

**Rocking the Baby.**  
 I hear her rocking the baby—  
 Her room is next to mine—  
 And I fancy I feel the dimpled arms  
 That round her neck entwined,  
 As she rocks and rocks the baby,  
 In the room just next to mine.

I hear her rocking the baby  
 Each day when the twilight comes,  
 And I know there's a world of blessing and  
 Love  
 In the "baby-byes" she hums.

I can see the restless fingers  
 "Playing" with "mamma's" rings—  
 The sweet, little, smiling, pouting mouth  
 That to hers in kissing clings,  
 As she rocks and sings to the baby,  
 And dreams as she rocks and sings.

I hear her rocking the baby  
 Slower and slower now,  
 And I hear that she is leaving her good-night  
 Kiss  
 On his eyes and cheek and brow.

From her rocking, rocking, rocking,  
 I wonder what she starts,  
 Could she be rocking through the wall between us,  
 "The rocking on a boat?"  
 While my empty arms are aching  
 For a form that may not press,  
 And my empty heart is breaking  
 In its desolate loneliness.

I list to the rocking, rocking,  
 In the room just next to mine,  
 And breathe a prayer in silence,  
 For a mother's broken sigh,  
 For the woman who rocks the baby  
 In the room just next to mine.

RETURNED FROM THE GRAVE

By MRS. HENRY WOOD: Author of "East Lynne," "Onward," "The Sign of the Cross," etc.

CHAPTER XXI—CONTINUED.

He parades himself as a gentleman, he has obtained admission in that character to the best families, he has made himself intimate with you. Will you believe that almost from the very first I have known him to be an associate with the worst characters here, sharing in their pursuits, poaching on my preserves with them? He tells you he was with Wilfred Lester till one o'clock this morning; I say that it is more than likely; for it has been whispered to me that Lydney was one of those engaged in the attack last night.

She felt utterly confounded. Strange doubts and fears assailing her at all points; but she had faith in Lydney.

"It is not possible," she gasped. "All that you say is his own house that he was last night."

"Understand me, Maria. With regard to last night, I assert nothing positive; for, of his movements then, and Wilfred's, I am personally ignorant. It has been told to me that he was in the wood, it has been told to me that your brother's wounds, both may be false, for aught I know. But when I tell you that he is the associate of bad characters, and that he frequents the wood at night with them, I speak of my own positive knowledge. Is that a man to be intimate with Miss Lester?"

Maria was hard of belief, and she spoke resentfully.

"If you have known this, as you say, from the first, why have you not stopped his visits to the families of the neighborhood?"

"I have no reason for not speaking to you, and the police have theirs. My gentleman is being watched, and the time will come, I believe shortly, when he will be dropped, and denounced. Private friendship would have led me to interfere, but as lieutenant I have public duties to consider. The time is not yet come, I say. He made a show of offering £1,000 reward for the recovery of the box—"

"He never said it was himself offered it; he was but acting for the owner," persisted Maria.

"Be it so. But whether for himself or owner, he was safe in offering it, seeing that the box is most probably in his own possession, and has been from the time it was lost."

"Who asserts that?" flushed Maria.

"It is a suspicion—not an assertion. We cannot come to any other conclusion."

At that moment Wilfred Lester came in view, walking as well as he ever walked in his life, with no sign of a wound about him. He did not stop, but passed them with a nod. Maria turned triumphantly to Lord Dane.

"You see! All the other assertions may be false as that."

"False! Thank you, Maria. I passed you my word that with regard to Lydney's pursuits and associates they were true. I did not answer for last night's doings. Can you have faith in him still?"

"It seems to me that I can never lose my faith in him," she replied in a low tone, as though she were communing with herself.

Lord Dane threw up his head with all the hauteur of a British peer, and he bit his lips with vexation. That he was very greatly prejudiced against Lydney there was no question; still he did believe him to be an unworthy character.

Dane held Hall in view, and Maria entered, Lord Dane also entered, and proceeded to the study of Mr. Lester. He there confided to Mr. Lester what had never done before—his suspicions of Mr. Lydney; and strenuously urged that he should be treated as an impostor and turned from the hall.

"He appears to me to be a thorough gentleman—a gentleman in all respects," was the reply of Mr. Lester, who felt considerably astonished and staggered at the communication.

