

DIABLERIE.

'Tis a night of the witches,
Of goblins and witches!
See how they hover,
Starting out of their niches,
Among the black trees!
The moon's ill at ease,
Lest the mob should have spied her,
And hastens to cover
Her face in a cloud,
Or diaphanous shroud,
Too sleazy to bide her!
And not only witches—
(Growsome with beards)
Goblins and witches,
In all keys and pitches,
Chanting their weirds:—
Not only ghosts, jostling,
In yonder dim alley,
Where ghosts wont to rally;
But I hear a low rustling
And whistling behind me—
Footsteps behind me—
On the hard, frozen ground!
I dare not look round,
Lest Terror should blind me,
Should chill me, and blind me,
And I next morning, in marble be found!

On it comes, lightly,
Over stones skipping,
On the turf tripping,
Something more sprightly
Than witches, I fancy—
Worse necromancy!
But, face about;
Charge on the rout,
Whatever betide me:
Ah, now I see clearly,
'Tis a dead leaf, merely—
A dead leaf! no wonder
The moon, peering under
That skurrying cloud, looks out to deride me!

EDITH M. THOMAS.

ESTELLA GRAVINA.

I.

It is somewhere about thirty years ago. Morning prayers are just over in the spacious hall of the collegiate school at Westminster, and a crowd of boys, worried by Greek roots and algebraic formulae, are impatiently awaiting their dismissal. But the doctor, stern and immobile, gives not the sign of release. To an outsider his grim silence would be inexplicable; but we understand the significance of the deep-set lines of his old visage, and the reason of the sudden departure of the two under-masters. We know that they will return with their victim anon, that the accursed rod will be brought forth, and a certain voice be heard to complain.

Presently the masters return alone. The doctor looks up surprised. They approach him with a troubled mien, speak in low tones, and then retire, whilst he, turning to us, thus delivers himself:

"You are, I think, aware that one of your number has been convicted of theft. It is, indeed, sad to discover that we should unconsciously have been living in terms of amity with such a scoundrel, and that the fair name of the school has been thus dishonoured. It was my intention to have administered to him this morning a punishment in proportion to his deserts; but I learn with surprise, yet not with regret, that the culprit has stolen away during the night. I shall not attempt to recapture him. The place is well purged of his presence. Probably I shall see his face no more; but should some of you meet him in after life, I would advise you not to trust him over-much. Remember, that 'as the twig is bent, so will the tree grow.' And now you may go."

Then tumultuously we rush forth and soon forget—all save one—Jim Smith and his crime. That one is Jack, his twin-brother, upon whom the burden of vicarious shame weighs so heavily that the compassionate doctor soon restores him to his friends.

Time passes, and I enter the army. Meanwhile I had heard nothing of the twins until some five or six years later, when they both joined my regiment. What they had been about all this time I did not learn, but it was said that they had been to sea, and that one of them—Jim—had left the navy under a cloud. However that may be, the latter favoured the wing to which I belonged at Plymouth, whilst Jack was posted to the other at Weymouth. They were thus separated to avoid confusion, so extraordinary was their resemblance to one another.

Now just then there came to Plymouth a wandering circus; and nothing was talked of in the place but Estella, the daughter of the proprietor, one Gravina, a Spaniard.

Her mother (at that time no more) was said to have been a gipsy, and, to judge by the lustrous dark eyes, rich olive skin, and faultless form of her daughter, probably was one.

Of those who were presented to the divinity, I was one; but as I was not disposed, like others, to make love to her, she was pleased, after a while, to look upon me as a friend, and indeed to give me her entire confidence.

So it came about that one day she informed me that she was to be married to an officer in the regiment, and that his name was Smith. Now when she told me this I was grieved; for I had got to be fond of the girl in a paternal way myself, and hated the idea of her marrying such a fellow as Jim Smith. So standing as I did *in loco parentis*, her father, a worthless fellow, having forfeited her affection, I told her plainly that she would be making a terrible mistake if she married this man.

"Why?" she asked quietly.

"Because he is a bad lot."

"Pray what do you know of him?"

"Enough to tell you that I would rather see you in your grave than his wife."

