

My Lost Love.

[From All the Year Round.]

When the silence of midnight... My lost love comes back to me.

RETURNED FROM THE GRAVE

By MRS. HENRY WOOD.

Author of "East Lynne," "Oswald Gray," &c.

CHAPTER X.—CONTINUED.

As he turned from the door, the others being by that time nearly at the end of the long passage, he saw something white gliding swiftly down it.

"Oh, my lady! you should not have given yourself this trouble. Why did you not ring?"

"I was frightened to remain alone," she whispered. "I dropped asleep, and when I woke, I rose to look at Lord Dane, wondering that he had not spoken or called."

"Can nothing be done?" demanded the petrified household of Mr. Wild.

"Nothing whatever. He has been gone some time. Don't you see that he is already becoming rigid? One comfort is he went off in his sleep, and did not suffer. I have thought this might probably be the ending."

"Then I wonder you didn't tell him so, Wild," burst forth Mr. Appery, in a hot tone of reproach.

"And why should I tell him? He was prepared for death; he knew it was coming; was very near; wherefore tell him it might be sudden at the last?"

"No, he was not prepared for death," returned the lawyer, in a heat; "not in one sense. He had not settled his affairs."

"The announcement took all by surprise. He, Lord Dane, with his protracted illness, not to have settled his affairs! Geoffrey Dane smiled incredulously."

"Mr. Appery, you must be mistaken. My uncle made his will when he was first recovering from his accident."

"I know he did; I drew it up for him; but he had a wife and children then. After they were gone that will was of little use, and it was cancelled. The second will has been drawn up this fortnight past, waiting for the signature. Upon what chance pivots things turn?"

"Heirship sent for me this morning, and appointed this afternoon for the execution. Then, feeling fatigued, said he would put it off till eleven o'clock to-morrow. And now he is gone, and the will is worth so much waste paper!"

"Wanting the signature?" assented Mr. Appery. "You will be the better for it," he added, looking at Geoffrey Dane, "but others will be the worse. It's a dangerous habit, is procrastination; I don't know anything I dislike more."

"My lord, do you remain in the castle?" inquired the housekeeper, as they were beginning to desert the chamber.

The proposition nearly took away what little sense Lady Adelaide had at the moment possessed. She made no reply.

"The license, which I already have, is special, so on that score there will be no impediment," pleaded Mr. Lester.

"Oh, I do not know! It is so sudden—and I am too bewildered to give proper deliberation to it. Let it rest until morning; I shall be more collected then."

"I must ask your pardon for interrupting you, my lord, at such a moment, especially on business," he began.

"Well," said Lord Dane. "And I should not have thought of doing so but I find there's not an hour to be lost. It's about the Sailor's Rest, my lord. John Mitchel has been announcing that he has agreed with Mr. Appery for the lease, subject to the consent of Lord Dane. You are Lord Dane now, my lord."

There was a peculiar significance in the tone of Ravensbird as he spoke the concluding sentence; a bold, independent, almost a demanding tone. Was it possible that Lord Dane failed to remark it?

"Yes, my lord. And I hope you will." "Enough, for to-night," curtly responded Lord Dane.

Ravensbird respectfully touched his hat, and strode along quietly toward Danesheld. Lord Dane also proceeded in the same direction, but at a slower pace.

"A dreadfully sad and sudden event, my lord!" cried the lawyer. "And to think that he should not have signed the will!"

"It has shocked me much," replied Lord Dane, turning upon him his pale face—unnaturally pale it looked in the starlight.

"I shall require instruction from your lordship upon different points," returned Mr. Appery. "When will it be convenient?"

"I shall be at the castle to-morrow at ten," interrupted Lord Dane. "Meet me there. And, meanwhile, until I shall have gone into things let any little business matters you may have in hand relating to the estate rest in abeyance. Granting leases, or anything of that sort."

"Very good, my lord. Not that anything much is in hand just now. There's that trifling affair of the Sailor's Rest; Hawthorne and Mitchel both want it got over as speedily as pens can trace parchment. Lord Dane had no objection to Mitchel as its tenant; your lordship, I conclude, will have none."

"Lord Dane's death puts a stop to negotiations for the present," was the somewhat sharp answer. "Let everything, I say, remain in abeyance."

Mr. Appery nodded in acquiescence, wished the new peer good night, and left him. "He'll be a martinet, unless I am mistaken," was his parting thought.

It was dusk, and the following evening; nay, dark—as dark as we get the summer nights when ten o'clock is drawing on. Miss Bordillon was seated alone in the handsome drawing-room of Danesheld Hall, her head running upon many things.

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"How do you do, Miss Bordillon?" She held out her hand, while Mr. Lester was taking her shawl from her shoulders, and Margaret touched it mechanically, in utter amazement.

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"It is scarcely fair to take the house by storm in this way, is it, Miss Bordillon? But I believe there was no help for it."

What Miss Bordillon answered, she never knew. Rarely had she been scared so entirely out of her self-possession.

"Would you like tea immediately, Adelaide?" interposed Mr. Lester.

Margaret muttered some half-intelligible words about "telling the servants to bring it," and escaped from the room.