"If what you say be correct, the fellow must have the impudence of—"

"It is correct," interposed Lord Dane. "Do I not tell you I have watched him myself, beat a witness to his night assignations in the wood, his confederacy with the poachers? I have had my reasons for keeping this close, and the police have also theirs. Neither must it be made public now, unless we would defeat the ends of justice; but I consider the facts to you that he may have no further opportunity of working more mischief at the hall."

"He certainly shall not be admitted here again," remarked Mr. Lester. "But as to past mischief—you go too far, Lord Dane. What mischief has he brought to the hall?"

"He has tried at it, unless I am greatly mistaken," significantly returned Lord Dane. "He has contrived to establish a pretty good understanding with Maria, out of doors and in; and you, ladies often prove more susceptible to the fascinations of a stranger than do the sterling qualities of old friends."

Very indignant, indeed, felt Mr. Lester at the hint; not indignant against Lord Dane, but at the presuming intruder, Lydney. He, however, repudiated the insinuation touching Maria. Lord Dane smiled.

"These fellows, who come into a neighborhood for what they can pick up, are just the sort to draw a young lady into mischief; I mean such mischief as a secret attachment, and then a marriage. Fancy what a windfall Maria's fortune would be to this man! and you know, were she to marry without the previous arrangement regarding the money, you would be compelled to hand it over."

Mr. Lester stood as one thunderstruck. His view of the case had never struck him

before, and he began to trail at himself for his blindness. "Sneaking" covertly after Maria, that he might grasp her fortune? Of course he was! It was all plain now. The perspiration broke out over his face like peas.

"You had better persuade her to become Lady Dane without delay," said his lordship, quietly, "and so secure her from harm: You would retain the money, and I should gain a wife, whose happiness it would be my daily study to promote."

"She shall be your wife before the month's out," foamed the disturbed Mr. Lester.

Lord Dane quitted the hall, and it happened unfortunately that Mr. Lydney almost immediately called at it before Squire Lester's indignant fears had had time to cool. He rushed out and met him as he entered, and with many needless words of insult, ordered him to quit the house again.

"What has occurred? what have I done?" demanded the amazed Lydney while the raised tones of Mr. Lester's voice brought forth Lady Adelaide and Maria. "I condescend to no explanation, sir," was the retort of Mr. Lester. "Only take yourself off, and never presume to attempt crossing the threshold of my house again; you have crossed it too much."

"But you will first accord me an explanation of this treatment," persisted Mr. Lydney. "There's the door, sir," stormed the squire, waving his hand to the door, which the servant held. "If you do not depart instantly I shall order my domestics to put you forth."

A moment's communing with himself, and then the young man turned to obey. But he first raised his hat courteously to Lady Adelaide, who had stood the image of consternation, and walked forth—not as one cowed by merited insult, but with a lordly step and head erect, his whole air and bearing that of a chieftain, from whom insult recoiled.

Maria shivered, crept up to her room, and burst into a flood of passionate tears.

CHAPTER XXII.

LORD DANE was not one to do his work by halves. If he could not publicly proclaim his suspicions of Lydney's ill-doings, or if he did not choose to do so, he yet determined to damage his reputation as far as possible. The most delicate means to his lordship would be to hear that Lydney had been driven from the place; perhaps he hoped to help on that desired consummation. Upon quitting Squire Lester's he bent his steps to the Sailor's Rest. Ravensbird was alone in the bar, reading a newspaper; he rose up when his lordship entered.

"I want three minutes' conversation with you, Ravensbird."

The man bowed, led the way to the parlor, and handed a chair to Lord Dane, remaining himself standing of course.

"How much longer do you intend to harbor that fellow Lydney?"

"I'm sure, my lord, that's more than I can say," returned the landlord, who could take questions as coolly and literally as most folks, even from Lord Dane. "It's his business; not mine. He'll stop on at his pleasure; as long as he pays his bill, I have nothing to say against it."

"No, Ravensbird, he will not stop at his pleasure," returned Lord Dane. "I am here now to desire you to turn him out."

"Upon what plea, my lord?" asked Ravensbird.

"Give any plea you choose to him. The one I give to you is—that it is my pleasure."

"My lord, I cannot put forth a gentleman in that fashion; and one who conducts himself as a gentleman, and pays his way."

"It must be done. I insist upon it," said Lord Dane.

"I beg your pardon, my lord. Not by me."