"You do not mince matters," she replied; "but what you say is simply absurd. Mr. Smith is a good and true man, and he is mine, and I am his, for ever!"

"You are mistaken in him, Estella. He is an utter scamp, believe me. He will tire of you before six months are over, and desert you. His love, you will find, will be of the kind that goes up like a rocket and comes down like its stick. A bad man is sure to prove a faithless lover."

At these words she sprang to her feet and stood before me, quivering with passion.

"I cannot guess," she said, "what evil you may think of Mr. Smith; but I know that in trusting him I have made no mistake. I am certain that he is incapable of an unworthy action. If you say more, I shall quarrel with you."

"I have said my say, Estella, and shall be silent on the subject henceforth. As I am now going on leave for some time, farewell, and be not angry with me for telling you the truth—bitter as it is."

She took my hand and touched it with her lips.

"Good-bye, dear Gordon," she said. "You mean kindly; but you should not have spoken as you have to me."

II.

During the time that I was on leave the regiment was ordered to India suddenly, and when I went out myself a year or so later I found that Jack Smith, instead of embarking with the regiment, had suddenly left the service; and Jim, now a captain, was at Gwalior, but unfortunately just then in dire trouble, having been convicted of embezzling the men's pay, and sentenced to be cashiered, with a year's imprisonment. He was still, as I was not surprised to hear, unmarried.

Of Estella all this time I had heard nothing until, on arrival at Gwalior, I found a letter from her informing me that she had persuaded her father to remove the staff of the circus to India, and that she was then at Bombay assisting him to reorganize it. They intended to visit the principal up-country cities, and amongst others Gwalior, where she learnt that I was stationed. A few weeks later they appeared at the cantonment, and Estella lost no time in informing me that Smith, before leaving England, had written to Birmingham, whither the circus had moved, to break off the engagement, on the ground that his financial position and prospects made their marriage impossible, begging her at the same time to forgive him; and she showed me the letter, which was dated Portsmouth and signed "J. S."

"There, Estella," I could not help saying, "did I not tell you that he would desert you?"

"My dear Gordon," she replied, "he has only done what was right. We could not have married upon nothing. That he will get on I feel sure; and when he has won fame and fortune he will return to me as surely as the needle finds its way to the pole. Meanwhile I am content to wait patiently."

"Estella," I said, "as you must know the sad truth soon, you may as well hear it now from me. Captain Smith has been convicted of felony."

At this news her countenance fell; but recovering herself quickly, she said:

"I do not believe him to be guilty; he is the victim of misfortune. Where is he?"

"Suffering a year's imprisonment at Calcutta," I replied.

"Then when he is released I will follow him whithersoever he goes, so that when he wants me I may be at hand. They may make a prisoner of him, Gordon, but they cannot make him guilty."

It was now the beginning of the hot weather of 1857, and the Mutiny had broken out. Gravina, perceiving then that to carry out his programme was impossible, resolved to make the best of his way down to Calcutta. Estella accordingly took leave of me and went her way.

III.

Five more years have passed, and I am returning home *via* the Cape. During that period I had wondered continually what had become of Estella, and never more so than in the weary hours of the voyage. And I puzzled myself about Jim Smith at the same time; for neither of them had I heard a word since his release. Were they married, or dead?

I was turning over these matters in my mind when we brought up for a day or two at St. Helena.

"If you've never seen a slaver, Colonel," said the Captain, as I was idly watching the shipping in the bay, "come on board yonder schooner with me," pointing to one astern.

I jumped at his offer, and was soon alongside the vessel indicated. They were separating the living from the dead as we got on deck, casting the latter overboard and sending on shore the living. A few hours before, both had been packed indiscriminately as close as herrings in a barrel in the stifling hold. No wonder, that the survivors, in their joy, lifted up their voices as they were borne away to the land of freedom in a chorus of thanksgiving.

"Who is the captain of this floating hell?" I asked.

"Yonder he goes," he replied, "in the broad-brimmed hat, in the stern sheets of that man-of-war's boat. His name is Johnson, and he sails

under the American flag; but he's an Englishman, they say."

