

# THE HEARTHSTONE.

## THE STORY.

I made a story long ago,  
One summer day I read it through,  
As dipping in the ocean low,  
The sun went down in gold and blue;  
Sweet winds across the water came,  
A lily face with meek brown eyes,  
Drew tender in the rosy flame,  
That burned and deepened o'er the skies.

I thought my story suited well  
The scene that evening by the sea;  
But my friend's thoughts I could not tell,  
Her face was never turned to me.  
I read the story to the end,  
I laid the book upon the sand,  
And turning lightly to my friend,  
I looked her little dainty hand.

The silken lashes drooped above  
The meek brown eyes she hid from me;  
I could not choose but tell my love,  
That evening by the dreamy sea.  
I spoke "This story I have read  
Betrays the secret of my life;  
Thou art the lady fair I said,  
My hero chose to be his wife."

"O, tell me did I write in vain,  
And have I read in vain to thee?"  
I almost long to hear again  
The answer that she made to me.  
Dear little hands I held then fast,  
And once I kissed the meek brown eyes.  
When homeward from the sun we passed,  
The sun had faded in the skies.

Max.

## THE DISCARDED WIFE.

### A Romance of the Affections.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE CHIMES."

#### CHAPTER III.—Continued.

In another moment he could hear a woman's voice speaking in low but earnest tones, although he could not distinguish the words. Then, at some yards' distance, the persons—there were two, as well as he could judge—came to a halt, and, after a few hastily-muttered words, parted.

One retreated and the other advanced. The latter was the female.

Where Percy Hardwicke sat, even had the night been less dark, it would not have been very easy for the person advancing towards him to have discovered the outline of his form.

As it was, however, the woman was close upon him before she perceived his presence. Then, with a slight scream, she started back—then hastily retreated.

Percy Hardwicke was at first surprised, afterwards curious.

By the imperfect light he fancied it must be none other than the beautiful Phoebe, whom he had seen at her father's door.

It was just about Phoebe's height and figure. If by chance it should be, what a capital opportunity for ranking her acquaintance.

When this idea occurred to the languid young man, it prompted him to quite unusual exertion.

Jumping down from the stile, he, without any further hesitation, followed in pursuit, and with such rapidity, that ere the flying damsel had got half a dozen yards away from the spot, Hardwicke's fingers encircled her wrist.

She struggled, for a moment, desperately; but finding her captor's strength was greater than hers, stood silently panting for breath and trembling with terror.

"Don't be afraid, my dear," said Hardwicke, smiling. "I would not harm you for the world. There's no occasion for such alarm."

At the sound of his voice she appeared to regard him attentively, but she wore a thick veil, which effectually concealed her face.

When first he had seized her, her fright was unmistakable; but it appeared that the chief cause of it was that she had mistaken Hardwicke for some other person.

When, however, she found that he was a stranger, her fear seemed almost entirely to abate, and in its place arose a sudden anger.

"Release me, sir!" she cried. "I do not know you!"

"We cannot too soon make each other's acquaintance, then," said the smiling gentleman.

"Release me!" she cried, in a passionate tone, again struggling to free herself. "You do not know to whom you are speaking!"

"That is exactly the knowledge I wish to obtain," he gravely replied. "I cannot think of letting you go until I have seen that pretty face of yours."

She made some low ejaculation, which sounded almost like a smothered sob, and struggled desperately.

But her assailant's strength was much greater than one would have expected in a gentleman with such languid airs.

With the greatest ease, in spite of her wild endeavours to break loose from him, he held her fast.

He placed his strong arm round her shrinking waist.

He drew her towards him, and pulling down her hands, with which she vainly endeavoured to defend herself, snatched off her veil.

It was a very handsome face that which had hitherto been concealed from him; but in its flushed cheeks and flashing eyes there were greater signs of rage than he had anticipated—a contemptuous expression, too, which somewhat astonished him.

For the first time, then, a faint suspicion occurred to him, that he had made a very great mistake.

This was no country damsel with whom he had to deal.

He had evidently insulted some lady. Probably one of the Captain's rich neighbours. In that case, he foresaw a host of unpleasant results, which a while ago he had been far from expecting.

Percy Hardwicke glanced somewhat uneasily down at the silk dress that she wore, at the valuable jewels, and the bracelets glittering upon her wrists above the neatly-fitting gloves covering her delicate little hands.

"Pardon me these piteous dark nights!" he involuntarily muttered to himself, as he gazed upon her with a rather sheepish expression; and he was upon the eve of meditating an apology, when a strong arm grasped him from behind, and ere he had time to turn, a heavy blow upon the back of his head dashed his hat over his eyes, and sent him staggering forward to a distance of several feet.