"The fellow is an impostor, a man given to nefarious courses; he consorts with the poachers, and trespasses on my preserves at night. But, mind, Ravensbird, this is for your private ear alone, and I know you can be secret when you like. He has wormed himself into the social circles of the best families here, and may work incalculable mischief. Is that a man for you to continue to harbor?"

"What he may do out of doors, I know nothing of," persisted Ravensbird; "I see nothing wrong in him, and have heard no wrong in-doors, he conducts himself as a quiet, well-behaved, honorable gentleman, and that's all I've got to do with."

"You are my tenant, Ravensbird, and you must do as I wish you."

"My lord, I am your tenant, but I pay you rent for your house, and am master of it. In taking the Sailor's Rest, I did not part with my responsibility of action. I should be happy to oblige your lordship in many ways, but to turn a harmless gentleman (as far as I see) from it, is what I can't do."

"Say you won't, Ravensbird."

"Well, my lord, I'll say I won't, if you prefer it," answered the man, though with every token of civility and respect. "If this young Mr. Lydney behaved himself ill under my notice, it would be a different thing."

Lord Dane regarded Ravensbird with a haughty stare. The man met it equally.

"I fancy you cannot understand, Ravensbird. He has come here to engage in bad practices, therefore he must be hunted out of Dunsheuld. The police might do it for him, and save trouble, but he seems to take precious good care not to give tangible grounds for his removal, and he must be got out of the place."

"All well and good, my lord, if it can be done; but I am not going to join in getting him out."

"Do you remember a certain clause in your lease, which I caused Apperly to insert, when you entered upon this house?" demanded Lord Dane. "It was to the effect that, should circumstances induce me to re-take the house upon my hands, you must give up possession, and quit at my pleasure."

"By your lordship's giving me six weeks' notice," interposed Ravensbird.

"Good. If you are to fly in the teeth of my requests in this manner—and it is the first, I believe, that I have made to you—you stand a chance of getting that clause acted upon, Mr. Ravensbird."

"As your lordship's pleases, of course," was the sturdy answer, while Ravensbird looked full in the face of the peer. "I should be sorry to leave the house, for it suits me, and I earn a living; still, there are other tenants to be had in Dunsheuld. Perhaps your lordship will give it some reflection, before you compel me to quit this."

Marked independence, nay, more, marked meaning, was in his tone. Lord Dane passed from the subject to another.

"You have heard of this outrage in my words last night?"

"As all Dan-sheld has, my lord."

"What do you personally know of it?"

"Not anything," said Ravensbird. "What should I?"

"Ravensbird," proceeded Lord Dane, bending his head forward, and speaking in an undertone, "I could bring the officers of justice into this house now, and give you into custody, upon suspicion of having been concerned in it."

"Because I harbor Lydney—it is your lordship's expression—and you suspect him of being connected with the poachers?" asked Ravensbird, with some freedom.

"No."

The two stood gazing at each other—for

Lord Dane had risen, and now faced his tenant. It was his lordship who broke the silence.

"Last evening—it must have been near ten o'clock, not very long before the affray took place—I saw you in the wood, with one of the worst of the men. Ben Beecher. Hand in glove with him, pacing the thicket with him, your hand upon his shoulder? I saw you myself, Ravensbird."

"I was there with him," quietly replied Ravensbird.

"It is a cool assertion."

"I had a little private matter of business with Ben Beecher, and I went to the wood, hoping to find him and to transact it. I did find him, and with him the best part of half an hour, and then I left him and came back home. That's the simple truth, and the whole truth, my lord. Had I known there was likely to be a fight in the wood, I should have chosen last night to go there. I take part in a poacher's conflict! You know better than that Lord Dane."

"Yet you have been accused of a worse offence in your day," cried his lordship.

A strangely significant smile played over the lips of Ravensbird. He raised his eyes full on Lord Dane. "I may be publicly cleared of that suspicion yet, my lord, by the real offender being brought to light. I have reason to think I shall be."

"What reason?" inquired Lord Dane.

"A belief in the divine laws of retribution and of justice."

"Can you tell me the nature of your business with Ben Beecher?"

"I have said that it was private, my lord."

Lord Dane took up his hat. "It seems that I have met with little satisfaction in coming here this morning. Considering that you were once a servant in my family, Ravensbird. I have an idea that it might behoove you to treat my wishes with more compliance."

