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LORD DACRE OF GILSLAND OR

THE BISING IN THE NORTH

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF ELIZABETH.

By E. M. Stewart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Hark | the revenue flappes hys wyng, In the briered dell below:

Hark ! the dethe owle doth sing

To the nyght mares as they go. CHATTERTON,

It was on the seventh day Gertrude's imprisonment that Euphrasia sat in one of the lower apartments of the house holding deep converse with a tall stately looking cavalier. Refreshments were on the table that stood between them, and the gentleman wore a riding cloak, as if only just arrived at the house, or now about to depart. The hands of Euphrasia rested on the table, and

tears were stealing down her face. "This is a mere weakness," said her companion.

ham thou didst liberate Lucy Fenton."

"Even so," replied Euphrasia. "I have no hor rible ties to urge me on to vice or virtue at Sir Philip's will. 'Tis a poor weak youth, that might hold himself my debtor even that I released the Dacre had risked its dearest hopes. A bitter sigh maiden. His vice is vanity, and conscience pricks him when his vanity is full. He would have destroyed the girl for very vanity, and wept afterwards Catholic School Books and School that he had destroyed her. Truly I served the silly Catholic School Books and School that he had destroyed her. Truly I served the silly Requisites, used in the different Colleges, Convents, Separate

"He renders you but slender thanks for the service," replied the cavalier; " but the dayswears on and I must away. Since the Earls have fied, I had fain hoped to bear the damsel hence; but while this rash Dacre blows anew the spark of discord, such attempt were unwise; and now must I back with all speed, to watch in secret the movements of our blunt Hunsdon, whose tough, unmanageable hon-esty may find too much that will jump with its own humor in the romance of that would be knight-errant, my Lord Morden, who may take my word that his share in the escape of the fair Gertrude had not passed unrewarded, but that it happened to chime somewhat with mine own inclinations." "Go you, then so soon ?" said Euphrasia.

"Aye," returned the gentleman, filling with wine two silver goblets that stood upon the table.

Euphrasia, absorbed in her sad thoughts, had not perceived that during their conversation he had dexterously let fall into one of these goblets a small quantity of powder. She waved her hand in token of refusal as he now pushed the goblet towards her.

" Ungracious churl," said the cavalier, " will you not pledge the stirrup cup ?"

Thus arged, Euphrasia smiled mournfully, and

accepting the goblet, she swallowed its contents. A fearful, almost convulsive, smile played for a moment about the lips of the cavalier as she put the empty vessel upon the table. He seemed in sudden haste to begone, and, hurriedly bidding her farewell, he turned to leave the apartment. At the door, however, he hesitated, and then said. "You will spare the fellow Ralph for, a few hours; surely, Euphrasia, you can for one evening attend upon the damsel."

" It is a task which likes me not," she answered petulantly; "I care not to approach either that girl or the chamber of her dwelling; but be it even as you will. Can I choose ? are not the evils of my fate beyond my own control ? that which you will have I not always done?"

"Nay, Euphrasia, who knows, amid the chances of this life, if I may ever ask a favour of you more." The woman, in her abstraction, noticed not the indefinable expression which again crossed his countenance: but listlessly repeating. "As you will, as you will," she rose to follow him to the door; but he declined this proffered attention.

"No, never," answered her companion. "But, main unmolested. Many other anxious thoughts Euphrasia, didst thou not play false with Sir Philip? had Gertrude too, her beloved father, her cousin, Assuredly on the night when I bore thee from Elt- what was their fate? And Lord Dacre-success she feared, from the nature of that summons which had arrived at Raby just before she was torn from her friend Blanche, had not attended the enterprise on burst from the heart of Gertrude at these thoughts. That cause had ever been the loadstone of her

own heart, but perhaps she felt in the present instance less for her own disappointment than for that of Lord Dacre. And what would become of her now, for what horrible fate was she reserved should she never see Lord Dacre more? That was a question which recurred with an incessant and painful repetition to Gertrude's mind.