The sofa was close at hand, and she thought she could scramble up the things, and escape again. But her footstep was arrested on the very threshold.

"I thought the ponies would have gone over once, on the heights," returned Lady Adelaide. "George, dear, I am sure you have eaten sufficient."

"I have only had a few, mamma," responded Master George, who was sitting in state by Mr. Lester.

"Did you venture on the heights with the pony cartage?" uttered Mr. Lester to his wife, as he dropped a walnut or two into the boy's plate.

"I soon drove off them again, when I found what the wind was," laughed Lady Adelaide. "I did not want a summer in the sea, ponies, and carriage, and all. You say you are dead tired," she continued, after a pause.

"Thank you, papa; I do not require anything more." Maria Lester looked hastily down at the child on her knee.

"Dane is coming to ten, Adelaide." "Dane! this evening?" "The words were few, but the tone in which they were spoken betrayed annoyance and vexation."

Her beautiful face—beautiful it was, still—flushed crimson, but she disclaimed the accusation eagerly. Too eagerly, Mr. Lester might have thought, had he been a keen-sighted, or suspicious man.

"I took a prejudice against Lord Dane!" she uttered. "What a strange idea! Way should you think that?"

"You seem to be annoyed at his visits, and to receive him coldly; forgetting, I presume, that he is, so to say, a cousin, or connection of yours. I'm sure, I don't wonder at his dropping in frequently, for he must find the castle dull."

"Have you any idea why he comes so frequently?" asked Lady Adelaide, bending over her plate.

"Not I," said Mr. Lester, "except that our house is gayer than his. What other motive should he have?"

"You are mysterious, Adelaide. Let us hear the thought." "No," she laughed. "It is not intended for the public benefit."

"Mr. Lester's brow contracted. "You know, Adelaide, that you are sometimes suspicious? You are so now."

"I suppose it is my nature to be so, George. Don't look cross. When you married me, you married me, with my faults and failings about me, remember."

"Where is Susan, this evening?" returned Maria. "Oh—Susan!—what's the good of Susan for evening work?"

"Oh, my lord, it's that puts me out. My lady won't hear a word against Susan, just because she's Tiffie's niece."

"What does she go?" "Chattering with the other servants, or gallivanting somewhere. I ought to have full control over Susan, Miss, for she's under me, and I have no more over her, than I have over that wind, that's tearing around the house, as if it would tear it to pieces."

"What's the good of your ringing like that, as if you'd have the bell down?" began she, before she had gained the room. "I won't allow."

"It was I who rang," curtly interrupted Miss Lester. "I rang for Susan." "Tiffie stood and held her tongue, somewhat taken aback. Her manner smoothed down to meekness; false as she was."

"For Susan, miss! Does nurse want her? I have just sent her out to do a little errand for me, thinking the young ladies and gentleman were in the dining-parlor, and that she couldn't be required in the nursery. I'll send her up the moment she comes in, miss."

"You see that she is wanted, Tiffie," gravely replied Miss Lester. "Here are three children, all requiring to be undressed at once, and it impossible for one pair of hands to do it. Nurse tells me that Susan makes a point of being away at this hour; now, I think, you ought to speak to Susan, and order her to be more attentive to her duty. I shall speak to Lady Adelaide."

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head, and speaking in a languid tone. Did you have good sport?" "Very bad, indeed; the wind, as you say, was against it. Dane, crack shot that he is, only bagged three brace; impossible to take aim with that whirling blast in one's eyes. I don't think I ever felt the wind so high; and the beating up against it has made me dead tired. More walnuts for you, young gentleman?"

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cessity for that, and it'll do no good; my lady has unlimited confidence in me and in Susan." "That may be, Tiffie, but it is right she should know that the children are neglected. Send Ann here to assist the nurse until Susan shall return."

The tone was imperative. Maria, gentle and mild as she was, yet possessed that quiet, nameless power of command, which few care to resist. Tiffie stood aside as she left the room, and then Tiffie shuffled on in her wake, her eyes glancing evil.

Tiffie had played her cards well. When she found that Lady Adelaide was to be her master's wife, her first thought was resentment; her intention, to depart forthwith. But when Lady Adelaide came home in the unexpected manner related, and Tiffie found that she was the hall's bona fide mistress—Tiffie's mistress—a mistress endowed with very different power from that invested in Miss Bordillon—then, to use a popular phrase, Tiffie began to find out on which side her bread was buttered.

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him, and when he returned for good, Lady Adelaide bore the infliction ill. A tacit, silent sort of antagonism was maintained between them, of which Lady Adelaide bore the position, of course, obtained the best, and Tiffie did not fail to fan the flame. Wilfred occupied himself, listlessly enough, with outdoor sports, hunting, shooting, fishing, as the seasons permitted, but he was devoted with annual, and at length took to passing most of his evenings at Miss Bordillon's.