A tinge of color flashed into Ravensbird's dark face. "I was servant to the Honorable Captain Dane; I was not servant to Mr. Herbert." Lord Dane put his hat on his head and walked out, Ravensbird attending him to the door.

"By the way," cried his lordship, wheeling around, "is that other man gone? I mean the old passenger, who was likewise saved and brought here," he added, seeing that Ravensbird looked puzzled.

"He is not gone, my lord; he has not found himself well enough to go. But he is getting better now."

"Does he not go out?"

"He has never once been out of his room, let alone the house, your lordship. He's waiting for remittances, he says."

"Ah! mind you don't feed him all this while, and then not get paid. How quiet he must keep himself! I never hear it mentioned that there's such a person in the place. What does he do all day?"

"Sits and coughs, and reads the newspapers."

"What's his name?"

"When he first arrived Sophie asked it, and he answered that it was no business of hers. But I saw his medicine can in directed to 'Mr. Home.' He was so ill at first, we were obliged to call in Dr. Green."

"Home? Home?" debated his lordship; "don't know the name."

He marched up the street, and Ravensbird turned in doors again. Certainly the man behaved more cavalierly to Lord Dane than any other of his dependants would have presumed to venture upon. The wonder was that his lordship put up with it.

It was growing dark that same evening—that is, it may have been near upon five o'clock—when three men met under cover of the thick wood. Later, with last night's remembrance upon them, they would not have dared to be there; a few days must elapse, ere they grew bold again. They deemed themselves alone; but, trailing flat with his belly on the ground, serpent that he was, lay young 'Sard, listening—not to plans for another battle on the pheasants, but to as nefarious a scheme of housebreaking as was ever concocted. Shad had not yet been promoted to assist at great crimes; and his hair rose up on end, as he listened. What, with his personal fear (for Shad fully believed that if any untoward accident betrayed his proximity, he should be riddled through with bullets), and what with the low tone the two men conversed in, Shad obtained but a partial hearing of the plot. The chief part that he made out was, that Dane Castle was to be broken into, and the plate bagged.

Waiting till the men dispersed—for he did not dare to move until they were gone—Shad rose up, and tore along at the top of his speed till he gained the spot where he was in the habit of waiting for Tiffle. But no Tiffle was there. She probably had been, and was gone. For it was near eight o'clock. Shad, with all his cunning was at fault; he dared not approach Mr. Lester's, which Tiffle had always strictly forbidden, but his tongue was burning to be delivered of its secret. He stole across the intervening space, and gave a timid knock at the kitchen-door.

"If you please, m'ama, can I speak a word to Mrs. Tiffle?" cried he, as a kitchen-maid answered it.

The girl went to the housekeeper's room, where Tiffle was.

"Mrs. Tiffle's wanted," cried she. "It's Granny Bean's Shad."

An unwelcome announcement in the presence of her fellow-servants, and Tiffle jumped up.

"Granny Bean's Shad!" uttered she, in a paroxysm of amazement. "He can't want me; it must be a mistake."

She flounced through the back passages of the house to its outside, and there, sure enough, stood Shad. Her first impulse was to treat him to a good shaking.

"Don't you ood upon me, then, till you've heard!" whined Shad. "I shouldn't a come a-nigh, but you warn't at the place. I've been a bearing murder, and it made my bones want to listen."

"Hearing murder!" ejaculated Tiffle.

"They're a-going to break into the castle," resumed the boy, "murder Lord Dane, and for the plate. I heard 'em say as there was hundreds of ounces kept in the big chest, and they'd bag it all, while 'tother was a-doing the business."

To give Tiffle her due, her badly disposed mind was more intent upon working petty ills and aggravations to her species, than great crimes. Murder, certainly, bore as much horror for her as it does for most people, and she clasped hold of young Shad in affright, and bade him speak intelligibly, and relate all he knew.

"It were them three, Drake, and Ben Beecher, and Bill Nicholson, and Ben Nick's brother," said Shad, "and I've been a-lying ever since dark a-listening to 'em, with my nose to the frosty ground, and afraid to draw a breath. I couldn't make out all they said, but I made out enough; and they be a-going in for the castle plate and to murder Lord Dane."

"Did you hear them plan his murder?"

