

swore I'd ha' the life of the first as touched me. They all closed in, and I hit out at the highest. He fell back in his blood, Rachel, a'most w'out a groan. I were just stunned. I'd scarce had time to feel angry even, and they did their worst w' me, and took me away bound, saying they'd gi'e me up for a murderer and I wouldn't walk w' um, and put me aboard a king's ship. They didn't care how they got men then in war-time. I'd no heart to write home, thinking o' nights o' that horrid pool, when they should afind the body. I must be going. Good-bye, dearie; shake hands—you'll wish me well, Rachel?"

"God bless ye and keep ye straight, Ralph, said she, tearfully. 'You've made a poor hand o' life—you'll do better naw?' she went on, laying her hand on his arm, anxiously."

He looked wistfully into her eyes, but at that moment Maurice's whistle was heard, and he was off like a shot.

"Yon's a bad un," said Maurice, moodily, as he caught sight of his retreating enemy.

"Poor fellow," said Rachel, "after all he haven't adone as much hurt, so we've acome together at last. 'Twere like silver tried in the fire, were our love, dearie. Please God, past troubles is like the dead leaves as falls off of a tree and nourishes it again; and she turned his face towards her, and held it till the cloud cleared away; and he smiled fondly at her as she told Ralph's story.

"Well thou wert worth serving long years for, like Jacob," he said at last, as he took her in his arms; "but I'm thankful I shan't never see un again, or I should do un a mischief yet!"

### DREAM-HAUNTED.

I HAD just come back from India with my family, after living there for several years; and my first occupation, after discussing my first breakfast in town, was to run carefully through the *Times* supplement, and pick out whatever advertisements had reference to country residences for sale or occupation. The advertisement which took my fancy more than any other, was one relating to a house named "Gledhills," situate in one of the Midland shires, and in the heart of a good hunting country. Next day, I ran down by train to have a look at the place. I found it to be a roomy redbrick mansion, dating from the reign of the second George, and built after the mean and formal style of a period remarkable for its poverty of invention in other things besides architecture. It was, however, tolerably spacious within doors, and in excellent repair; moreover, as it stood within a small demesne of its own, and had a capital walled garden, with good stables and other offices, I thought that it would suit me very well for a few years to come; and I decided to inquire more fully respecting the terms of occupation, for the house was only to be let on lease, not sold. By the ancient man-servant who shewed me over the place, I was referred to a certain Mr. Lomond, an inhabitant of the neighbouring town, whom I naturally set down in my own mind as the agent for a non-resident landlord.

The town was only a mile and a half away, and to every man, woman, and child in it, the name of Mr. Lomond seemed familiar. I was directed to a pretty little cottage in the outskirts, half-covered with honeysuckle and clematis; and just as I was about to knock at the door, Mr. Lomond himself came up, equipped with rod and basket, and having the hearty sunburnt look of a genuine fisherman. "No common house-agent this, but a thorough gentleman," I said to myself.

After a few words of introduction, I stated the business that had brought me so far from home. "I hope you find the old place to your liking?" said Mr. Lomond. "Of course," he went on to say, "many of my country friends deprecate the letting of Gledhills at all, and urge upon me the propriety of living there myself. But what would you have? My income, thanks to the roguery of a person who shall be nameless, is far too limited to allow of my keeping up the old place as it was kept up by my father and grandfather, and by a dozen Lomonds before them. I could neither

afford to visit nor to receive company, as the Lomonds of Gledhills have been used to do; and being a bachelor, and a poor man withal, it seems to me a more sensible plan to make a home for myself in this little cottage, which is my own property, and trusting to my gun and rod for sport and exercise, leave some one with a longer purse than mine to enjoy the grandeur of the big house, and pay for the privilege in the shape of a welcome addition to my income."

I told him frankly, that from what I had seen of the house, I thought it would suit me very well; and then we entered upon the question of terms, which I found to be sufficiently reasonable; accordingly, I expressed my desire to have the preliminary arrangements concluded as quickly as possible, in order that I might be enabled to remove my family, and take possession of the house at an early date.

"You are not a bachelor, then, like myself?" said Mr. Lomond, with an inquiring smile.

"I have been a Benedict these dozen years," I replied; "and as my wife's health is somewhat delicate, and as the air of London does not suit her, I am anxious to get her down into the country as soon as possible."

Mr. Lomond did not answer for a moment or two, but drummed absently on the table with his fingers, and was evidently revolving some knotty point in his own mind. "Before this matter is finally settled between us," he said at last, "there is one little favour that I must ask you to do for me: a very slight favour indeed."

"You have but to name it, Mr. Lomond," said I.

"Don't go back home till to-morrow," he said earnestly. "Sleep to-night at Gledhills. Dobson and his wife, who have charge of the house, will find you a tolerable dinner, and make you up a comfortable bed. I will walk over in the morning and see you; and then, if you are still in the same mind that you are in now, I will have the agreement drawn up at once, and you can enter upon your occupancy the following day."