Turning and feeling his assailant as soon as he could recover himself from the effects of this unexpected attack, he found before him a short, thick-set fellow of sporting and slung appearance, as well as the darkness of the night would allow him to judge, who wore a white hat very much on one side of his head, and was smoking a cigar.

"Well, fellow," cried Hardwicke, wrathfully, "what do you want?"

"The same to you!" the stranger made answer. "Can't you leave the lady alone, when you see your company's not wanted?"

"It will not be so awfully, and at the same time he made a rush upon the other man.

But he had not calculated upon so formidable

an assailant. In another moment they had closed, and were wrestling with all their strength.

The next, and Hardwicke was swung heavily to the ground, where he lay silent and motionless, stunned by the fall.

"Good heavens!" the lady exclaimed, clasping her hands in alarm. "Have you killed him?"

"What odds?" the other replied, with a coarse laugh. "I don't care if I have."

"I hope he is not seriously hurt!" the woman faltered. "Who is he? Do you know?"

"Never saw him before that I am aware of. That's all the luck for you, too. It's to be hoped he's a stranger."

"Did you not hear me cry out?" said the woman. "If you had come a moment sooner he would not have seen my face."

"If it had not been for some over-caution the accident would never have happened!" grumbled her companion. "You were so mightily afraid I should be seen!"

"Well!"

"The consequence of which is that you have been seen yourself by goodness knows who!"

"The woman made no answer to this speech, and they slowly walked towards the stile, her companion he plied her over into the next field.

said the landlady; "but I don't like showing you into the common room, and two gentlemen from London have taken the best parlour private."

"I won't intrude upon them," answered the smiling gentleman. "Don't dream of disturbing them upon my account, I beg. The common room will do quite well enough for me."

"It's almost closing time, said the landlady, thoughtfully; "and, perhaps, I might as well turn them out."

"Pray don't turn any one out."

"I'm sure he's been there long enough."

"And hasn't given an order for the last two hours?"

"Who's that, mother?" asked the pretty Phoebe, who had come down stairs to look at the new comers, and now joined in the conversation.

"Who?" answered the landlady, pettishly; "why that fellow, Rourke, to be sure."

"What has he been doing?"

"Doing?" retorted the landlady; "what does he ever do, except loaf about and drink himself silly, I should like to know?"

"You ought not to grumble at people's drinking," said Miss Phoebe, perky.

"I don't want his custom, at any rate," retorted the landlady; "and I shall show him the door, there!"

"I hope your mother is not doing it upon my account, though," said Percy Hardwicke, with one of his most winning smiles. "Particularly if it causes you any annoyance. Say, shall I interfere in favour of our friend Mr. Rourke?"

"Do what you please," answered Miss Phoebe, slightly tossing her pretty head. "But don't think I care a penny for the fellow, for I don't."

She turned away with this, and Mr. Percy, showing his white teeth, walked after the landlady.

As he entered the room, towards which she had a minute ago bent her steps, he found her in conversation with a rough, dirty-looking fellow, apparently a blacksmith, who said angrily as he entered, "That's him, I suppose. Oh, very well! If my company's too low for the house, I'll take it where it's better appreciated—that's all!"

The man rose to his feet with these words, and swayed unsteadily to and fro, for he was evidently intoxicated. Then, with a defiant glare at the landlady, moved towards the door.

"There, go along!" said Mrs. Miles, picking up a glass from the table as she spoke, and looking after him angrily. "You've had more than enough this evening, and you're not sober or you'd not talk such nonsense. Don't fall down, if you can help it."

The man looked very savage, but he made no reply to these taunting remarks.

On his way out, however, he stopped in front of Percy Hardwicke, and stared at him fiercely in the face.

The young officer returned the steadfast gaze with interest.

"I'm not fit company for the likes of you, I suppose," said the drunken blacksmith, swaying to and fro as he spoke. "I shoe horses. What do you do?"

"Break heads," replied Hardwicke, calmly.

The blacksmith scowled savagely, and tried to stand more steadily.

"Those heads?" he presently asked in a thick voice.

But before Percy could make any reply—perhaps not an unfortunate occurrence either, for blows were pretty certain to have very quickly followed such an unpromising dialogue—Miss Phoebe appeared at the door, and called the blacksmith by name.

So sudden a change as the sound of the pretty girl's voice caused in the blacksmith's appearance and behaviour, it would be difficult to describe; straightening himself by a violent effort, he tugged at his forelock, whilst the savage expression upon his grimy face gave way to a sort of sheepish stumper, which was anything but becoming.