The strange demeanor, too, of Eupbrasia, fur-nished her with much matter for meditation, and, as her eyes rested on the picture which so strangely resembled her own father, and she recollected the words of Euphrasia, while she compared her face with that represented in the portrait, she became convinced that John Harding had at some period of his life crossed the path of that extraordinary female.---There was nothing in the nature of Euphrasia's expressions to repudiate this idea, for though he had over been tenderness itself to her, Gertrude knew that in the cause of virtue her father could be severe.

The miserable remains, too, that were concealed in the closet, often did she shudder as she remembered them ; the dagger hid there with the skeleton spoke manifestly of murder. Such a train of horrible associations did the near vicinity of such an object awaken that all the innocence of Gertrude's heart, combined with her unusual power of mind, was required to enable her to support her situation, or perhaps even, when the dim twilight closed in, or through the silent watches of the night, to preserve her reason,

After Ralph had withdrawn on this the day that she had completed a week's imprisonment, Ger-trude seated herself at the little casement of her apartment, her single and melancholy amusement to mark the mists creeping along the lonely glen,

or watch the eddying clouds as they scudded over the surface of the wintry sky. Seated at the casement, she drew forth the ruby

ring of Lord Dacre, for since her flight from London she had worn it not on her finger, but as an amulet, next her heart. Long and earnestly did she regard this ring, her only and most precious treasure, and when she returned it to its wonted hiding place it was wetted with tears,

She now turned her eyes towards the glen, a soft summer kind of sunlight on this day threw a yellow tint over its turfy knolls, and danced upon the dark boughs of some fir trees which grew luxuriantly near the house, while it threw into bold relief all the fantastic masses of rock which overhung the river, whose course down the glen Gertrude could distinguish from her casement. Now the glow of the sunbeams touched the sharp, bare rocks with a red or saffron coloring, or darting among the woods which fringed their ledges, contrasted with the "For Heaven's sake, whoever you are, if it be in "For Heaven's sake, whoever you are, if it be in "Are, even so," replied Euphrasis, something of "Malice flashing through the film, which was fast gathering over her once brilliant eyez. "Thine

Heaven for her present escape. Meantime the sun- blance, and as the astonished girl intently regarded beams began to stretch in longer lines athwart the glen; then they gradually grew paler, till the sober grey tints of evening settled down upon the landscape and threw a darker horror on the brown rocks and overhanging woods.

Gertrude had closed the casement, and had sat for some time watching the flame lcap and play about a billet of wood which she had just thrown upon her fire, when suddenly she was startled by a loud and heartrending shriek, which seemed as though it were uttered in one of the lower apartments. A sound so horrible-so expressive of an extremity of agony-she had never before heard, and she started from her seat and stood panting in expectation that it would be repeated. It sunk, however, in a long,

low wail, which was succeeded by several heavy groans, and these gradually died into silence.

Gertrude glanced fearfully about her chamber; the evening had set in, and in spite of the unusual fineness of the day, it was suddenly and unusually dark, the sky having that kind of blackness by which at another season of the year she would have foretold a coming thunder-storm. That dismal shrick had been uttered by a female voice, and though she could not recognize the tones, Gertrude did not doubt that the sufferer was Euphrasia. Believing that the men in his employ, or even Lord Leicester himself, was capable of almost any atrocity, Gertrude would have resolved that the unhappy female was suffering some extremity of ill-usage at their hands, but a total silence reigned in the house; she could not hear either voice or step, and had in-deed reason to believe, now that the Earl and Ralph had departed, that Euphrasia and herself were the only inhabitants of the house. Ill as had been the conduct of this woman towards herself, Gertrude would not have hesitated a moment to tender her any assistance which might alleviate such as was betokened by that borrible shrick; but she was a prisoner in her chamber, the door of which being locked and bolted on the outside; hence she was compelled to remain there listening in nervous agitation for the repetition of that frightful sound.

