

RETURNED FROM THE GRAVE

"What in the world is the matter with you all?" exclaimed Mr. Lester, above the confusion...

"To Wilfred Lester's" involuntarily uttered Wilfred's father.

Lady Adelaide did hear, and looked terribly conscious and confused.

They left the hall, and were about to step into the carriage, when they encountered Miss Bordillon, who was calling at it.

"I told you that the time would soon come for you to welcome me again," smiled William, as he held out his hand.

"I never will be persuaded out of my senses again," emphatically uttered she.

Lady Adelaide had gone up to her chamber with their departure, and there sat Tiffie on a stool of ebony impatience.

"Not but what I'm grieved to have it to disclose, my lady, for it's awful iniquity," quoth she.

"His wife!" shrieked Tiffie, in her amazement.

She pointed to the door as she spoke, and Tiffie retired, cowed and thunderstruck.

"Come back from where?" cried Tiffie, "where has he been?"

"Not him at the castle; he ain't Lord Dane no more. Tother's come, him what they says fell over the cliff, but he come to life again."

CHAPTER XXXI. Never surs was such a levee seen or heard of. It had no parallel in history, ancient or modern.

It appeared that Lord Dane, with his induction to the home of his ancestors, had taken a new lease of life, so well did he appear.

ment is of benefit in some cases; perhaps it had been so to him.

The castle was thrown open at ten o'clock on the morning of the levee—a brilliant morning in winter, with a blue sky and a bright sun.

How fast the visitors flocked in, none could tell, save those who witnessed it, all pushing eagerly to welcome and do honor to Lord Dane.

"Ab, my lord," cried Mr. Wild, the surgeon, as he, too, offered his greetings to Lord Dane.

"Wild," he laughed, "I appoint you surgeon in ordinary to me from henceforth; not that I shall live to employ you long; you must get my son to fall ill after I am gone, and exercise your skill on him."

"What an idea!" laughed William. "I gave you credit for better sense, Young; or at any rate believed that you would give me credit for better."

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"Once, inside the hedge, took into it, too, by the squire's own suggestion, the plate-chest band, it was hardly in the nature of man not to help themselves," pleaded Beecher.

"Dash my memory!" I wish it never had been Dane, though. Is Squire Lester going to issue a warrant against us—does he suspect it was us?"

"Whether Squire Lester suspects or not, I cannot inform you; he does not know. Do you know what my opinion is, Beecher?"

"That the better mode of proceeding for all parties will be to do nothing; but to let the affair die out in silence. Were I Lord Dane, I should recommend that to Squire Lester with all my influence."

"Allow me to recommend you—all of you who were engaged in it—to be entirely silent. Never speak of it, even among yourselves; never let the name of Wilfred Lester, as connected with it, escape your lips."

"True, true," whispered Beecher. "Oh, sir, if you would but be merciful to us, and keep our counsel! We'd promise faithfully never to go upon your lands in return for it."

"Beecher, will you make a bargain with me? If I undertake that—through my influence, or my father's with Squire Lester—you shall never be proceeded against for this midnight crime, even should your participation in it come to Squire Lester's ears, will you promise, on your parts, to drop the disreputable lives you have hitherto been leading, eschew expeditions against game and gamekeepers, and let the Dane lands alone?"

"What slips of the tongue you do make!" merrily cried William. "I am no more a 'my lord' than I am 'Mr. Lydney'; you are dreaming of the future, I expect."

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"I had been the vigorous opening in the ruins, and I saw you meeting with her. Sir, why from upon me, in that naughty manner? I am speaking out at your request, but I can be silent if you will."

"I told me that you would be silent if you will," said William, "but I can be silent if you will."

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"Bruff, you had better apprise my lord," cried out Miss Dane.

"He went across the corridor to Lord Dane's room, and knocked at it. There was no reply. Bruff knocked again. Still there came no answer, and the man then tried the door. It was fastened. He went back to the drawing-room and beckoned out William."

"I can't get into my lord's room, and I cannot make him hear. I fear he must be ill."

"Dead," was on Bruff's tongue, remembering the precarious state of Lord Dane, but he did not utter it. William hastened to the door. The rest, who had caught sight of Bruff's alarmed countenance, followed him. William put up his finger for silence, and his ear to the door, but not a sound was heard.

"My dear father, are you ready? We are waiting for you," he said, in a clear distinct voice.

"No response. 'Do, pray, speak just one word, Lord Dane, if only to assure us you are not in a fit,' cried Miss Dane, in coaxing and trembling accents, for she was easily alarmed."

"I shall break open the door," said William, hurriedly. "Had you not better"—he looked at the ladies—"go back to the drawing-room?"

"The door was forced, and there lay Lord Dane on the bed. He was not dead, but he appeared to have fainted; feeling ill, he had probably thrown himself on the bed for a few minutes' rest."

"The night will close it, William," he said, "but I have waited for it long. Maria, taking her hand, 'you will be William's wife?'"

