

A FRAGMENT.

"Give me back the days when
I too was young." — *Goethe's Faust.*

Give me back my happy childhood,
When the world seemed fair and bright;
And the mountain, glen and wildwood,
Filled my spirit with delight.

Give me back those radiant faces,
Which have vanished in the gloom;
Who can fill the vacant places
Of the sleepers in the tomb?

Give me back the golden hours,
That on "angel wings" flew by,
While I plucked life's fading flowers,
Disbelieving they would die.

Give me back the hope I cherished
In the triumph of the truth—
Give me back the love that perished
In the dewy morn of youth.

Give me back my faint that Goodness
Will resume her ancient reign,
And the earth, being free from lowliness,
Will be Paradise again!
Paris, Oct. H. M. STRAMBERG

A NIGHT OF TERROR.

BY Z. AURER.

A bleak December wind was howling through the leafless branches, and dashing the stormy waves against the rocks, as I sat at eleven o'clock one night some quarter of a century ago over my comfortable bedroom fire. I had dismissed my maid, closed my book, and extinguished my candle; and, attired in my dressing-gown, I had fallen into that dreamy, half-conscious state, in which the red-hot coals and the dying embers are wont to assume all sorts of fantastic shapes, and figures and faces, recalling the dead, and picturing to the mind's eye the familiar countenances of the absent living. I am afraid I cannot hope to offer a very interesting or romantic image to your mind's eye, oh, my reader, when I represent myself as being at that period a middle-aged spinster, with just a few incipient furrows on my brow and a few grey hairs scattered here and there over my head, perhaps more the traces of early sorrow than of advancing age. But Time, that great softener—if never an actual healer—of human woes, had softened mine, though without obliterating their memory; and the lonely old maid who has ventured to appear before you *was* and *is*—far from being an unhappy woman.

Surrounded by kind, if mostly rather distant neighbours, numbering among them a few intimate friends, I was enabled, by the liberal bequest of my aunt and godmother, both to own and to occupy the house that has been my home from infancy—a pretty dwelling in the old-fashioned cottage style, which, though not of spacious dimensions, would have been greatly in excess of my means, had I been dependent only on my small inheritance from my parents. This dear home of mine (*how dear*, let the dwellers in these far-off regions tell!) is situated on a grassy slope, leading by rather a steep descent to one of those lovely little coves on the North Devon coast, so well known to pedestrian travellers, and so prized by all true admirers of English scenery. My front windows command a full view of the blue sea, blue in something more than in name on the favoured shores of my native county, and often of many varied hues and tints, as, in the bright sunny days, it breaks in transparent wavelets upon the clear shining beach; on either side of the cave rise the turf-covered cliffs, whence in clear weather the outline of the Welsh coast is distinctly visible, like a long line of cloud across the purple horizon; while, sheltered and half-hidden among the rocks, nestled a picturesque fishing-village; its white-washed, thatched cottages, their walls altogether concealed by clustering honeysuckles, fuchsias, climbing roses and passion-flowers—the forest-trees, growing and flourishing almost to the water's edge—the venerable Church, with its ivy-covered granite tower,—complete the picture, and, all bathed in the glorious summer sunshine, offer to the eye a *tout ensemble*, to my fond fancy rarely equalled in our island.

And whose were 'the faces in the fire,' that came back from the grave, or from far distant lands, to revisit me that winter night, as I sat listening to the northerly gale beating the waves against the rocks of a coast as wild and stormy in one season as it is placid and smiling in the other? I know not why, but in my mental wanderings through the happy days of youth, one lovely June day was as it were singled out from a host of others like it, and rose so vividly before me, that the past became the present, and the present glided away like a dream.

Once more I stood, a girl of twenty, in our garden, with its flowery walks and its verdant mossy banks, descending towards the white pebbly beach, and the huge boulders, flung as by a giant's hand under the tall cliffs; again the deep blue billows, reflected from a sky as blue, and just stirred by a soft breeze, were gleaming in the golden sunlight, and the little fishing-boats with snowy sails were dancing gaily on their surface; again the warbling of the birds, and the remoter sounds of childish merriment from the village green, were in my ears; once more I gazed on the countenance of father and mother, who had long been sleeping peacefully in the churchyard, where the waves make ceaseless music and mourning over the dead—of brothers and sisters, since scattered far and wide through many lands—and I felt those looks and tones of departed love, and heard the joyous shouts of the younger ones at their play. My father, a retired naval officer, was repairing a little pleasure-craft of his own construction, my

mother was sitting by him at her work, while the elder boys were helping him in his task. And yet another figure rose on the scene—that of one dearer to me than all the world besides, numbering then some five or six and twenty years, full of health and vigour and life. Where is he now? Long has he lain 'where pearls lie deep,' leaving many an aching heart behind him, and one more desolate than all, to mourn him through the weary days and nights, when months of suspense and anxious yearning had past, and it was certainly known that the brave, true, tender heart was stilled for ever beneath the restless waters.

