

incidental features of the scene suggest themselves; truly, of the waters of bitterness, I drank deeply. Likely as not—so some of the hundred fastasies would run—the man had been paddling to his home down the river, when catching, perhaps, some sound of our approach, in turning his head, had received his death wound and given vent to his agony in that one wild scream which had startled me; the lurching of the body to one side, doubtless, had upset the frail canoe, which then had floated swiftly down the river, turning round and round again with the bubbling eddies.

“Nearing home, the sight of places long familiar, brought with them sensations of a more pleasing nature, so that my arrival at ‘The Orchards’—my property near St. Catharines—was cheering enough.

“The whole farm was flourishing and doing splendidly under the skilful management of the foreman, who had been in charge since my purchase of the place. I now found peace of mind not only in the charm of fruit farming but also in the fascination attendant on the cultivation of bees—the extensive gardens and groves of bass-wood near the house making ‘The Orchards’ specially adapted for the breeding of the honey-producing insects. In such a manner, my wife and I passed four happy years, and watched the growth from girlhood to womanhood of our only child Marjorie. Even now, no matter how commonplace my surroundings—whenever I hear her old-fashioned name—there comes to me memories of the garden where she, just as scores of Marjories before her, tended and trained holly-hocks or daffodils, mignonette or sweet williams, growing in pretty unconventional patches on either side of the winding box-bordered walks.

“Shut out from the world, though we kept ourselves, except when in the fall I visited the markets, the post regularly reached us. One day it brought news which blasted the whole foundation of my hopes, and brought anew all the old fears. Thus it ran:—‘Major Sinclair,—By sending to the enclosed address fifty dollars in Canadian money, you will save me the trouble of exposing you, and will preserve yourself and family from the ruin you so much dread. *Beneath an ash tree on the banks of the Burnt River there lies a grave which can tell tales!*’ The address enclosed was on a small slip of paper, and read, ‘Care of———, Toronto Post Office.’

“Realizing that my secret was in the hands of some one, who, if fallen foul of, would not hesitate to injure, I saw no way out of the difficulty but by complying with his cool request for money. A week after I did so (although at first in no way did I connect the one fact with the other) in a walk through the place, I surprised a stranger, who kept his face studiously averted, coming through the trees from the direction of the house. Before I could approach, he hurriedly jumped the fence separating the orchard from the road, and walked briskly away. The one glimpse I caught of his face, as he vaulted the fence, sent a shiver through me—it was strangely similar to that of the dead man I had looked upon four years before up the Burnt River; still, thought I, it might have been imagination, for you see the idea commenced to gain on me that I had been growing nervous since the receipt of that unsigned communication. Shortly after this, my foreman advised me that, on account of the approach of cold weather, another hand would be needed to aid in storing the fall fruit, at the same time mentioning an application he had already received from some one, and obtained my permission to engage him.

“My feelings may be imagined, on finding that Jim, my new employee, who greeted me with all outward signs of good breeding, though a trifle over-shy, I thought after, was none other than him I had surprised lurking in the orchard—him who bore such striking resemblance to my victim, long dead. I managed, however, to control myself whenever he came in my way, though it required, on my part, some presence of mind, after discovering him several times in deep conversation with house-maid Mary. Yet I did so, contenting myself with inward resolutions to watch the pair to find, if possible, what they had to do with the threatening letters, and what, really, they knew about that night’s tragedy—resolutions I doubled, when

by numerous incidents it became apparent that the two purposely seemed to avoid meeting me about the place. About this time came a second letter, much in the strain of the first, the address being changed to Montreal—whither in reply I mailed fifty dollars, perceiving nothing else than that as long as my secret was not public property, it was advisable, for my own peace and for that of my wife and daughter—to so preserve it. Then things went smoothly for a month, till Marjorie, (who had long been resisting an invitation to visit friends near Hamilton and that too, against my wishes, as she made frequent complaints of illness, and I believed the change would be beneficial), one dull, dreary day, toward October’s close, packed up her trunks, and left on a fortnight’s visit. I remember it so well, because, that evening, I answered with another inclosure of fifty dollars—the third anonymous application for money, received this time again from Toronto; and the next morning both Mary, the maid, and Jim were missing from ‘The Orchard,’ having, as I learned, walked to the station four miles away and procured tickets to Toronto.

“My suspicions, for a time past, had connected these two with the letters I had been sent; here, of course, was sure proof. Likely enough the man had in some way become acquainted with the events which transpired during my shooting excursion, and with his accomplice Mary, relying on “bleeding” me to any amount, had decided that single blessedness, however enjoyable, was vastly inferior to the charms of wedded life, and had only waited opportunity to carry the plan into execution. I saw the whole thing now; all the dark looks and secret conversations between the two were explained as clear as the day. Why had I been so blind not to have discovered this before?

“Then came thoughts, different to any yet experienced. Why should I suffer this way? I asked myself. Surely morally, and legally, too, I was not responsible for that poor unfortunate’s death; and with the reaction came determination to put a detective privately to work to discover, if possible, the doings and whereabouts of the runaway couple. The detective came and, being put into possession of the facts as I have related to you, departed, was absent a week, and turned up with information which will surprise you now, I think, as much as it did me.”

The Major paused here long enough to lay down his empty pipe and put a little coal on the grate-fire, which gradually had been getting lower and lower. “What was it?” he began again, in answer to my impatient inquiries. “Well, briefly, that Jim, who in Toronto had registered himself R. James Reynolds, Esq., had denied any complicity in the extortion of money from me, and, moreover, had furnished the detective with written proof that a brother of his—a certain Robert Reynolds—had met his death in 1857, I think it was, from the accidental discharge of his own gun, whilst crossing the Burnt River on a floating log, and that the body going under had never been recovered by his comrades; all the dates, anyway, corresponding, so that no doubts remained as to the identity of the man I so long had wrongly accused myself of shooting.”

“My first glad surprise over, and happening to look up I saw beaming upon me from the door-way, and set off by the bonniest and loveliest blushing face conceivable, two of the brightest eyes in all the world; the next moment my daughter Marjorie advanced to greet me, leaning upon the stalwart arm of—whom do you suppose but—Jim, my former farm-help, while behind the pair, in regular old-fashioned abigail style, lightly tripped Mary along, carrying her mistress’ cloak.

“When explanations were forthcoming, and I learned that my Marjorie, now Mrs. R. James Reynolds, was the wife of one of Ontario’s most promising young men, I thought it proper to swallow any parental indignation which I might have felt that her lover had concealed from me in so unnecessary a manner his real station in life, in face of the fact that Marjorie, evidently, had appreciated such a wooing and profited by it.”

“And that,” said the Major, sleepily, as he lighted me to my bedroom door, “that is my bit of family romance—not bad is it? Oh, yes, the letters; true, I had forgotten