

and Miss Artslade, who came over from Ashenfield to see me, kept me talking. You don't look well to-day."

"Nonsense, child I never do look well."

Rose knew that any further questions would only provoke him, and hurried into the apartment used by them for the common purposes of sitting room and kitchen, where she was not long in making preparations for breakfast.

The old man toddled in painfully after her and threw himself without a word in his great arm-chair within a few feet of the fire (for, though it was in the height of summer, his limbs shivered with cold). It was a gloomy place, such as his sympathies leaned to. A dark and faded tapestry screened the blank and grimy walls from view. The sunlight barely crept through two ancient embrasures that served for windows. The uncertain glare of the fire sometimes dimmed the daylight altogether. The grotesque carvings over the chimney-place were darkened and defaced by age. The furniture, too, which was chiefly improvised from such articles as were for generations abandoned to decay by the owners of the Castle, was of a sombre cast that did no violence to the prevalent gloom. The only thing out of place seemed to be the bright creature who was its goddess (or, shall we say, its victim?) Light florid in gloom; life in death.

Old Richard tossed and groaned painfully in his arm-chair while Rose, like a good fairy, flitted about the little breakfast-table and soon set it out with enticing fare. A cup of fragrant hot coffee and some well browned slices of buttered toast (Rose's special manufacture) sweetened by the tender little offices woman's love alone can imagine, speedily dissolved his crusty humour. A look of tenderness came into his face, and sat there so well—illuminating, softening, shining with a pale light, but still shining—that tenderness must have made it a favourite dwelling long ago, before years, thought and sickness wrought on it their woful patterns.

He looked at her fixedly for a few moments, as she busied herself with an angel's devices for his comfort,—now cheating him into an over allowance of coffee, now couching the leg in which paralysis lurked on a soft restment of footstool and pillows.

"Rose," he said at last, "come here."

She knelt beside him, and stroking her dark silken tresses, he said:

"Rose, I spoke harshly to you just now—"

"Dear father, I know you did not mean it harshly."

"I did not, child, indeed I did not. I know I am very cross and unreasonable, but I suffer a great deal. To-day I was in a worse temper than usual."

"Perhaps you did not sleep well last night?"

"I never do sleep well."

"Ah! father, if you would only go about more in the air—it is so mild and delicious now—you would soon be all right again."

Old Richard shook his head mournfully.

"The air would only make my pains the worse," said he. "But it was not they disturbed me so much last night."

Rose started.

"You did not see anything last night?" she asked, eagerly, "anything in the western tower?"

Her father looked at her half-sternly, half in bewilderment.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because," said Rose with a shudder—"I suppose it was fancy, but I thought—I am almost sure—I saw a red light last night in the western tower, and I even fancied," and she shuddered again—"I even fancied I saw something like the shadow of a man crossing the courtyard."

"Pooh! child, that comes of your walking late at night on those lonely battlements. There are no ghosts outside our own imaginations."

"Then you did not see the light or the man's shadow?"

"Of course not. But I had a terrible dream."

It was now his turn to shudder. Beads of cold perspiration stood on his forehead.

"A dream!" said Rose, "surely if you don't mind ghosts, that could not have troubled you."

"It did deeply," said the old man, bending down as if absorbed in unpleasant reflections; and with good reason," he added, speaking aloud as it were involuntarily.

Rose waited in silence till he spoke again.

"Yes," he cried, suddenly, as if his resolution was taken. "It was an evil dream. I dreamed I was entrusted with a secret—a secret of vital interest to one as dear to me as even you are, Rose—with an injunction to reveal it at the proper time. When that time came, I thought I selfishly kept the secret, wronging this dear one deeply, lest I should lose a treasure by the revelation. I was always fixed upon disclosing it, but I thought I kept putting it off, putting it off till one day I found myself on my death