"No, but look you here," said Shad, who did not want for brains, though it was convenient to let it appear to the world in general that his head ran short of them. They talked about the plate; and so hear of it was good to make your mouth water, spoons, and

walters, and teapots, and things; but 'tain't the plate as they're a-going in for; I heard that out that much. They said, while the business was a-going, two or three of 'em could go and ride the plate-chest, and no-body be none the wiser. And I says to myself as I listened, what is the business, if it's not the robbing the plate-chest? It must be to murder his lordship's conclusion for Shad to arrive at Tiffle arrived at the same.

"How many more was to be in it, beside them three?" asked she.

"I don't know. They said two or three of 'em ud fork the plate while the business was a-going done, so there'll be more in it nor them. I heard 'em speak of Lydney once, and then the rest said, 'Hush!' and after that they called him 'L.' I'd lay that white doe rabbit of mine, what's at granny's, as he is to be in it."

Tiffle's eyes sparkled at the information, but before she could reply, one of the footmen, who had been out on some private matter of his own, came up to the back-door.

"What is it you, Mrs. Tiffle, out here? why, you'll catch cold. And young Shad, as I'm alive!"

"Come to beg a drop of my liniment for Granny Bean's rheumitix," responded Tiffle to the servant.

"The last time I gave her some of it cured her in no time; her back's almost double tonight, he says. Here, Shad, give me the bottle, and I'll bring it out to ye."

"A-groaning with it awful, granny was," whined Shad, quickly taking his cue; "and please, m'ama, I haven't got no bottle. I come cutting along last feeling for granny, and fell over a stone and broke it."

"What a careless boy you must be!" returned Tiffle; "I suppose I must find one. Wait there."

She followed the footman in-doors; but only to return and finish her conversation with Shad. The boy dismissed, she prepared to go out herself. Lady Adelaide, with Mr. Lester, was dining abroad, so she had no leave to ask.

Her proposed visit was to Lord Dane. Apart from Tiffle's shock and the contemplated murder in itself, it put a stop (should it be carried into effect) to certain ambitious visions which Tiffle had recently, and more especially that day, been indulging a hope might grow into realities. Tiffle had cast her covetous eyes on the castle, hoping to slip in as its housekeeper, either through favor of Miss Lester, should she become Lady Dane, or through the favor of Lord Dane himself, did he remain a bachelor. Of course, were the thread of his lordship's life to be severed by any such summary process, Tiffle's visions must fade into air.

Lord Dane was seated alone in his dining-room—the great dining-room that the reader has seen before.

Miss Dane had retired, but he sat yet over his wine. The rays of the chandelier fell on the glittering table, on its beautiful service of sparkling crystal. Bruff entered.

"My lord, a person is asking to see you. It's Lady Adelaide Lester's maid."

"To see me?" returned his lordship.

"What, Tiffle?"

"Yes, my lord. I told her your lordship was at dinner, but she wished me to bring word that she had come for something important."

A message from Lady Adelaide, possibly, carelessly remarked Lord Dane. "Let her come in."

Tiffle appeared. Lord Dane had turned his chair to the fire, and she advanced and stood near him. Bruff departed and shut the door.

"Oh, my lord! the most wicked plot!" she began, throwing her bonnet back in her flurry, and putting out her hands. "The castle's going to be rifled, and your lordship murdered promiscuously in your bed."

"What?" uttered Lord Dane, wondering whether Tiffle had turned crazy, and evincing a very powerful inclination to laugh. "You can sit down, Tiffle; you seem little excited."

"My lord, it may sound like a ridiculous, but it's gospel truth," returned Tiffle, taking the chair offered her. "Them three men have been a plotting of it in the wood—Bill Nicholson, and Drake, and Ben Beecher; and one overheard 'em as is sure and safe, and he come and imparted of it to me. Lydney is to be with them, it's pretty apparent; and his name was mentioned several times, but they said 'hush!' and spoke of hiding the plate-chest while the business was done—the business object that they break in for, my lord—and that you may be sure, is no other than the murder of you."

Lord Dane, uncertain still whether there might be anything in the tale, or whether Tiffle really had lost her senses, made her go over the whole of it circumstantially. It comprised all she had heard, and some she had not heard, for Tiffle's news, like many other persons, was sure to increase in the telling; she repeated it all.

"Was it you who heard this fine plot?"

"Me, my lord! As if I should be prowling in the wood at night, a-hazarding of my reputation!"

"Oh, of course not," said Lord Dane, with a cough. "Who was it then?"