"Rourke," said Phoebe, "why do you not do what my mother tells you quietly?"

"I was going—I was."

"Go, then, at once!"

"I only—"

The rough fellow made no further attempt to speak, but slunk towards the outer door.

More like a hushed bound than the bully he seemed to be a few moments ago, the burly ruffian sneaked past the angry village beauty.

Ere he passed out into the street, however, he cast one scowling glance towards Hardwicke, full of deadly vindictiveness, which rendered his natural ugliness almost awful to look upon.

"A queer customer, that," said Hardwicke, with one of his sweetest smiles.

"An ugly one if you vex him, sir," said the landlady.

"The gentleman has done so already, mother," observed Phoebe; "and you know how revengeful Rourke is."

"If I only have a protector in you," said Hardwicke, in a low tone; "I shall feel quite safe."

But when he was presently left alone, he

could not look upon the events of the last half-hour or so with any amount of satisfaction.

"This seems to be a very pugilistic neighbourhood," he observed to himself, as he lit a cigar; "and I've managed to make two enemies out of my first two acquaintances. It isn't a bad beginning. As to love affairs, there's a promise of a little courting, certainly, but it will be under difficulties, too. My mysterious friend has a very ugly hang-over; but the pretty young Hebe, here, is several shades more ferocious. Egad! If I don't take particular care, it's quite likely I shall get murdered amongst them!"

It was, it must be confessed, rather a dreary subject for a joke, and yet Percy Hardwicke smiled as he thus reflected, perhaps fooling himself of his safety. The candle by his side was burning with a winding-sheet, and the corners of the room, a few yards' distance, were enveloped in deep shadows. The wind was whistling mournfully without, and things generally bore a dreary and dispiriting aspect, which, however, the hot negus in his tumbler, and the fragrant cigar which he held betwixt his lips, could not dispel.

The traveller shivered, and half rose to his feet, thinking he would be much more comfortable in bed.

But as he was rising, he accidentally cast his

eyes towards the window, and was suddenly transfixed by the sight which met his eyes.

Close to the glass, upon the other side, was squeezed a man's face eagerly peering at him. An ugly face it was, with an unshaven chin, bushy eyebrows, and great, fierce eyes, blood-shot and protruding.

It was the face of the blacksmith, who was watching him, with the same look of vindictive malice Hardwicke had noticed when he left the inn.

## CHAPTER V.

### MYSTERY.

The greatest unbeliever in woman's truth must have believed that Eleanor's delight at her husband's return, was unfeigned, sincere, and genuine.

The most artful deceiver could not have played so false a part, had her protestations been hollow mockeries.

But no, it was impossible that she should be acting false, as that the simple-hearted husband, who doted upon her, could have been brought at that time to believe in her treachery.

There came a day though, when the evidence grew overwhelming—when the criminal facts came rapidly one upon another—when the damning truth forced itself upon his horror-stricken mind.

But that was not yet!

There still remained a few short hours of happiness!

The storm was brewing fast. The thunder-clouds grew blacker and blacker, and more threatening; but as yet, the hurricane had not burst forth, as soon it would, with overwhelming fury.

It was a happy day this, which followed Edward Jerrold's return home!

It was a bright, sunny day, too, the very reverse of that which had preceded it. Yesterday was winter,—to-day was midsummer. Such changes are of common occurrence in this incongenial climate of ours, in this dear old mother country, poor people would rather stand it, than desert.

Jerrold supposed that his friend Hardwicke would have put in an appearance early in the day, but in this expectation he was disappointed.

He then came to the conclusion, that Hardwicke supposed that Jerrold ought to go and fetch him. Perhaps he was offended.

Eleanor thought this very probable, and gave it as her opinion, that Percy Hardwicke must have thought their conduct extremely rude, in turning him out over night, after inviting him to stay at their home.

"But he persisted in going," said Jerrold. "I tried all I possibly could, to make him stay until you returned, but he would not do so. And then you were so late, and we had no idea where—by the way, my dear, where were you?"

He had forgotten all about the subject, until chance brought it up again in this way.

The mystery, however, is soon solved.

Throwing her arms around his neck, and kissing him while she spoke, though not looking in his face, she said:—

"I was waiting the 'Good Samaritan.' If you must know, there is a poor woman in the village, who is very ill, and she—she had led a very wicked life, and the lady visitors don't like to go near her, so she is left all by herself, in a wretched little room, where she lives, or rather starves, without a soul to care for her. Therefore, I thought I would go and—I know you don't mind it, do you?—you don't think I should have turned away as the others did, because she had sinned?"