Now, too, as ever in the still evening hour, the thought of her dread companion stole over her mind, and shook even her firm nerves. She rose hastily, and kindled a lamp which was always left upon her table, and then resumed her seat by the fire, every other thought absorbed for the time in the recollection of that agonizing shrick. It might have been half an hour from the time when the scream had rung through the house that she was again startled by the sound of a heavy, leaden kind of foot, apparently in the act of ascending the stairs. There was something strange and horrible in that lingering footfall, still recurring after a pause of from two to three minutes. At length the stairs seemed passed, and Gertrude heard that heavy, painful step advance along the passage which led to her chamber. No groan or shriek of anguish was heard -nothing but the dull foot, which she shuddered as

it she fancied that the curl of the lip betrayed an au-dacity, a lack of that willness in sin of which she believed the Earl to be now a perfect master. There was an expression of sincere compassion in the countenance of Gertrude as the miniature of Leicester fell from her hand, and she looked upon the face of the dying woman, whom she believed to be his victim.

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"You pity me!" said Euphrasia, and as she spoke the maiden was obliged to bend low, in order to catch her weak and trembling accents.

"Aye, poor unhappy one !" answered Gertrude; "tell me only how I may relieve you."

"Alas, maiden, this miscrable world is fast fleeting from my sight, and dim and threatening does on my frightful doom. There was poison, maiden, in the draught he gave.

"Who gave ?" gasped Gertrude.

"That Leicester gave," replied the miserable Euphrasia, rallying with the very strength of death, and grasping the hands of the muiden with a frightful energy, while rage, remorse, and terror agitated. her countenance.

"Hark! hark! damsel, to my hideous tale, and then you will leave me to my fate, you will shrink. from me as from the poisonous asp."

"Alas, unhappy woman," said Gertrude, "what, tale hast thou to tell, or where is the heart that would not pity thy condition ?"

"Within thy father's breast," replied Euphrasia, in a hollow tone. "Oh, ell my worst of misery and guilt, do I not owe to that merciless heart, so stern, so insulting in its virtue."

"Speak!" said Gertrude, with a frenzy almost equalling that of the miserable sufferer before her." Speak, woman, what hast thou to do with my dear father ?

Euphrasia had fallen back upon the cushions exhausted by her late violence, her eyes closed, and her breath was so faintly heaved that Gertrude thought she was even then dying-dying with the secret of her connection with John Harding trembling undisclosed on her lip. Oh, with what an intensity of agony did Gertrudo gaze upon her livid features, yet preserving all their chiselled beauty amid the dark shadows of the most horrible of deaths. Once more her eyes unclosed. "Oh " she faintly murmured. "In this dreadful hour must I be the herald of my sins-must I hear yet another voice? Commend me to despair. Thou hast a valorous heart, Gertrude Harding, says he whose cruelty is that of a coward ; who drugs the cup, and deals with daggers in the dark. He told me so, but I will prove it now. Shrink not then from the sister of your father, though he cursed and spurned her twenty years ago. Oh, he might have saved, but he chose rather to urge me on my doom."

"Thou wretched: woman 1" spied Gartrude, "the paramour of Leicester, the sister of John. Harding !"

"I pray you, why should a few days residence in this old house have touched your spirit with so deep a melancholy. Besides, was it not your own proposal to come hither? I thought your heart was made of sterner stuff."

chide, because you thought that there could not be as she watched through that narrow casement the even a moment's compunction in my wickedness. I remember, indeed, that it was mine own proposal to come hither; I was myself deceived in mine own heart-I thought not it could so much tremble to day had passed on which she had not shed them ; the touch of compassion or remorse-that heart where hideous delight it hath been for years to exult over the ruin of all that was lovely and estimable in woman."

"Dreams, idle dreams, Euphrasia !" replied the cavalier, "bred from the shadows in this dismal house. It irks me that for a few days more you must, with the damsel, remain its inmate ; but the fiery Dacre is abroad, and bodies of his armed vassals traverse the country. It were unsafe to send you to Carlisle at present; more secure is your retreat in this lonely and long deserted dwelling; but be of good heart, soon will we again to Loudon. You now. Gnee even, as Euphrasia wept, a thought of glen had ceased to excite in her any extraordinary have served me right faithfully in this matter of prayer crossed her mind. She had not prayed for surprise. On the preceding evening, indeed, she the damsel, nor shall you find me ungratoful as of yore."

" I pray you set that damsel free," said Euphrasia-"Set her free !" cried the cavalier with an accent of astonishment. "Good Euphrasia, thou are surely distraught. Bethink thyself, Euphrusia, with how much exultation of revenge didst thou contemplate the captivity of that maid, and dost thou now ask me to set her free? Bethink whose child is this damsel whom thou wouldst save."