"But my family will expect me home this evening," I said; "besides which, I cannot see in what way my sleeping a single night at Gledhills can affect my determination to become its tenant."

"You can telegraph to your family that you will not be home till to-morrow," said Mr. Lomond; "and as for the other point of your objection, all I can say is, that I have my reasons for wishing you to do as I ask you: my desire is based on no mere whim, and to-morrow I will tell you what those reasons are."

After some further conversation, I agreed to accede to Mr. Lomond's wish, which had an element of singularity about it that interested me in spite of myself. It was accordingly arranged that he should at once send off a special messenger to have dinner and a bed got ready for me at Gledhills, while I rambled about the town for an hour, and visited the ruins of the old abbey. Ten o'clock the following morning was named for our next meeting.

The autumn day was drawing to a close when I found myself walking up the avenue towards the old mansion. The same old man whom I had seen before answered my summons at the door. He bowed respectfully at sight of me, and informed me that Mr. Lomond had sent word that I was about to dine and sleep at Gledhills, and that everything was prepared for my reception. As I crossed the threshold, the great door closed behind me with a dull, heavy crash, that vibrated through every corner of the house, and awoke a foreboding echo in my heart. Preceded by my ancient guide, whom age and rheumatism had bent almost double, I crossed the desolate-looking entrance-hall, passed up the grand staircase, and so through a pair of folding-doors into the drawing-room, beyond which was a suite of smaller rooms, of which two had now been set apart for my service. How chill and cheerless everything looked in the cold light of the dying day! Now that the glamour of sunshine rested no longer on the place, my fancy refused to invest any of those bare, desolate rooms with the pleasant attributes of home; and already, in my secret mind, I half repented my facile eagerness in being so willing to accept without further

experience this worm-eaten old mansion, tenanted, doubtless, by the ghosts of a hundred dead-and-gone folks, as a shelter for my household gods, a home for all that I held dear on earth.

The two rooms set aside for me I found to be comfortably furnished, in a neat but inexpensive style; but when I understood from the old man that ever since the death of the last tenant, three years before, they had been furnished and set aside, ready for the reception of any chance visitors, like myself, who either by their own wish, or that of Mr. Lomond, might decide to pass a night at Gledhills, and that three or four would-be occupants before me had so slept there a night each, and had gone on their several ways next morning, never to be seen under that roof again, I began to think that there might perhaps be something more in Mr. Lomond's stipulation than was visible on the surface.

Having dined, and done ample justice to Mr. Lomond's claret, and being possessed in some measure by the demon of unrest, I took my cigar, and strolled along the corridor, and so came presently into the great empty drawing-room, in which the moonbeams were now playing a ghostly game of hide-and-seek. It was uncarpeted, and destitute of furniture, and its oaken floor creaked and groaned beneath my tread, as though it were burdened with some dreadful secret which it would fain reveal, but could not. Outside each of the three long, narrow windows with which the room was lighted, was a small balcony, below which stretched a velvety expanse of lawn, set here and there with a gay basket of flowers, the whole being shut in by a stump of sombre firs. I have said that the room was destitute of furniture, but I found after a time that it still contained one relic of its more prosperous days, in the shape of a family portrait, which still hung over the mantelpiece, as it had hung for half a century or more. When I became aware of this fact, I fetched one of the candles out of my sitting-room, in order that I might examine the picture more closely. It was a full-length portrait of a man in the military costume that was in vogue towards the end of last century. The face was very handsome, with a proud, resolute beauty of its own, that would have been very attractive but for a vague, repellent something—a hint of something tiger-like and cruel lurking under the surface of that artificial smile, which the artist had caught with rare fidelity, and had fixed on the canvas for ever. It must have been something in the better traits of the countenance that taught me to see a likeness to my pleasant piscatorial friend, Mr. Lomond; and I could only conclude that the portrait before me was that of some notable ancestor of the present master of Gledhills.

The fatigues of the day, and the solitude to which I was condemned, drove me to bed at an early hour; but there was something about the novelty of my position that precluded sleep for a long time after I had put out my light, and I remember hearing some clock strike twelve, while I was still desperately wide awake; but that is the last thing I do remember; and I suppose that I must have slid off to sleep a few minutes later, while still in the act of asseverating to myself that to sleep there was for me an impossibility. Whether I had slept for hours or for minutes only, when I woke up in the weird land of dreams, is a point on which I can offer no opinion. I awoke to that consciousness which is possessed by dreamers, and which, in many cases, is quite as vivid as the consciousness of real life; but throughout the strange wild drama that followed, I was without any individuality of my own; I had all the consciousness of a spectator, without the responsibility of one. I was nothing; I had no existence in my own dream; I was merely the witness of certain imaginary occurrences, which took place without any reference to me, and which I was powerless to prevent or influence in the slightest degree.

Before me was the drawing-room at Gledhills—I recognised it at once by the portrait of the soldier over the fireplace. The walls, painted of a delicate sea-green, were hung with numerous pictures and engravings in rich frames. A thick Aubusson carpet covered the floor; and in the