"Blow you! blow you, my own brave-hearted Nelly!" said the sailor, straining her to his breast; "why were you afraid of telling me this before?"

"Yes!" she answered, blushing deeply, and half crying, half laughing as she spoke. "You're not angry, are you?"

"Angry!" he exclaimed in astonishment, "why should I be? By Jove, I should have been awful vexed, though, if you hadn't gone to see the poor creature, if she's really in a bad way."

And then he would have kissed her for her goodness, but breaking from him, she burst into a violent fit of sobbing, which was as unexpected as it was astonishing, to the simple sailor.

In vain, however, he strove to console her, or to ascertain the cause of her tears. For some time she persisted in him to leave her.

But then, almost suddenly as the fit of weeping came on, she dried her eyes and burst into smiles.

Edward Jerrold looked at her in blank amazement.

"Am I not foolish?" asked Eleanor.

Jerrold, indeed, scarce knew what reply to make to this very pertinent inquiry.

"All women are riddles," he said; "that's a proverb."

"Then, I am only like the rest, so don't blame me. But, by the by, what about your friend?"

"What about him?"

"Why hasn't he come?"

"I can't imagine."

"He ought to have been here by now. It's twelve o'clock."

"I don't know what to say about it," answered Jerrold, thoughtfully. "But I'll go for him, at any rate. I hope I shan't miss him on the way, though."

"You won't do that, I should think. He will come by the fields, won't he?"

"I don't know. I told him to go by the road last night, because I thought he might lose his way in the dark."

"That was a good plan. If he had gone by the fields, he would have been pretty certain to have gone wrong. It was such a dreadful night."

The Captain did not think he was justified in wasting any more time, and, therefore, set out at once upon his errand.

If you must know the candid truth, he would very much have preferred Hardwicke's room to his company, as he was much happier alone with Eleanor than he could be in the presence of a comparative stranger; but then he was too much of a gentleman to wilfully be guilty of a want of courtesy.

The Captain, walking rapidly across the field, was very soon in front of the door of the "Blue Dragon."

"Was a gentleman stopping there—a gentleman who had come late the previous evening?"

Mrs. Miles answered him, and said, rather suspiciously, that the gentleman in question had slept there over night, but he had gone the first thing in the morning with all the rest.

"Gone!" ejaculated the Captain.

"Oh, yes!" replied the landlady, evidently very much out of temper. "Everybody goes out but me! But I've got today at home, if you please, and I suppose I ought to feel thankful!"

The Captain thought he had come at a wrong time to make inquiries. Yet, he must know what had become of his friend.

He, therefore, after a momentary hesitation, returned to the charge.

"Have you any idea where he is gone, ma'am?"

"Oh, he's where all the rest are, I suppose!"

"And where may that be?"

"Oh, at the fair, to be sure."

"The fair?"

"Bless me, sir, haven't you heard of it? I wonder you're not there, too!"

The Captain smiled.

"My ignorance is my excuse, ma'am, I suppose."

"It's Wellwood fair, to be sure! That's where he's gone. That's where my good-for-nothing, idle daughters are gone, too! And my husband, he's gone out on business, so he says. I don't know whether it's the same road, though, but I expect it is, if the truth were known!"

Captain Jerrold left word for his friend that as soon as he returned, he was to come over to his home and mentioned the dinner hour. Then retraced his steps.

There certainly seemed to be some truth in the landlady's statement that everybody had gone to the fair.

The little village, at the best of times, wore a somewhat sleepy aspect. Old women were always to be seen dozing over half-mended stockings on cottage doorsteps. Vagabond boys and vagabond dogs everlastingly slumbered in the sun. Not infrequently a drunken man was to be seen slumbering in close proximity to the pump, to which his inebriated condition must, if he had any feelings, have been a very great scandal. There was a sleepy mill on the slope of the hill, which was at rest at least four days out of the six, which the villagers facetiously called working ones. The mill stream crept lazily through the fat green meadows, where well-favored kine chewed the cud in a semi-solomonic manner, or a drowsy-headed shepherd's boy, with the aid of a dog, who snored, in spite of gnats and other inconveniences, looked after a flock of fat sheep much too idle to run away, and basking away for any kind of active mischief.

This was in the summer time, but during winter the poor little place appeared to die out altogether.

To-day the vagabond boys and dogs had gone. The old women were in-doors out of sight, if they were not holding making with the young ones. The proverbial drunken man had gone elsewhere to take his liquor and his sleep. All the idle population had departed; and though there was a distant sound of shrill female voices and the voice of ill-used wives left at home by their worthless spouses, these noises were not, as usual, at their wash-tubs, and were taking their rest over their back-yard rattings, and screaming out their grievances to their next door but one neighbours.