It was well he did so, at least in one sense, for soon, very soon, the annals were dissipated. The dispirited, listless young man, who had been ready to throw himself into the ponds instead of his fishing-line, and in truth cared little which of the two did go in, was suddenly aroused to life, and hope, and energy. Far from the present time hanging about his neck like a millstone, it became to him as a sunny Eden, tinged with the softest rapture. The dim, indistinct future, so dark, so visionless to his depressed view, suddenly broke from its clouds, and shone out in colors of the sweetest and rosiest hue—for he had learnt to love Edith Bordillon. Not with the unstable, fleeting nature of man's general love, but with a pure, powerful, all-absorbing passion, akin to that felt by woman.

A few months given to dreamy happiness, and then he spoke to Mr. Lester. The appeal perplexed Mr. Lester uncommonly. He could have no objection to Edith; she was of good a family as his son (it may almost be said of the same), and there was no doubt she would inherit a snug fortune at the colonel's death, for she was his only child. Colonel Bordillon had been in India now for many years, spending little, and making money. What perplexed Mr. Lester was his share in the affair. Wilfred, in his eagerness, protested they could live upon nothing—as good as nothing. He did not wish to cripple his father; let him allow them ever so small an income, and they would make it suffice. Edith said they would. Mr. Lester pointed out to Wilfred that what he could allow would be very small indeed, but if the colonel would come forward with present help to Edith, he could add what he was able to spare. These statements were drawn out, and particulars written to Colonel Bordillon.

The only one who protested against the match, was Lady Adelaide Lester. Not openly; in private to her husband. It was the most imprudent thing she ever met with. What did a young fellow like Wilfred want to marry for? Better get him an appointment under government, or dispatch him some where abroad. Mr. Lester listened, and inquired why. They were bent upon marrying, he said. Edith was a very nice girl, and if they would be contented to make a moderate income suffice, they might as well marry. He could give but little; but the colonel would most likely come down with four or five hundred a year.

"Suppose he should refuse to come down with anything?" returned Lady Adelaide. "Then the affair would be at an end," emphatically replied Mr. Lester. "In that case, I would never give my consent."

Meanwhile, Wilfred and Edith lived on, looking forward to the answer of the colonel, and revelling in the golden visions of dream-land. Are such ever realized? I never knew them to be. In due course the reply of the colonel came. It was addressed to Wilfred, and included a short note for Edith.

Have you ever passed from the broad light of day into the gloomy darkness of a subterranean dungeon? If so, you may remember the utter chill that seemed to overwhelm your feelings, both mental and bodily. Just so did the news from India plunge its recipients from the sunny brightness of expectancy, to the blackness of despair; but, whatever your own experience of a chill may have been, it was as nothing compared to that which shivered the frames and hearts of Wilfred Lester and Edith Bordillon.

The colonel would have been delighted with the union, and cordially given them his blessing; nay, he gave it them still, should it be carried out; but of help, of money, he had none to give. The Calcutta Bank, the one in which he had hoarded the savings of years, no inconsiderable sum, had just gone smash, and left him penniless. The public newspapers would supply them with details.

Wilfred put up the letter, and sat on, buried in a gloomy reverie; Edith sat opposite to him, not weeping, but looking much inclined for it. The letter had come in by the evening's post addressed to him at Miss Bordillon's, and it happened that they had received it alone, for that lady was out.

"I have decided what you must do," Wilfred said, after awhile. "Edith, you were— you are—to be my wife; will you be guided by me in this business?"

"Of course I will," she answered. "And you would not like—after all our fond hopes and plan—that we should be separated forever?"

"A passing shiver, and a faint answer. "No, I should not." "Then, my darling, before this week is over, you must be mine."

She looked up with a start of surprise, thinking he was jesting.

"We must be married privately, and declare the fact after it is over. Otherwise nothing in the world will prevent their separating us; I foresee it. Don't look scared, Edith; it will all come right in the end. Say nothing yet about this news."

"But how are we to live?" "My father, when he knows we are married, will allow us something, and we must economize till brighter days turn up. Shall you be afraid of it?"

Wilfred stopped her; he deemed it more politic to drown objections than to combat them. And he managed, wonderful to say, to obtain her consent to the plan.

It was strange that he should be able to do so; but far more strange was it that Tiffie obtained an inkling of what was going forward. She poked, she pried, she fretted; it was her daily habit; and in ordinary cases no wonder that she succeeded in unearthing secrets, though how she managed to scent this one, was in truth a marvel.

The very day before that fixed for uniting them—and no soul knew of it, as they believed, but themselves—Tiffie went moping into Lady Adelaide's room, her hands meekly upfolded, and the whites of her eyes turned inquiry.

"Oh, my lady! such dreadful intimacy! I have that has come to my knowledge! I have been turned upside down to think how you and dear master's been deceived."

"What is the matter now?" asked Lady Adelaide. "Them two mean-spirited wasters are going to get married on the sly. I mean Mr. Wilfred and his sweet-heart," added Tiffie, perceiving her lady's puzzled look.

"With-out saving a syllable, or letting any soul know it, my lady, they are going to ignite themselves together in secret till death do them part."

"But why in secret?" demanded the amazed Lady Adelaide. "They are to be married when news arrives from the colonel, and it is expected daily. There is no motive, no inducement for them to do in secret what they may soon do openly. You must have found a man's nest for once, Tiffie."

"My lady—craving your pardon—are the even as a boy, made his home unpleasant to