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## THE DOOM OF WARNHAM.

### CHAPTER IV—(Continued.)

Whatever were his thoughts or what his musings, he seemed to be tranquil and happy. To him was given, as it is always given to such afflicted creatures, when religion trains them, a great faith; and it might be that, with that poetic fancy which supplies for them the want of every other faculty with its sweet grace and heaven-born bliss, he might have been walking by the 'eternal streams' with the soul of the dead. Entranced he was in sweet and changing visions that flitted and formed in his mind with varying shape and beauty the destiny of the departed spirit, and hours might have fled over him in this musing, when suddenly he started and seemed to listen intently. A moaning gust of the wind around the house appeared to deaden the sound he desired to catch and criticise, for he waved his hand impatiently, and muttered between his teeth—

'Hish-sh sh!'

The noisy gust lulled, and again intently Phildy listened.

'Ay,' said he, as if in answer to a doubt; 'ay, I knew it; Charley—that's what she used to call him—Charley is coming. O vo, O vo! she won't welcome him at the door again, as she used. Hist! now is the time to punish him for the blow I saw him give her wamp, and the cruel word worse than the blow. Though she wouldn't let me touch him if she lived—What is that? what is that? He owes her something now for all the peace and pleasure he robbed from her young heart; ay, an' her father's, too—her father's, too. He owes her more than he can ever pay; but he'll pay some iv id by quieting him, by telling him 'purty Nancy' was his wife. I saw id—saw them married, an' she told me that she was a real lady, near a princess, or something that a-way. Hist! he's at the door.'

A step at the entrance stopped the soliloquy of Phildy, and striding through the hall he heard the new-comer. With a rapid spring, Phildy got behind the huge-side of the door. The handle turned, and with a wild cry of surprise a young man bounded forward to the bedside—a wild laugh announced the presence of another in the death room, and the strong arms of Phildy were in an instant clasped around the stranger. Thus caught, the stranger struggled in the grip of his unexpected captor; but he struggled in vain. With all the strength of his herculean frame, Phildy held him fast. He might as well have freed himself from a giant, as deliver himself by any effort of his own from the grasp that closed on him like a vice. In ignorance of who held him so strongly, after a few vain attempts to get loose, the stranger groaned in bitterness of spirit, as he asked—

'Who holds me?'

'That's id,' said Phildy; 'you're reasonable at last, Charley; you know me,' he continued, letting the young man free, and standing before him, 'an' you know her?'

'I do—I do!' replied the stranger.

'That's your wife,' Phildy went on, 'your wife; I know id; but I know too that you bruk her heart, and sent her to heaven afore her time. An' look, Charley; I always took you for a rascal, and an imp; and see,' said he, whilst a ferocious expression of hate darkened his face with the most gloomy of shadows—the presence of anger in a mind uncontrolled by aught except instinct,—'see, I'd strangle you now, tear you limb from limb, as a lion id tear a lamb, if she wasn't there now.'

He raised his voice with terrifying menace as he went on with his threats; the veins of his forehead swelled and stood out in knots upon his brow; his neck, rising bare and brawny with the loose rolling collar of his shirt, grew purple with the rush of blood to his brain; his hands were clenched; the muscles of his arms showed in their tension, as they were braced by his excitement, through the covering of his clothes; and his whole appearance indicated such murderous purpose that the stranger cowered before the truculent aspect of Phildy Lee. He looked

furtively around for a weapon; he could see none. He moved his hand towards his breast.

'Shtop,' said Lee, 'shtop! move a hand now, and the devils 'll rejoice in the deed I'll do; tar—he sunk his voice to a hissing whisper—'I'll kill you, an' send you to your place amongst them, iv her eyes wor to open, an' her tongue to pray to save you. See now,' he went on; 'I'm sparin' you of a mercy that isn't my own; id's her prayer—the prayer of that poor saint to th' Eternal—that stops my hand. She prayed that way afore once; id was the night you struck her an' cursed her. I was looking through that window. I ken in then through that doore out side to kill you. Her pale face was like a pain; it was so bitter to feel for its sorra. An' she met me and saw I meant blood; an' she prayed and my arms wor like an infant's, they wor so wake. Bud to-night I don't hear her voice, though God does, and He stops my hand from murder. Yet id was a pity my sowl id be risked in that a way, an' her life lost. She was the fairest, the heartiest, and the happiest crathur that ever lived ontel she met you. The fust evening you put the *comether* on her in that chance way, you tuk for doin' id; there was a darkness put upon her life. Thin ken your talk of luv—luv that you tol' her was burning up your life. Oh, bud id burned hers. As lightning id blast a fair young sapling in the green forest, so you went on, went on—made her desave her poor old father, an' you desaving her all the time to her early doom. You tol' her that she'd be a grate lady if she'd be silent and marry you to saycret; bud that your frinds id be powerful angry, and desthroy you iv they knew id thin. An' didn't she believe you, the poor thrusting girl; didn't she believe all you'd say as iv you bewitched her? Didn't you coax her from her home, he pursued, raising his voice 'didn't you bring her here when she was married be the poor old priest? that I know. An' didn't I hear you, after all that, tell her it was no marriage; that you were a Prodestan' and a lord; and that the laws made her—what, you villen? what?'