As Edward Jerrold walked slowly down what was ostensibly designated by its inhabitants as "The Street," he looked in vain for any sign of a miscreant.

"They're all gone, certainly," thought he. "I wonder what the great attraction can be. However, any change cannot but be greatly enjoyed by the dwellers in this place. I hope they will enjoy themselves, I am sure, though I do not envy them. There is change enough for me in home!"

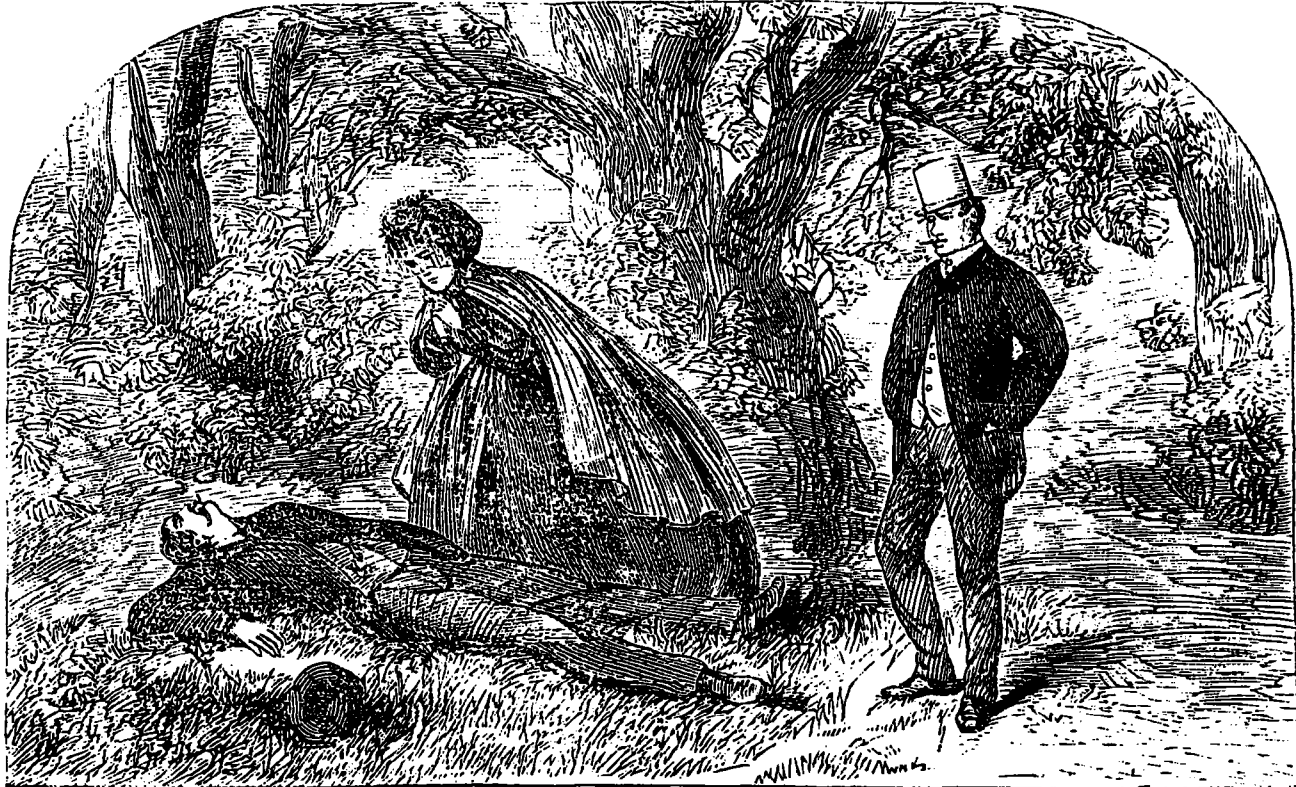
He quickened his steps, as the thought of the pretty face peeping out for him through the rose-covered porch, occurred to his recollection.

She was waiting for him! How happy she would be to see him come back again, and not the less so, perhaps, because he came alone.

The village "smithy" stood at the corner of the lane leading towards the pathway crossing the fields. At its door the Captain found seated the first man he had yet encountered during his walk.

Yes, here sat the black sheep of the village, Jabez Rourke.

He was not a pretty object, squinting there with his head resting on his hands, and his thick matted hair straggling over his snarled face, smeared with a week's dirt. A streak of sun light penetrating through a crevice in the roof,



PERCY HARDWICKE PLACED HORS DE COMBAT.