"I have bethought me," replied Euphrasia. " Oh, not for years, long years, has this heart known such a throb of delight-thrilling even to its core-as when you told me whose child was to be betrayed. The tongue that taunted my repentance-that urged me back into the gulf of guilt-seemed then to pour again into my cars its merciless reproach ; the eye in which I had in vain sought the ray of compassion gazed sternly on my sufferings again. Then when you told me who was to be your victim, and these things rushed upon my mind, I bore the anguish which their memory wrought with the promise of a near revenge."

"And do you now turn from this revenge even when the cup of its promise is tendered brimming to your lips ?" enquired the cavalier.

"Ay," returned Euphrasis, " for I have grown sick at the draught. Dim and sad forebodings, the sha-dows of a coming doom, oppress my mind. I dare not look upon the girl. But once have I approached her chamber, and the holy and quiet pride of her eyes then filled me with a loathing of myself. The better part does she seem to have of the severe and heing who mocked me in my early fall. cruel All the dignity of virtue, without its sharp acidity, is hers"

"Truly," remarked the cavaller, "thou art becoming a doctor, Euphrasia; who would not marvel when virtue makes the theme of thy discussion ! But may I not fear to trust thy guardage of the maiden since thy conscience hath become so nice?"

"I never bruke my word with thee," replied Eu-

"The day is chill," he observed; " rest you here Euphrasia, for you have need."

With these words he quitted the room. A few minutes afterwards the sound of horse's hoofs was heard without, and Euphrasia, looking up, beheld her late companion pass the window, followed by "Ah !" replied Euphrasia, bitterly, "I will not Ralph Adams. Her eyes again grew dim with tears figure of the cavalier, as it appeared and disappeared among the windings of the glen. Tears were common to Euphrasia; for long, long years scarce a but not such tears as those which she now wept Tears of terror, of disappointed passion, of fierce remorse, had been hers; but there was something soothing in those she now wept; they seemed to give back to the guilty and miserable woman a portion of the inneceuce of her youth, and her heart softened to the holiness of hope-to the veriest lowliness of repentance. It seemed even as if these words of loathing and contempt which had in her youth stung her heart to such a bitterness of hatred towards the being who had uttered them—it seem-ed as if such words would calm her wounded spirit

> Meanwhile, alone and in captivity, Gertrude Harding was borne up by the sweet self-reliance of a righteous spirit, she could not believe that heaven would abandon to be the victim of vice one who had ever endeavored to tread in the path of charity and kindness. Since the morning after her arrival at this lonely dwelling she had not seen Euphrasia. On her entering the room on that morning the girl, urged by a natural curiosity, had enquired who was the original of the portrait, which hung over the mantle-piece. A dark color rose even into the woman's brow at this inquiry, and seizing Gertrude violently by the wrists, she gazed esgerly from her features to the picture, as though she endeavored to trace a resemblance between them. Then bursting into a wild laugh, she released her hold, and exclaimed :

twenty years before,

"No, no, thou art not like; there is too much softness, to much mercy in thy face. Thou wouldst not trample on the wretched, girl? I do think thou wouldest not,"

And thus Euphrasia had quitted the room, and throughout the seven weary days of her imprison-ment Gertrude had not again beheld her. Her meals were regularly served by the fanatic Ralph, from whose tongue she suffered all that malise could invent; and more than once was she taunted with her futile escape in the ruin.