So completely was I engrossed by these 'images of vanished things,' that I took no heed of the flight of time, till the first beginning to burn low warned me that it must be growing late, and my watch told me that it was close upon twelve o'clock. Then, by another turn of thought, I was wondering whether the eagerly-expected arrival of some little Indian nephews and nieces (to be consigned to my care) would, or would not, add to my comfort and happiness after my years of solitude, when my notice was attracted by a sort of uneasy movement on the part of my favourite Tabby—a pet-cat being as you know, my reader, the universally recognized inseparable companion of an old maid. Glancing round the room into the now partially-darkened corners, I could not discern anything unusual, but perhaps Puss's quicker sense of sound might have detected another presence through that medium, for almost immediately afterwards I imagined that I heard a very slight rustle. However, after listening for a few minutes, I concluded that my waking dreams had made me fanciful, albeit not naturally prone to unearthly or ghostly terrors, and my house, old as it was, had somehow escaped the imputation of being haunted, even among our rather superstitious village folk; and I adopted the more probable supposition that the noise—if noise there were—had been caused by the wind, which was blowing almost a hurricane. I should here premise that it had been my habit, ever since I had lived alone, to guard my plate at night in a closet of the dimensions of a very small room at one end of my bedchamber, the spoons, forks, &c., in daily use, being brought and deposited nightly by my maid in the box with the rest within the closet; and it had further been my practice to make her lock my door on the outside; and take the key to her own attic, at the door of which my bell was hung, so that she could hear it without any delay in case of illness or other emergency. My window, though not on the ground-floor, was guarded by strong shutters; and thus it was altogether impossible that any one could effect an entrance into my room without giving me such notice as could not fail to arouse a far heavier sleeper than myself.

I arose to complete the process of undressing, when a groan, loud, all but inaudible, I fancy, to one whose nerves were in a less highly-wrought and sensitive state, was this time unmistakably heard by me, as proceeding seemingly from beneath my bed. My eye following the direction indicated by my ear, I saw plainly, through a corner by the bedpost, not entirely hidden by the valance, a human eye gazing fixedly on me. If I had not had sufficient presence of mind to ignore the discovery by any outward token of consciousness, I had not been here to day to tell the tale; but I evinced no sort of emotion at my unwelcome visitor's presence, and proceeded quietly and leisurely to brush my hair, while I considered my plan of operation in this unlooked-for strait. Any attempt to rush at my bell, or even to approach it more deliberately, would doubtless be frustrated by the robber, who was of course keenly watching all my movements; and here I was, a prisoner by my own act and deed, shut up with a man who was perhaps intending to take my life as well as my property. I offered up a silent prayer for strength and guidance in this trying situation, and I succeeded in keeping my hand steady, so that no tremulousness should betray me.

My scheme, such as it was, was quickly formed and matured. Without hurrying I went through the brushing of my hair, and completed my little disrobing arrangements. Next, I opened my jewel-case, which stood on the glass, by my dressing-table, took out my rings, brooches, and bracelets, &c., one by one, held them up to the light of the candle, and feigned to be engrossed in the occupation of rubbing and polishing them. One by one I replaced them, and then moved my casket into the closet before mentioned as containing my plate-box; this said closet was such as may still be met with in some old-fashioned houses, forming a very small room, and fitted with shelves and hooks whereon to hang dresses and cloaks. I had had a new door lately constructed of considerable thickness and power of resistance, with a strong patent lock and key, more for additional security in my absence than from any anticipation of requiring it when at home. While I was passing in and out of the closet, I contrived noiselessly to abstract the key, and afterwards to deposit it unobserved beneath my pillow. My ears were of course on the full strain, and from time to time I was sensible of the muffled sounds of the man's breathing, notwithstanding his evident struggles to suppress all such demonstrations, but probably the stifling atmosphere he had so long been inhaling under the bed was becoming by degrees almost unbearable.