"I couldn't impart that to your lordship?"

"Then you had better not have imparted the tale. I suppose it was some—some—his lordship was rather at a loss for a word—'a-beau of yours.'"

"Indeed, then, no!" was Tiffle's nettled rejoinder. "I've had enough of them sort of vanities, and had rather keep 'em at arm's distance."

"Well, as it appears that something may be in it; at any rate there's sufficient doubt to induce some sort of preparation against the possibility—"

"Some sort of preparation?" interrupted the alarmed Tiffle. "Preparation against it must be made, my lord, or you'll have the catastrophe for certain."

"Just so!" said Lord Dane. "Therefore it is necessary that all points bearing upon it should be imparted to me. Tell me, in private, who this bearer was, and he shall come to no harm, nor you either. Otherwise, I must call in the aid of the police, and you must be publicly examined to-morrow before Squire Lester."

This would not have suited Tiffle at all; quite the contrary. Yet she was awake to the common-sense view of Lord Dane's argument; and to the necessity of his knowing all.

"It's not that he could come to harm, my lord, or that I have any motive to conceal it, such as you might fancy," she resumed. "But the one that heard it is useful to me; he looks about for me, unsuspected, and brings me news; and if it was once known he did so, there'd be good-hya to it—for folks would be on their guard, not to speak before him. I'd tell your lordship, if you'd let it be quite private from everybody else; indeed, you might see him for yourself!"

"Agreed," said Lord Dane.

"It was Granny Bean's Shad."

"Granny Bean's Shad?" he uttered, looking at her. "Why, every word word spoken by that boy is a barefaced lie."

Tiffle bent her face close to Lord Dane's; he had never seen it so earnest, so little saving of deceit.

"That Shad will tell you the truth in this my lord; I'll answer for it with my own life. He has less faults than folks think for, and he doesn't play the fool with me."

"I'll see him," said Lord Dane, as "Tiffle rose to withdraw. "When do you say the attack is to be made?"

"Not for three nights for certain; and then gone was named. They were waiting for something; though Shad could not make out for what, unless it is for the moon to go. Another thing, he only 'half' heard; those ruins were mentioned. He thought perhaps they were going to meet in them, and plot further."

"What ruins?" quickly asked Lord Dane.

"The chapel ruins opposite," replied Tiffle, extending her hand in the direction. "They may be there now, at this very moment, for all we know."

"Tiffle," called out his lordship, as she was slipping from the room with her usual stealthy step, "not a word of this abroad, remember. And caution that Shad."

"He's safe, my lord; and you may rely upon it, I don't eject another syllable from my lips. It's in your lordship's hands now, and out of mine."

Lord Dane remained in a reverie after her departure, and then strolled out of the castle. That an attack was being contemplated he entertained no manner of doubt, though he did not take precisely the same view of it that Mr. Shad and Tiffle had adopted. He felt surprised; for, loose in character as the three men mentioned had hitherto been regarded, taking their full delight in poaching, smuggling, and similar adventures of a venal nature, and what are looked upon by many as venal, they had never attempted great crimes, and Lord Dane felt convinced that some master head-piece was urging them on.

He stood outside the castle gates, still thinking, taking little notice of a female form approaching from the direction of Dunsheuld. But the female came close up to him, and compelled his attention; he recognized the cloak and bonnet of Tiffle.

"Back again?" cried Lord Dane.

"I have obtained a little more evidence, my lord," were Tiffle's rejoinder, "and thought you'd blame me if I didn't return with it. When I came the first time, I sent young Shad with a lantern to search the place where them smugglers had been, thinking it not impossible that they might have left some token behind 'em; for when folks hold a meeting in the dark, and things slip from their pockets or their hands, they're difficult to be picked up again. Shad was back before I was, and he brought this."

She held out a scrap of paper to Lord Dane, and he examined it by the light of the lamp which illuminated the gateway, paying Tiffle the compliment, as he took it from her, that she would have been a first-rate detective.

It proved to be part of a note, and Lord Dane read the following words:

"Impossible to join you to-night, but to-morrow you may expect me without fail."  
 W. L.

It appeared to have been written hastily on a long narrow bit of paper, and then twisted up. The direction, if there had been any, had gone with the first part of the contents.

