not share thy perfumed thorn with
thee;
Nor chaunt to airy fay, from its blossom laden
spray,
When the pale moon-beams are flooding all the
lea.
For me it is to rise, and pierce the gold-bar'd skies,
That part to let the blushing morning thro';
Dart thro' the rosy cloud, and with matin clear and
loud,
Proclaim to man the Day is born anew."

"Thou lovest the moonlit glade, and in evening's
pensive shade,
Alone dost pour thy melancholy lay,
Thy mistress is the Moon, in her robes of silver'd
glow,
And I love the rosy glances of the Day!
So I bid thee farewell, melodious Philomel,
And let us each be constant to our fate;
Mine it is to usher in the Day with matin hymn,
And thine upon the Queen of Night to wait!"

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of 1868.]

THE DEAD WITNESS; OR, LILLIAN'S PERIL.

BY MRS. LEPROHON.

CHAPTER I.

LILLIAN TREMAINE'S BASH RESOLUTION.

Tremaine Court was a large, irregular, weather-stained building, situated in the western part of the County of Surrey, bounded on two sides by arid, stony hills, at the back by a dense pine wood, dark and cool even in the hottest months of summer, whilst in front broad, flat meadows stretched out in interminable sameness.

An antiquarian might have derived satisfaction from a study of the quaint, many-gabled mansion, the foundations of which had been built whilst the princely Plantagenets still sat on England's throne. Trees, moat and draw-bridge and many other relics of bygone times had long since disappeared, but the heavy, oddly-carved portal and massive stone mullions still spoke eloquently of the past. A man of a thrifty and practical spirit, however, would have clinked at the countless indications of neglect and carelessness everywhere apparent. The east wing, partly in a ruinous condition, was evidently unoccupied, for doors and windows were closely nailed and boarded up. Wood-grown walks, gates broken off their hinges, fences and outbuildings deplorably out of repair, said little for the management of the master of Tremaine Court.

The interior dilapidation corresponded with that which reigned outside. Damp-stained walls, mildewed tapestry and painting, with decaying wood-work, were its characteristics; whilst the few articles of old-fashioned, cumbersome furniture to be met with in the various rooms gave evidence of the same indifference to comfort and appearance. Everything, however, bore the stamp of scrupulous cleanliness.

In a small, octagonal apartment facing the east, and lit up by a flood of sunlight that streamed over the old high-backed chairs and carpeted floors with a halo of brightness, were two girls who, though dissimilar in expression and feature, were nevertheless sisters. The eldest was pale and of small stature, with a face indicative alike of sorrow and physical suffering, through which, however, shone the light of a patient meek spirit.

Her companion, evidently her junior by several years, presented a wonderful contrast to herself. Tall, exquisitely formed, with a countenance whose chiselled features would have been almost haughty in their regular beauty but for the soft splendour of her dark gray eyes and the waves of golden brown hair that rippled over her shoulders; she seemed the very incarnation of youth, health and beauty. Her bright young face, however, was clouded at the present moment and her crimson lips compressed; but looking at her mood was neither a pleasant nor a joyous one. The dress of both girls, though scrupulously clean and bearing marks of careful mending, was singularly poverty-stricken in appearance, and the thin, washed-out calico worn by the younger sister, the sleeves and skirt of which were much too narrow and short, had evidently been made for her before she had attained her present queenly proportions. A basket of coarse sewing and mending rested on the oaken table at which they sat, and their fingers moved diligently for



A HUMAN SKELETON, PARTLY CLOTHED IN FRAGMENTS OF WHAT HAD APPARENTLY BEEN A WOMAN'S NIGHT-DRESS, EDGED WITH RICH LACES.

a time in silence. At length the youngest abruptly said, with a sharp ring of pain in her voice:

"I tell you, Margaret, life is becoming intolerable to me, and there are times I care not how soon or in what way it may end."

"Lillian, my darling sister, do not speak so wildly. Patience—"

"Ah! I have none left, nor hope either. Tell me," and with a sudden movement she turned more fully towards her sister, "are these rays that barely shield us from exposure, for they do not protect us from cold; is the miserable, scanty nourishment furnished; are these bare, comfortless, wretched surroundings suitable to the daughters of Tremaine, in whose blood runs blood old and proud as any in England? Look!" and with a passionate movement she dragged back her sleeve revealing her arm in its faultless symmetry.

"See this skin, smooth white as satin, then contrast it with these hands, disfigured with the roughest household drudgery, drudgery wrought not only in kitchen, but in out-house and garden. Think of the life we lead! Half-starved, overworked daily, outraged in every good and gentle feeling, tyrannized over by a heartless father and a mental upstart. Oh, Margaret! how can you still talk of patience?"

"My poor Lillian, what else remains for us? Friend or relative, save our father, we have none; means, resources we have none. Our only alternative is submission to our lot."