At last, being quite ready to retire, with the exception of saying my prayers, I knelt down by my chair near the fire, and, contrary to my general custom, I uttered them aloud, I believe in a calm unbroken voice, adding to my usual

petitions the short collect in our Evening Service—"Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, oh Lord; and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the sake of Thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen." Then I again extinguished my candle—(as it happened, the only one), and got into bed. The room was now but partially lighted by the remains of the fire, and for the first time, since early childhood, the growing darkness was terrible to me. I knew that, not to arouse suspicion, I must be cautious of pretending to be asleep; too suddenly or too quickly, and for several minutes I purposely gave furious indications of being wide awake, by turning and returning on my pillow, coughing and so forth, till I thought I might safely lie still, and endeavour to breathe with the regularity of a peaceful slumber; and by degrees I simulated all its outward signs to the best of my ability. This, as I had anticipated, was the signal for my companion to change, his uncomfortable position; slowly and softly he emerged from his hiding-place, and commenced operations by lighting my candle at the fire. Next came the period of dreadful suspense—he approached me, flaring the flame before my closed eyes and leaning so near me that I could feel his breath upon my cheek—then, most horrible of all, he drew some sharp murderous instrument across my throat, the edge of the cold steel touching and scraping my skin. How I commanded myself to lie quiet and motionless during this ordeal, which must have lasted some two minutes or so, I know not, for it seemed to me more like a quarter of an hour in duration. But strength and courage, and even external composure, were given to me in my great necessity in answer to my prayers; and my relief may be imagined when the man turned away, seemingly satisfied of my being in a state of unconsciousness. Almost in that very moment it occurred to me that my maid had asked my permission that night to share the room of a fellow-servant at quite a different part of the house from her own, and I, with no foreshadowing of danger hanging over me, had consented, as the woman had been unwell that day, and might be glad of Louisa's assistance, which I had little expected to stand in such urgent need of myself before another two or three hours should be past. As it flashed across my mind that possibly she might not hear my bell, even if the successful accomplishment of my schemes so far should enable me to ring it, I all but screamed out in my terror and anguish; and I suppose a faint shriek must have escaped me, for the fellow hastily retraced his footsteps to my bedside, where he repeated the alarming performance already so fully rehearsed; however he was doubtless soon convinced by my entire stillness that I was not awake, for he made no attempt to injure me, but, after experimenting upon me afresh with the candle and the sharp implement, he retreated again in the direction of the closet.

I was now persuaded that I had but one foe to contend with, and this assurance was a great source of comfort and encouragement, for I had not been without apprehension of a confederate entirely concealed from my view, in which case I could not have hoped to come forth victorious from the unequal struggle. I ventured one hurried glance at the intruder, as he stood, with his back partially turned towards me, and the light shining on a young and rather handsome face; but that glance, instantaneous as it was, impressed me with the belief that I had seen him before, and then it dawned upon me that he was—or had been till quite lately—a 'follower' of my maid, whom I had endeavoured to dissuade from further encouragement of him, owing to the evil reports that were beginning to be current about him in our village, where he had taken up his abode as a stranger only a few months previously, his ostensible trade being that of a carpenter. Could it be that Louisa had been inveigled by her liking for this worthless Will Burton into aiding and abetting his designs, and that she was privy to this attempt of his? Such a notion might account for her request to change her sleeping quarters on this special occasion, and likewise for the information he seemed to possess of the locality in which my plate, as well as my jewellery, was kept, namely in and within my own room; perhaps, also he had thus learnt that I was richer in these articles and more worth the risk of plundering than most other single ladies in my position, from the kindness of the same aunt who had bequeathed to me the chief part of her fortune. But I dismissed the half-formed suspicion as a libel on the good and faithful girl, acknowledging to myself that he might have wormed much family history out of her during their courtship, without betraying that he was instigated by any worse motive than curiosity. All this passed through my mind with the rapidity of lightning, during the very brief interval between his leaving my bedside for the second time, and his fairly ensconcing himself, candle in hand, within the closet, the door of which he partly pulled to after him, but did not close it. I secured the key, and then, favoured by the still remaining light of the grate, I crept out of bed quite noiselessly, reached the closet-door, which I shut before Burton could turn round, and, as he had retreated to the shelf at the further end whereon I had designedly placed my dressing-case, I had just time to turn the key in the lock, while he hardly yet realized his situation in the face of such an unlooked-for move on the part of the enemy—just time, not a moment more, ere his kicks resounded from within, and his angry voice was raised in direful threats, oaths and imprecations.