"Now, I can take my Bible affidavit that that writing is Lydney's," cried Tiffle, when Lord Dane had looked at it. "I have seen his handwriting at our house upon pieces of music, and I saw a note of his to Miss Lester. 'Twas only a line or two about a book, but it was that very self-same hand-writing, and I'll stand to it, my lord, with the very same autograph at the end of it. 'W. L.' which is the short for his name, William Lydney."

"Where did Shad find this?"

"Close upon the very spot where they'd been a plotting."

"Why did you not bring Shad up, as you dropped upon him?"

"Shad'll come to-morrow morning and ask for you, my lord, as you ordered. 'Twasn't likely I was going to bring him to the castle myself, and set your detainers a wondering and talking," was the reply of Tiffle.

She took her final departure, and Lord Dane, after consigning the paper to his pocket-book, fell into another reverie. That Lydney was an out-and-out villain he was beginning to believe, and his angry eye flashed at the thought he had been admitted to the intimacy—perhaps gained the love—of Maria Lester. Before him stretched out the sea, broad and wide, not that he could see much of it from where he stood; on his right were the lights of Dunsheuld; and on his left the chapel-ruins. The moon was high in the sky, and flickered her light upon those picturesque ruins as she had done many a time before—upon the green walls, the several apertures. Lord Dane turned his eyes toward them.

Singular to say, he had never once been inside those ruins since his return from abroad, in fact, since his accession to the title; nay it may be said since the period of his romantic love for the Lady Adelaide. Many times had he passed them since then, walked around them, stood near them, but it happened that either by design or accident, he had not gone inside. He bent his steps thither now, his mind full of Tiffle's surmise; the plotters might be there at that moment for aught he knew.

Lord Dane crossed the green sward crisp with frost, crossed it stealthily as he had ever stole to his appointments with Adelaide Errol; for it was not his intention to pounce upon or to surprise the men, but to listen to them. He had his own reasons for suffering the plot to go on to the very hour appointed for its execution. Once inside, he halted, looked about and kept his ears open. Nothing appeared to have changed; there were the faint remains of the altar, the traces of the graves, the ghostly-looking windows and the moss-covered stones; all looked as it had looked in those years long gone by.

It appeared to be entirely void of human life; if any plotters were there, they remained still and silent; and that none were there, speedily became apparent to Lord Dane, as he paced about it. His thoughts began to revert to the past, and soon growing oblivious to the present, to the lapse of years, to annoying plots, and to Maria Lester, the past was naturally reverted to the tragic accident, which had cost the life of Henry Dane; almost on the very site where he then stood.

The latter was not a pleasant subject to indulge in with the ghostly-looking ruins around, the grave-stones beneath, and the pale white moonlight above; and Lord Dane middle-aged man though he was getting, British peer though he was, began to find that he was not totally exempt from the sport of superstitious fancies. He turned from the altar where he had been standing, to make the best of his way out, when at that moment a form rose up in the window aperture nearest to him, and remained silent, watching him, it seemed, in the moonlight. A half-smothered cry broke from Lord Dane's lips, his hair stood on end, and his flesh crept.

Yes they did, lowering to him as you may deem the assertion. It is true that Lord Dane had been thinking of his cousin; and imagination, especially superstitious imagination, plays curious tricks. As he stared at that figure in the aperture, its extraordinary resemblance in form to the dead man, struck upon him; he strode to the window, separated only by the wall, and stood face to face—face to face with him who was once Harry Dane. The once-familiar features stood out pale and clear in the moonlight, far too clear for Lord Dane not to recognize them. It was then he uttered the smothered cry, and his hair bristled up from his brow.

He fell back involuntarily. He leaned against the decayed wall to recover himself. He remembered who and what he was, a man and an Englishman; shook himself, stepped to the entrance and passed out at it. That he had seen his cousin's spirit—a ghost, as it is familiarly called—was his undoubted conviction, little as he had hitherto believed in ghosts, given to ridicule the nauced seers of them, as he had been.

It had vanished. Nothing was to be seen outside. Lord Dane strode around the exterior of the ruins, but the ghost was gone, leaving no trace behind.

No trace, save in the physical disturbance of Lord Dane. Again the superstitious feeling came creeping over him, the dread that the dead was hovering near; and he positively started full pace to the castle, quickly, and perhaps as conscious of terror, as Lady Adelaide had run shrieking, that eventful night. Bruff was standing in the gateway as his lord entered, and turned in amazement to look at him; for in the starting eyes, the panting lips, and the livid features, the man could scarcely recognize those of Lord Dane.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TELEGRAPHIC despatch went up to London in the course of the following day. It was sent by Lord Dane, and received by the head police-office in Scotland Yard. On the morning after Bruff informed Lord Dane that a gentleman, a stranger, was at the castle asking to see him.