"Yes," she answered, through her tears. "Don't wait for months and months to elapse first, because I have just gone," he continued to them both. "Remember, it is my wish that you marry shortly; and I leave my blessing upon it. William will be here alone. Where is Adelaide?" he resumed, looking around, after a pause.

"Come close to me, Adelaide," he said, when she came in; "stand by your husband; between your husband and Wilfred. Old grim Death has come for me child; but I must say a few words to you before he penetrates quite in. Did it ever occur to you that you must sometime be where I am lying—on your death-bed?"

"There is but one thing will relieve you when you come to it—a clear conscience. I look back now on my past life, and vainly gasp forth the yearning wish that I had in many cases acted differently; though, of wilful injustices, I cannot charge my memory. It is not, however, to tell of my faded life, my sins and my atonements, that I speak; they lie between me and my merciful Father, to whom I am hastening. Adelaide, when you come to this hour, what will your conscience say to you for the manner in which you have treated Wilfred Lester?"

"My dear, you have been guilty of terrible injustice; and I think that your eyes must have had perverting scales thrown before them," pursued Lord Dane. "Wilfred is your husband's eldest son; he has an equal right to partake of his substance with your own children; but you have driven him upon the world without means or resource, that they might enjoy the more. Do you imagine that injustice such as this, can be acceptable to God? or that it will be permitted to prosper?"

"A deep silence, broken only by the sobs of Lady Adelaide.

"You must change this course of conduct, and repair the injury, if you would obtain peace at last. I speak to you, more than to Lester, because you have been the chief actor and mover. What could possibly have so set you against Wilfred Lester?"

"It was Tiffie," broke out Lady Adelaide, in her emotion. "She is always exciting me against him."

"Show Tiffie the door," returned Lord Dane, with a touch of his old fire. "I must leave you reconciled."

He took Wilfred's hand in his open palm, and looked at hers. She immediately put hers into it. Mr. Lester did the same.

"What a wealthy man he has died?" quoth the gossip.

So he had. But he had spent nothing like the whole of his income abroad. William Lydney had been fully justified in asserting that Squire Lester was entirely welcome to Maria's fourteen thousand pounds.

CHAPTER XXXII. Once more there was a large gathering of the people at Danesheld. But this time it was not of a sad nature, neither did it take place at the castle, but at the residence of Squire Lester.

Following the injunction of his father, William had not long deferred his marriage, and on a balmy day as May ever brought forth, he was united to Maria.

They had returned from church, and were now seated at the breakfast, a woody company. Lord and Lady Dane in the middle of the table; opposite them, Mr. Lester and Lady Adelaide; Wilfred sat by his sister's side, and Edith by Lord Dane. Many friends were present.

Miss Dane was present, in the most ravishing of costumes—so coquettish and airy that it was difficult to believe anybody but Sophie, with her French taste, had had a hand in it. Herbert Dane was not there. He had left to take up his residence in Paris, and there he would probably remain for a permanency.

"At the castle! How can you? You will not be wanted here. Ask William if you will."

Miss Dane rather offended, went off on the spur of the moment to find William. In a pretty little speech, all airs and graces, and Lydia-Languish looks, she proposed to remain with him as housekeeper.

"But I shall soon be bringing a housekeeper home, Cecelia," was his reply, in a laughing tone of remonstrance.

"Oh dear! then it is true? I never did put the question direct to you or Miss Lester, and could not think of paying attention to the insinuation of others. I should manage the household better than she will, being accustomed to it. I wish I could stay, William—only as a cousin, of course," simpered she, casting down her eyes and blushing cheeks.

William thought it about as direct an offer as a gentleman could well receive. He suppressed the merriment in his eye, and replied in a grave tone.

"I fear you have spoken without counting the cost. I am young; you are—young, too; what would scandal-loving Danesheld say?"

"O dear! would it, do you suppose? I never did think of that. Then I may as well accept Herbert's offer of his house."

She hastened from the room, her silk apron held before her eyes, and William burst into a fit of laughter; so prolonged and irrepressible that the sober Bruff, who just then came in, thought his young lord had suddenly gone crazy.

Miss Dane, therefore, took up her abode in the offered house, with a cordial intention that the castle would be delighted to welcome her at any and every opportunity; and here she was at the wedding. Perhaps the next best thing to being the bride, was to be one of the bridesmaids, for in that capacity did Miss Dane officiate this morning.

The breakfast had proceeded to the toast giving. The health of Lord and Lady Dane had been drunk, and William was standing, a flush on his handsome face, to return thanks, when the door slowly opened, and a tall, spare stranger, with a military air, and his sallow features bronzed, stood at it, leisurely surveying the company. The company, in their turn, surveyed him, and William paused. He seemed to strike upon their senses somewhat after the fashion of Banquo's ghost. A dead silence supervened, and not a few of the visitors began to wonder whether this could be a second Lord Dane sprung from the dead.

"Which is Edith?"

"Curious words to come from him, and the sea of faces stared in blank consternation, Edith's not a faint blank than theirs. Suddenly, there was a loud, yearning cry, and Miss Bordillon sprang toward him.