I answered him not a word, but rushing to my bell, I rang it loudly and repeatedly, though, as I had feared, to no purpose. Those who know what heavy sleepers young servants habitually are, will not wonder that a bell, hung expressly to be heard in one room should fail to awaken them in another at the extremity of a long rambling passage. My housemaid had for several nights past been at her mother's in the village, to help in tending a sick sister, and I had little or no expectation of rousing the only man on the premises, who slept in a room over the stable. Any faint hope that the cook's slight ailment might have induced an unusual degree of restlessness in herself or her bedfellow was soon dispelled, and for the space of perhaps an hour I continued to ring vehemently every five minutes, until the rope gave way beneath my repeated and violent pulls, and I could pull no more. Meanwhile, Burton was kicking and pushing at the closet-door with all his might, uttering dreadful menaces, which I did not doubt he would execute, of murdering me the instant he should break through, and cursing his own folly and weakness in having spared my life when it was in his hands. The time wore slowly on—terribly to me—for I could not but believe that he must ultimately, with the strength of desperation, succeed in his efforts, and then I should find myself face to face with an enraged ruffian, and without chance or possibility of escape. The man taunted me with being also locked in, a circumstance of which I gathered from his expressions that he had only been made aware by my frantic, but necessarily ineffectual, struggles to open my own door with the closet key, and this ignorance on his part of my nocturnal practice proved to me the injustice of my passing misgiving that my poor Louisa was in league with him.

What more could I do? The fire, which I had no coals to replenish, was dying out, and the increasing obscurity added to the horrors of my forlorn condition, while it reminded me that if any further steps were delayed, they would soon be rendered impracticable by the total want of light. But what remained for me to attempt? The stormy wind bore to my ears the sound of the church clock, as it struck the hour of two. Suddenly I resolved to throw open the shutters, and so afford myself the last desperate resource of leaping out of the window, should I hear signs of the door yielding to the vehemence of Burton's unremitting blows and kicks; the latter, however, had fortunately been rendered less effectual by the absence of his heavy nailed boots, which he had left in a shed below, to obviate as much as possible any noise in ascending the stairs or in his after movements, otherwise I feel sure the panels must have been driven in. After awhile, the robber seemed to grow tired of this violent and fruitless exercise, for he became perfectly still, while gradually the darkness deepened through the room, and the weary interminable winter's night crept slowly on its course.

During this interval of silence and tranquillity which had succeeded to the incessant noises I fell into a strange state of semi-unconsciousness, the result, I think, partly of the benumbing influence of the cold upon my thinly-clad body, and partly of the weariness of mind consequent upon the excitement and strain of the last three hours. Events of days long gone by haunted me—one especially, a real occurrence in the life of an old friend, as bearing a sort of resemblance to my own adventure that night. She was sleeping soon after her confinement with the baby and the monthly nurse in the same room, when she heard her door softly opened; but this caused her little or no alarm, as she fancied that it must be the hour for the household to rise, and that one of the maid-servants was coming in for a light; and great, indeed, was her surprise and consternation at the spectacle of three men entering with stealthy footsteps. Her first impression was that she was dreaming, then that she was wandering from weakness, or that her head was disordered by her recent illness; but she was speedily convinced that it was no delusion under which she was labouring, when one of the burglars (known in the profession by the sobriquet of "Black Harry," from the mask he wore), approached the foot of her bed, and presenting a pistol at her, threatened to shoot her dead if she made the slightest disturbance. Like many another the woman of a calm, gentle, undemonstrative exterior, she was gifted with much fortitude and power of self-control, and her presence of mind did not desert her at this critical juncture, for while the men's backs happened to be turned, she signalled to the terrified nurse to reach her jewel box from the drawers which stood by the woman's bed, and to pass it on to her, and Mrs. D. then managed to secrete it under the clothes. I remember her telling me that her chief dread was lest the infant should wake and scream, and be murdered to still its cries. Mr. D., who was sleeping on the other side of the passage, was at last aroused by some noise proceeding from his wife's chamber, and came to the rescue; but though young and strong and vigorous, he was unable to offer any protracted resistance to such superior numbers, and after a brief but valiant struggle, he was forced to relinquish the unequal contest. Happily, the thieves decamped without inflicting serious injury on any one, and, being subsequently arrested and brought to trial, they were recommended by Mr. D. to mercy on the plea of their having abstained from bloodshed, and (according to the custom of that period as regarded notorious criminals on whom capital punishment was not inflicted), they were transported. Mrs. D., the friend of whom I speak,