"But the Lord, maiden, the Lord, hath now delivered thee into my hands; then submit to thy fate with a goodliness of patience, for it is vain to

wrestle with the judgments of the Lord." Thus spoke Ralph Adams to Gertrude on the morning of that day, on which Euphrasia held, the conversation which we have detailed. To this kind of language custom had now made Gertrude almost indifferent, and she could have borne that, and even her imprisonment, with fortitude had she not looked to some future and greater evil than even. such a loss of her liberty, for she could not believe and taking their way down the glen. Eagerly she that the person by whose orders she had been imphrasia, and there was a doep and nacemplaining prime d, whether it were Lord Leicester or any every dread for the future absorbed in a feeling of been taken many years before ; the pride of youth the last brief summons will be been and in a feeling of the future is than of beauty was in that stilking resem. Bo time for it is the last brief summons will be been and in a feeling of the future is than of beauty was in that stilking resem.

black and leafless branches of the trees, the deep shining verdure of the arbutus, and its delicate

branches of pink flowers. So fine was the day that it tempted Gertrude to open her little casement. Though it was now the beginning of January the softness of spring was in the gentle breeze that came whispering down the glen, and on the sky the clouds had assumed the azure tint which they wear in that loveliest of seasons, occasionally flecked with a feathery-looking streak of white.

While Gertrude thus lingered at the casement she perceived a tall man issue from a side door of the house; her heart grew sick, for his large mantle and the feathers drooping in his hat could not conceal from her the Earl of Leicester.

A suffocating sensation seized her, and she sunk back in her chair, overcome with horror at this realization of her worst fears. When had he arrived, thought Gertrude, probably on that day, but there had been such a constant coming and going of the armed men who had first accompanied her to the house, that the sound of a horse's hoof in the had seen a party of six soldiers take their way up the glen, and thought that Ralph and herself, with Euphrasia, were the only persons left in the house the noisy hilarity of the other men having frequent ly ascended to her lonely chamber, while on that evening all had been quiet.

The long ivy wreaths which partly overhung her casement enabled Gertrude now to watch the Earl without being observed, and as she looked through them she perceived that he was joined by Ralph Adams. They conversed in a low tone ; but snatched of their speech ascended to the casement; the first words which she caught were those of the Earl. "Nay, I dare not at present move her to Carlisle that meddling Morden is with Lord Hunsdon. I believe, indeed, his journey to the North has had little other purpose than mine own-the discovery of this fair damsel, though he affects to join the army."

Something was then said by Ralph which escaped the ear of Gertrude, and she heard only the latter portion of Lord Leicester's reply; for the casement was a high one, so high, indeed, as to preclude all hope of an escape from it.

"You will return by midnight," concluded Lord Leicester. "It irks me that we are driven on such a necessity; but she will be secure until then .-Hasten, for we can lose no time."

Gertrude's heart beat somewhat more freely, for she began to hope that now, at least, the Earl would not molest her with his presence. In reply to some remark made by Ralph, he observed-

" Nay, she knows it not; it is a bold and secret undertaking of mine own. My faithful Ralph, I will be here with the first-light of the morning, and then to London again in all speed." WAt this point of their conversation the Earl and his companion moved from beneath the window, and, to the inexpressible relief of Gertrude, she, be held them both mounted a few minutes afterwards, watched them till they were out of sight, and then, every dread for the future absorbed in a feeling of

my power to assist you, hasten to withdraw the fastening of this dreadful door."

Hereupon a dismal sound, something between a sob and a groan, passed through the gallery, and there seemed an endeavor of the staggering feet to approach more quickly. They reached her door, and its bolt was forced back in the staple; then there was a heavy sound as of some person falling across the threshold.

"Oh, Heaven !" exclaimed Gertrude, " what is to be done ?" for she now felt certain that some unhappy and suffering being was in want of such assist ance as might be in her power to afford. " Poor un fortunate " she continued, "it is not possible for you to unlock the door,"