"Margaret, Margaret, we are as dissimilar in character as in everything else. You are gentle, patient, holy as an angel; I, well, I am entirely the reverse. There is a stubborn pride, an impatience of injustice, a vindictiveness in me that at times would surely terrify you, my meek sister, when it often alarms myself. But a week ago—I have kept this secret from you till now—father, in one of his angry outbursts, threw a stool at me. I stood my ground, only bending my head slightly to avoid it, staring unflinchingly at him all the time. Almost livid with rage, he shouted: 'Quick, Stakely, take that girl out of the room, or I cannot answer for what may happen.' Curse her, she has her mother's hot-temperament! Shaking off Madame Stakely's officious arm, I slowly left the room with open defiance in look and manner; but oh! Margaret, I felt that death would have been welcome to me then, even if it had been given by my father's hand. There must be more of my father's nature in me than of my poor, gentle mother's."

"Lillian, my love, my sister, what is this change that has come over you?" and flinging down her sewing the elder girl threw her arm round her companion's neck and lovingly drew the bright young head with its masses of silken hair down on her shoulder.

"Do you remember the lessons I have endeavoured, in my poor, humble way to inculcate, and the prayers I taught you even when you were a little child, as well as the promises of patience and forbearance you have so often made me?"

"Yes, Margaret," and the speaker sadly shook her head. "I was a child then, but I am a woman now."

"Ah, dearest, that should make you only the more patient. What is woman's chief study through life but to learn to suffer?"

"So it has generally been with the women of our house, sister, but such is not necessarily the case. Besides, there are things that can be endured meekly and patiently; others that cannot. Our father's harsh severity and apparent want of affection for us, his alarming violence when under the influence of the fatal stimulants to which he occasionally resorts, is hard to bear, so also is the penury, want and squalidness that surround us in the midst of riches and plenty. Still all this could be borne; but what I find intolerable is the odious, insolent tyranny of the woman called our house-keeper, but who is in reality our task-mistress."

"My Lillian, do not at least quarrel with our inevitable poverty, nor talk so childishly of possessing wealth and riches."

"But I say we do, Margaret! Think of the rolls of bank notes father gives that Miss Stakely at the beginning of every month. It is not well known in the village of Brompton that she supports her married daughter in a style of ease to which we are strangers, though her son-in-law rarely does a day's work or curries a shilling? Then does she not pay for her other girl, poor wretched Dorothy, in a private lunatic asylum, where the charges are exorbitantly high? See the comfortable manner in which her room is furnished—the soft, fine fabrics she wears, the dainties and rich wines that spread her solitary table in her own sitting room. Ah, a mystery there is about her which I will yet fathom! The unbounded influence she exerts over our father is not derived from friendship and regard for I have seen him time and time again look at her from under his bent brows in a manner that seemed clearly indicative of fear and dislike. I

have walked through life till lately with my eyes closed as it were, but they are opened at length, and I will never rest till I find out the real meaning of many things that puzzle me now. Again I repeat that I have good grounds for believing that we are rich in actual wealth. You remember the old man that came here last winter to help in nursing father through his terrible attack of delirium? Well, under promise of strict secrecy he told me that many years ago, shortly after father had returned from abroad, he was working one day in the garden when Mrs. Stakely came out in a great fright and asked him to accompany her to the stone vault under the east wing as Mr. Tremaine, who had gone down there for some business papers, had been suddenly seized with a sort of fit, and she did not know but that he might die on the spot. Old Davy went with her and found father lying on the ground, in a sort of stupor, with staring eyes and white ghastly face. He helped the house-keeper to ring him into one of the outer cellars where a window grating admitted the fresh air, and after a time that brought him round. Now, you know, Margaret, that one of the traditions of Tremaine Court is that the founder of the race had a secure vault constructed under the east wing of the building for the express purpose of storing gold, through as far as I can judge from our annals, the said vault has proved quite a superfluous luxury, as no Tremaine seems ever to have had any gold to store, they wanting it all for actual use. We, ourselves, however, are favored exceptions I sincerely believe to this rule."

"Why do you think so, Lillian? Did old Davy see any gold whilst he was down in the vault?"

"No, but he saw a long, brass-bound oak chest heavily padlocked, which he knew contained gold, silver, or valuable jewels. My old informant added that a spade stood in a corner as if for immediate use as he supposed Mr. Tremaine was about to bury some of his treasures. The truth of Davy's story I will yet ascertain. You shake your head, sister, as if this were impossible, but to a firm, daring nature rendered almost reckless by misery, few things are really so. Alas! I see my way to a certain extent clearly before me. Listen. Last week when Mrs. Stakely had gone to the village, probably to draw the money for father from the bank, I brought him up in pursuance with her parting commands, his evening meal. He was asleep and the decanter on the stand beside him, as well as the oppressive atmosphere of the room,

heavy with spirituous fumes, announced that his sleep would probably be long and profound. Whilst hesitating whether to awake him, or else return with my tray, I rested it a moment on the bureau. The small top drawer of the latter was open, and therein lay a bunch of keys labelled 'east wing.' To a heavy, peculiar looking brass one was affixed a card, inscribed with the words: 'Oak chest in east vault.' Now, my quiet Margaret, model of listeners, what do you say to my discoveries?"