I looked at the man's back and fancied I had seen it before, but when or where I could not think. Then we returned to our vessel, and I thought no more of Captain Johnson and his misdeeds until I was reminded of him in the following manner. It so happened that after I had been some months in England I was ordered upon particular service to Canada, proceeding thither *via* New York. Having transacted some business one morning in the lower part of the town, I was returning to my hotel, when I found myself in the midst of a seething crowd outside the prison of the "Tombs." As everybody was gazing at one of the towers of the gaol, I too looked up, and noticed a black flag floating from its staff. Presently it fell, and then there arose from the silent expectant people a deep dull moan. My curiosity being excited, I turned to inquire of a bystander the meaning of the strange spectacle.

"It means, sir," he replied, "that it's all up with Captain Johnson."

"And pray who may Captain Johnson be?" I asked.

"He is, or was, the captain of a slaver, and they've just hanged him in there. Guess you're a Britisher?"

"I am indeed."

"And so was he," he continued. "His real name was Smith. Maybe you know him, stranger?"

Then I knew that the Captain Johnson I had seen at St. Helena was no other than Jim Smith; but I made no reply. Just then a woman, thickly veiled, standing by, touched my arm, and in a low voice said:

"Let us go, Gordon."

It was Estella. Through her folded veil I could see the death-like pallor of her face and the twitching of her set lips. When we had moved away, she said:

"I heard what that man told you, and it was all quite true. Accident brought me here to-day; yet, in fact, I knew all along that Johnson was Smith. May God forgive him! He was indeed all that you said of him, and more. Come with me now to where I am living, and I will tell you how I came to know."

"You remember," she said, when she reached her house, "my leaving you at Gwalior for Calcutta? Well, on arrival there, I found that Smith's release would shortly take place, and accordingly made preparations to carry out my intention of following him. My father at this juncture fell ill and died, and I disposed of the circus just in time to embark in the next American vessel to that in which your disgraced brother officer sailed for New York. At first he seemed in great straits there; then for a while I lost sight of him altogether. But he turned up again later on, and lived for a time in luxury. Whilst I was wondering where the money came from, an accident explained the mystery."

"I must tell you that this house belongs to a certain Bonum, a circus proprietor, in whose employment, in fact, I am. As he and his wife appeared disposed to be friendly, I gladly availed myself of their offer to board with them. I was ignorant, indeed, then that Mr. Bonum, in addition to running a circus, was one of a ring of speculators in black ivory, as they call it here; and that his house was a resort of persons connected with the slave-trade, or I should have lodged elsewhere. But once settled, I did not care to move."

"It was about a year ago that a carriage drove up to the door, and I saw from the window of this very room a man descend whom I recognized, although I heard him give to the servant the name of Captain Johnson, as Smith. It flashed across me that his visit was in connection with slavery; for I remembered his having told me that he had been to sea in his youth, and thought of his mysteriously acquired wealth. My first impulse was to implore him for his own sake, if not for mine, to abandon this horrible business; but fearing lest he should blame me for having followed him, I hesitated. Meanwhile he disappeared again, and I heard no more of him until there appeared in the papers an account of his capture by a British man-of-war. In due course he was handed over to the American authorities, brought here, and—you know the rest."

As I knew that no word of sympathy could alleviate her misery, I merely inquired what were her plans.

"I have decided," she replied, "to return to my tribe in Spain. The best of the Romany blood is mine, and I am rich now. My mother's people would restore me to the position she forfeited when she married my father. My dream of happiness is at an end. Henceforth I shall devote myself to my people, and be their queen. Farewell now, dear Gordon—but I shall see you before I depart, shall I not?"

I kissed her in answer, and departed.

IV.

As a rule our visions are tinged with the hues of the waking thoughts of the day; but no sooner did I become unconscious that night than the mind threw off its burden of grief, and became buoyant and hopeful. Perhaps never more boldly than in the world of dreams do "coming events cast their shadows before," and are deeper glimpses into the future accorded us. Is it strange, therefore, that the gift of prescience should then have been mine, and that I should have felt with joy the approach of something or some one favourable to the fate of her in whom I was just then so deeply interested? But, alas,

when I awoke, my fond illusions incontinently fled, and I should have relapsed into gloom had not the chambermaid presently appeared with hot water, boots, and the card of Mr. Smith. There was nothing in those three articles, in themselves, inspiring; yet, recalling my dream, I harboured the pleasant idea as I dressed that the owner of the card might be the *some one* it foreshadowed, and hastened my toilet accordingly.