A renewed groan was her only reply, and the hnmane Gertrude snatching a knife from the table, endeavored to force back the lock. This effort on her part, however, seemed to revive the courage of the sufferer without; an apparently uncertain and trembling hand passed over the door, till it rested on the key, which was with some difficulty turned in the lock. The door opened inwardly with a latch, which Gertrude speedily raised, but on her opening the door an object presented itself from which, at the moment, she recoiled in horror. Euphrasia, looking more like an animated corpse than haman being, sat crouched upon the threshold .--Her long, black hair had escaped from its covering, and hung in loose masses over her features, save that about her mouth and fixed eyes there was the purple look of convulsion. Her clenched hands. which Gertrude grasped, were icy cold, and such a coldness too was on her brow, on which were fast gathering the dews of death. Gertrude found that she was incapable either to walk or rise, and with much difficulty she dragged her into the room. A universal shiver now seized Euphrasia's frame, and her teeth chattered as in an ague fit; to lift her head on the bed was an effort beyond the slight measure of Gertrude's strength, but she stretched her within the genial low which spread round the fireplace, and supported her head upon pillows and cushions. She now chafed her hands and temples, and warming a portion of some wine which had been left in her chamber, she succeeded in forcing a small quantity down Euphrasia's throat. Partly revived by these attentions, the latter betrayed some symptoms of returning consciousness, her features became less convulsed, and Gertrude fancied that she could discover a slight warmth diffusing itself over the chill hands, which she still held between her own. At length the eyes of Euphrasia lost that glassy stare which Gertrude had been terrified to look upon, and she fixed them upon the damsel with an expression which had in it both melancholy and recollection. The violence of her agony seemed past, but she was now powerless as the new born babe. She put her hand towards a gold chain which hung about her neck, but that hand refused its office, and fell as if paralysed by her side. Gertrude perceiving this, unloosed her boddice, in the folds of which the extremity of the chain was concealed she, then discovered that a miniature was attached to that chain, and, as the light of the fire flashed over it she recognized the features of Lord Leicester. A glance told, Gertrude that the portrait had been taken many years before : the pride of youth,

father's spirit in thee now. Spurn mo, then, dying, as he did when I was betrayed, or own that he had a cruel heart. I vowed even to leave the loverwhom I adored-I asked him only for silence, that. I might hide my shame; and he could refuse me that poor boon, he spurned me from his feet, and slew my father with the dreadful tale, and blazoned it in the cars of my youngest brother."

"Woman ! woman !" shriek3d Gertrude, "die not with these black falsehoods on your lips. I will, not believe you are my father's sister."

"Believe that portrait, then-the portrait of his. father," said Euphrasia, pointing to the picture which had excited Gertrude's attention from its. extraordinary resemblance to John Harding. Enphrasia continued-" But I sought some vengeauce. for his scorn, and Leicester came hither to repay my. wrongs. Hark, maiden," she said, in a whispering tone: "he slew my younger brother as he slept.--Alus, alas! my stornest tyrant escaped the blow. He escaped, for whom it was designed."

Gertrude now started back in horror, and Enphrasia now clapping her hands together, burst into. frantic laugh.

"Said I not it would be so," she exclaimed, "that. you too would shrink from me in disgust? But scorn me not, proud maiden, for thou mayest live to be Lord Leicester's victim yet. And, oh, that I might live to see thee so; I then were quitted of those wrongs thy barbarous father wrought.

Gertrude had shrunk appalled from the side of her misguided aunt. Broken and disjointed as was her horrible tale, there was too much reason to believe its truth. And that skeleton in the closet was. then, the remains of the murdered brother of Euphrasia. A renewed torpor had again fallen upon her; and as she lay stretched motionless, and apparently speechless, Gertrude heard the rising wind come wailing down the glen. Presently a sharp shower of hailstones rattled against the narrow casement. The sound seemed to rouse the dying Euphrasia. She lifted her head and looked fearfully around the apartment : and as the pale light of the lamp fell upon her countenance, Gertrude perceived legibly written there the characters of fast approaching death. A spirit, was about to busit the bonds of mortality—a soul to be summoned to the judgment seat. What dreadful and mysterious agents might then throng that narrow chamber, though unseen. Awfully sensible that she was not alone, Gertrude sunk in the very agony of prayer upon her knees.

"Hark!" said Euphrasia; and at that moment, loud even above the fury of the storm, Gertrude heard what seemed to be a heavy blow upon the framework of the casement. "Do you hear that?" shrieked the dying woman. That summons is for me. Oh, for a week, a day, an hour of life!" Then her brain wandered. "Why do you bring me here? Was it not in this room, at the midnight hour-Ob; no, I cannot lie upon that bed ; behold; there is a blood-stain upon the sheets !" The herror-stricken Gertrude now drow from her bosom a crucifix which had been given to her by Blanche Norton. She held it before the failing eyes of the dying woman ; she grasped her clammy hand, and strove to speak of mercy and of hope.