"They are worse than useless. Forbidden knowledge is always dangerous."

"What a dear gentle moralist you are!" rejoined the other, with a smile that lit up her face like sunshine, making it for the moment almost startling in its glowing, wonderful beauty. "Listen!" and she caught her sister in a playful embrace. "Forbidden knowledge, like forbidden pleasures, is popularly supposed to be sweet, and I will taste it. The next time Mrs. Stakely goes to Brompton to pass the night with her sick daughter, and father—well, goes to sleep soundly, we'll say—I shall bring in his supper, take the keys from the drawer, and thoroughly explore the east wing."

"The eldest girl's cheek blanched. 'For God's sake do not venture on so wild, so mad a step! What! venture at night into that lonely, ruinous place, shut out as it is from all human help or ken?"

"What would I have to fear except rats and beetles, of which I am less afraid than most women are?"

"But, Lillian, people have said that the place is haunted."

"What a speech for my wise, sensible Margaret to make, who is as free from superstition as it is possible for mortal to be. For myself, I could say with Madame de Staël, in speaking of ghosts: 'I do not believe in them, but I fear them.' Nevertheless, at the risk of meeting the shadowy horrors, I will, on the first occasion, carry out my intention. Why, Margaret, are you going to cry over it?' she hastily added, as tears filled her companion's sorrowful eyes: 'Well, I will think twice before I risk my projected exploration, so we will change the subject for one less painful and exciting.' A pause followed, and then Lillian, throwing down her sewing, drew from the bottom of the basket, where they had been concealed under some linen and cotton, a tiny slip of old tape and a pale blue ribbon, which she proceeded to stitch together.

As Margaret noted this a faint smile stole over her lip, and she softly said: "So my sister Lillian—I can no longer call her my 'little Lillian,' as I used to do not so very long ago—begins to listen to the promptings of feminine vanity, and to study self-adornment! I have noticed also that for a few weeks past you arrange your hair differently to the plain, neat manner in which you once braided it at the back of your head. Rippling down in a shining shower of curls, as it now is, is certainly very becoming. In fact, prettiest, but I should also think rather uncomfortable, and, to be plain, untidy."

"Ah, sister, I have been admiring looks more than once directed at it in its present flowing state."

"And by who?" was the wondering question.

"Surely not Mrs. Stakely or father?"

"No certainly not by them."

"I again ask by who?" and this time a look of vague alarm stole over Margaret Tremaine's face.

Lillian's cheek hadly flushed.

"Sister, I ought to tell you, and twenty times I have been on the point of doing so, but fear of your sorrowful displeasure has always kept me silent."

"Lillian, dear, speak now. What is it?"

"I will. Do you remember, about three weeks ago, when Mrs. Stakely was at Brompton, I went out with my basket to gather mosses and ferns, which, you know, I prefer to the handsomest garden flowers, in the pine woods at the back of our place. Just as I had reached the densest part of it, where I have been in the habit of wandering for years without ever meeting a human being, the report of a gun fired off close at hand started me, and my alarm was increased by the bounding out of a dog from among the bushes, barking furiously. Greatly terrified, for I am more afraid of dogs than of ghosts, I hastily retreated, endeavouring at the same time to ward him off with my basket, the sight of which appeared to glad him to frenzy. At this critical moment there was another entrance on the stage, and from the direction in which the dog had come stepped forth a tall, thick, military looking man, carrying a gun, and dressed in the rough sportsman's style. In courteous terms he apologized for the fright he had unintentionally caused, and then, looking more closely at me, and seeing, I suppose, that my very lips were white with terror, he, in a softer and more deferential tone, asked permission to accompany me a little distance, to ensure me against any new alarm in the agitated state I then was. There came an expression of perplexity over his face as his eye rested for a moment on my miserable faded calico, coarse straw hat, and heavy leather shoes, so plainly revealed by my disgustfully short dress."

"Very little poor Lillian prided herself on the rare beauty of a foot and ankle inwardly pronounced by the stranger the most perfect he had ever seen, or which might have chafed less at a circumstance that now dyed her cheek with the hot blush of mortification."

"To his offer I replied in the negative adding that Tremaine Court was near at hand. He started, re-estimating the words, Tremaine Court, and then hesitatingly said: 'Are you—are you a member of the family?'"

"Yes, the youngest daughter."

"With a quick glance at me he resumed, 'I might have known you, Miss Tremaine, from your strong resemblance to your mother whom I knew, though slightly, before I embarked with

* Je n'y crois pas, mais je les crois.