

moved by some infernal magnetism; my eyes seemed to start from my head, so fearful was the sudden strain to which they were subjected.

For once again I saw the livid face, the staring, glassy eyes of the murdered woman—once more I beheld with horror the fragile form lying, where he had left it, stiff and stark in the shadow of the old lych-gate.

And even as I looked it disappeared!

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Shall I confess it? Why not? Man is but mortal, after all, and I had looked on that which might have appalled the devil: I turned and fled—fled from the spot as fast as my legs and the heavy snow would enable me, and never paused until, faint and trembling, I stood beneath my mother's roof.

III.—THE HAND OF HEAVEN.

It is Christmas morning. We are in church, Amy and I, with our good mother and many of our neighbours and well-wishers. We are early—by at least a full half-hour, somebody says—but the time passes pleasantly enough in lively but subdued conversation and the soft cracking of jokes appropriate to the occasion. The fact of my being a globe-trotter of ten years' experience is sufficient to make me the principal theme of conversation, and helps, I am afraid, to divert some of the female attention which, in the circumstances, should have been wholly absorbed in the glories of the bridal frock.

I feel proud of my darling—bless her!—as I stand chatting with a neighbour and watching her bonny face the while; and I have good reason to be, for, look you, it isn't every girl that'll wait ten long weary years till a fellow is in a position to marry her. And Amy, I know, has had offers by the score—aye, and refused them every one for my sake. Well, well!

Three couples are to be united this morning—Amy and I, farmer Buxton and the widow Smith, and George Stanton and Kitty Marsden. The latter had come together after much vicissitude. Originally sweethearts as children, they had, as they grew up, drifted apart. George, like myself, had been abroad; whilst Kitty, being fancy free, had become engaged to Philip Lester, the organist of the church, who loved her, Amy

told me, to distraction. Alas! Philip's dissolute habits and mad outbursts of temper had proved too much for the girl, the match had been broken off, and George, the sweetheart of yore, had been restored to favour again.

The organ begins to play. One by one more neighbours drop in and sit down to a seasonable but subdued gossip.

Farmer Buxton, fat and scant of breath, enters, bearing on his arm his elderly widow-bride, who, methinks, glances with malicious triumph at the single ladies present, who, in turn (or some of them), I hear, *sotto voce*, express their views of the match in terms anything but complimentary to the unsuspecting widow.

George Stanton comes in, too, with his best man. He is surprised, and not agreeably so, to learn that his *fiancée* has not yet made an appearance. She was to drive over, George says, with her father and an aunt, and it wants but ten minutes to the hour fixed for the ceremony.

We go to the door together, George and I, and look anxiously down the road. We can see but a short distance, for the snow is again falling steadily, and the sky is gloomy with heavy clouds. I glance uneasily at the lych-gate in front—weighted and shapeless now almost with heavy masses of snow—and for a moment an awful suspicion crosses my mind. No sign, no sound of the carriage. Shivering with cold, we re-enter the church, and the next moment the vicar (a stranger to me) enters with the curate. And still the organ plays grandly on.

A whispered consultation is held, and presently, when the music has died away, Amy and myself and the elder couple take our places before the altar rail to be married. George has begged that the ceremony shall proceed without Kitty and himself, and with an anxious look once again turns to the door to watch for the coming of his bride.

My darling and I have plighted our troth to each other and are married. So with the other two. We all four withdraw to sign the register in the vestry, and are presently emerging therefrom, smiling and happy, when I become conscious, as do we all, that something unusual is occurring outside the church. Those nearest the door, I see, have a scared look on their faces, and as I and my wife make our way through the bewildered throng, once again a nameless dread takes possession of me.