As I entered the *salon* a young man arose and greeted me warmly. Though not superstitious, I recoiled at his approach, and was on the point of saying, "Why, I thought you were—" when it flashed across me that it was my old friend Jack—his brother!

"Surely you have not forgotten me, Gordon?" he said. "It was but an hour ago that I saw your name in the list of arrivals. What a piece of luck to have caught you!"

"Forgotten you, Jack? No. But I did not know that you were on this side of the water."

"I have been here for the last five years," he said.

"Doing well, I hope, Jack?"

"Well enough. I have made my pile."

"And what are you going to do with it?"

"I have been thinking of going to India to search for the grave of poor Jim. He disappeared, as probably you know, just about the time the Mutiny broke out, and I fear there is but little doubt that he shared the fate of those who perished at that time. He is probably buried at Gwalior, where I heard of him last. Poor dear fellow!" He paused for a few moments, and continued, "At all events, I'm off soon to England to look up a certain person."

"Your brother is no more," I replied; "that I know for certain. But you will never find his grave, believe me. Do not grieve at this. Why not rather think of him as one of the many gallant soldiers whose bones have long since mingled there with the desert dust? Their monuments are not in stone, but in the memory of those who loved them."

"It may be that you are right, Gordon," he said, "and that mine would be an idle quest. Nevertheless I should be happier if I could stand for a moment by the spot where he sleeps."

The thought of a certain dishonoured grave beneath the flags of a neighbouring prison made me shudder. Presently I continued:

"You say also that you are going to England to search for some one. Do I know the individual?"

"I should think not," he replied. "She is the daughter of a circus proprietor I once met at Weymouth. We were engaged, in fact; but in those days I was too poor to support a wife. It may be that I was wrong; but God knows I acted for the best when I wrote to break off the affair. Then I came over here buoyed with the hope of one day being able to offer her a home."

"What became of her Jack?"

"I know not. The last I heard of Estella—that was her name—was that she was at Birmingham with the circus. She went to Plymouth, I believe, *en route*; but Jim, who was quartered there at the time, told me when I saw him off to India that he had never seen her."

The scales then fell from my eyes. This, then, was the man who had been her lover all along, and not the other. Without moving a muscle of my countenance, I said that I hoped he would be able to dine with me that night at the Brevoort House, and would excuse me now, as I was busy.

"All right," he replied; "I will be there." As soon as he was out of sight I rushed off to the Bonums'. They told me there that Miss Gravina was too ill to see me; but when she received the following missive—"The man who suffered yesterday was not your friend after all. C. G."—she came down, though pale and trembling, at once.

"What is the meaning of your note, Gordon?" she said. "For God's sake tell me!"

"It means that you are to cheer up like a good girl, and dine with me to-night at the Brevoort House."

"I cannot, Gordon; really I cannot. You forget—"

"No, I don't. You must come; I insist upon it. By the way, did you ever see any one when you were at Plymouth resembling your friend?"

"No, no one. Why do you ask?"

"And are you quite sure it was him you saw out of this window some time ago, and no other?"

"How absurd you are!"

"One more question. What was the Christian name of your friend?"

"Why, Jack, of course! As if you did not know!"

"Ah, well, never mind; I will call for you at 7.30. Be ready; good-bye now."

Straightway then I hurried off to the Brevoort House, where I ordered a private room and dinner for three. Thence home; but no sooner did I reach my hotel than I despatched a note to Estella, begging her not to wait till I called for her, but to go straight to the restaurant and meet me there. At 10 p.m. I gently opened the door of the room I had engaged, and found Mr. John Smith on the sofa calmly smoking, and Estella close—very close—to his side, a picture of contentment.

"Ah," I said, "I'm rather late; but I see you've managed without me."

"You old darling!" exclaimed Estella, going for me.

"Keep your kisses for Jack, Estella," I said.

"But the way, when are you going to be queen of the gipsies?"