As the reader may surmise, it was one of the chief detectives, come down in obedience to the demand of Lord Dane. He bore about him no outward signs of his profession; was in plain clothes, and a free-speaking, agreeable man—one who had received a liberal education, and was well read. His name was Blair. Miss Dane, meeting him in the corridor, scanned him with her critical eyes—critical when single gentlemen were in the way—and inquired privately of her brother who he was, and whether he was married. To the latter question, Lord Dane, at hazard, answered "Yes," to the former, he carelessly said something about "banking firm," "private affairs," "money matters." Miss Dane, who was a great gossip, forthwith favored the household with the information that Mr. Blair was one of his lordship's town-bankers, come down on money business. And thence the news penetrated to Dunsheuld. He remained on a visit at the castle.

After breakfast, which Lord Dane partook of with him in the library, came the conference. Mr. Blair was put in possession of the facts already known to the reader—of the shipwreck of Lydney's being saved from it, of the recovery of the box, and then its loss of Lydney's suspicious association with the poachers, his frequenting the wood, of his having been seen in it, or close to it, at the hour of the late conflict with the keepers; of his having wormed himself into the confidence of the neighboring families, especially of Squire Lester's, and his supposed covert designs on Miss Lester and her fortune, and lastly, came this projected attack on the castle, to which Master Shad had been a listener, and of which Lydney was no doubt prime mover. Lord Dane threw open the whole budget.

Mr. Blair listened in silence.

"When is the supposed attack to take place?" was the first question he put.

"Better be prepared from to-night, inclusively. The boy said not quite immediately."

"And—if I gather your lordship's wishes rightly—you would prefer the attack not to be prevented; but that the light-fingered gentry should be caught in the act?"

"Precisely so. The neighborhood shall be rid of this pest Lydney; therefore it shall go on to the attack. I am sorry for the other man, and would have spared them if I could, but there's no help for it, and they must share the penalty. They have been too fond of helping themselves to hares and pheasants, and of setting my keepers at defiance, also of doing a little private business in the smuggling line; but they would no more have ventured to plan such a feat as this, than I should. Lydney has drawn them into it."

"I scarcely follow your lordship yet," said Mr. Blair. "By this lad's account—Shad, or whatever you call him—robbery appeared to be a secondary consideration; the clearing of the plate-chest is to be effected while the real object, 'the business,' is transacting, and this business a murderous assault on your lordship. How have you incurred Lydney's ill-will, that he should plan so diabolical a crime?"

"I have given you Shad's version—I should rather say the conclusion he jumped to," returned Lord Dane, "but I have not yet given you mine. I do not believe that any assault upon myself is contemplated. I believe they would be only too happy that I should sleep undisturbed, through the proceedings, and wake up to find themselves and the plate safely off."

"But you have said the plate is not the principal object," again pursued Mr. Blair.

"Neither is it," returned Lord Dane. "I believe that Lydney's chief object is to search for this box. From the first, he has insolently and rudely accused me of detaching it in the castle; accused me both to my face and behind my back. Now, I think it will turn out that the box is the prime motive-mover, and that he has persuaded these poor fellows to join in the attack by promising them a share in the plate—body for their pains."

"Where is the box?"

"I cannot say."

"Did it enter the castle?"

"Have I not explained that the things were all placed in my strong room and secured; and that when they were visited—on the same day, and by Lydney himself—the box in question was not among them? The two men who carried in the things could not remember that particular box; my butler, who was looking on failed to observe it; in short, the only pair of eyes which professed to witness its actual entry, belonged to this young reptile, Shad; and he's the deuce of a good fellow for telling lies, if it suits his purpose."

"Had he a purpose?"

"He was standing by, watching the unloading of the cart. Lydney afterward heard of this, and offered him sixpence if he could tell where the box went to. Shad said into the castle—having the attractions of the site before his sight. The general opinion was, that the box was stolen from the castle's progress to the castle. For my own revival, faction's sake, and in justice to my revival, I had the castle at once searched by the police; but no box was found."

"And did Lydney know of this?"