At this instant, the door behind Phildy opened, and Peter Verdon appeared. Phildy stopped his utterances at the noise, and looked for the cause of the interruption. The old man tripped upon the carpet, unused as he was to its luxury, and staggering came to his knees. Phildy rushed over to raise him, and as he lifted him, the report of a pistol rang in his ear. A sharp stinging sensation across his scalp stunned him for a moment, and he dropped upon the floor; but a wild cry from old Verdon roused him.

'What ails you, mather!' exclaimed Lee.

'Id's all over, Phildy,' said the old man; see here!'

The man looked, and the blood was running in a torrent from Verdon's neck. The ball that had grazed Phildy's scalp, and only inflicted a flesh wound, had glanced upward, and struck the miller in a vital part. The large arteries of the neck were cut across, and he was bleeding to death.

'Oh, wirra, wirra!' said Lee, looking towards where he had seen the stranger standing last. A cloud of smoke was in the spot; but a current of air unrolled its volumes, and, the open window told how he had escaped.—At this moment, too, the footfall of a horse in rapid motion on the carriage-drive without conveyed the fact of the escape of the stranger to Phildy's ear. He groaned in the torture of his baffled rage.

'I'm dying, Phildy,' said the old miller; 'lay me on the ground; an'—an', when I go, put us both—Nancy an' me—together in the clay. It's well, oh, its very well. An' a mercy out of the heart of God I'm goin' so soon to meet thin I lost—pray for me, Phildy, fur—I cannot pray for myself somehow; and gi' me some wather, Phildy—some wather, for I'm wake, and my head is dizzy, and my eyes are dim. O my God, pardon—pardon—Phildy stop the mill, for the kiln-fire is almost out, an' the work is—lift me, Phildy, an' let me see Nancy—light—light, till I look at my *girlsen*—oh, light—the kiln—is out—an' the work—over—over—lay me—'

There was a sigh, a struggle, a shiver that lasted some moments, and the father of Nancy

Verdon stood before the judgment seat of God, where his child had been so recently before himself.

All this was many a year before the storm that startled the story-teller in the Warnham Arms.

### CHAPTER V.

We left the strange visitor, after his brief stay at the country hotel, striding along the road to Warnham Castle. He heeded neither the wind, nor rain, nor lightning, as he walked quickly onward and got over the road that lay between himself and his destination without a pause.—When he reached the gate where *Jemmy McCabe* the huntsman was delayed so much to his chagrin, the storm had lulled; but after trying for some time in vain to attract the attention of the inmates of the lodge to admit him, he looked around for some means of entrance. The clambering ivy, stretched up the high wall by strong tendrils, suggested his course at once. He tried to cross the barrier by its means, and was not long before he succeeded. Having gained entrance in this manner, a step or two brought him to the door of the lodge, and a thundering knock announced his application for admission. Footfalls were soon heard along the passage, and the voice of Hugh Dalton questioned the stranger, 'Who is there?'

'You shouldn't want to know my name,' was the reply. 'Lord Charles Warnham ought to be no stranger to Hugh Dalton.'

'Lord Charles Warnham,' the keeper echoed back, flinging the door wide. 'Lord Charles Warnham,' he repeated, holding a lantern, with the glare full in the face of the new-comer.

'Yes, myself; come back, too, with scant welcome.'

'Your face my lord, it would take time to know in that guise; but the voice is yours.'

'Ay, the voice is his,' broke from strange guttural tones behind the nobleman. 'Ha, ha, ha.'

Lord Charles turned as he heard the sound, but in the thick darkness he could discern nothing.

'What's that, Dalton?' he said quickly.

'Oh, come in, my lord,' answered the man; 'it's only a poor madman we lately noticed about this part; he stops mostly in the woods round Warnham, or in the empty stables at the castle. He comes down here sometimes of a night, and raps at the door to ask for food, but he never comes inside.'

'He has an ugly laugh that reminds me of some one or other whom I forget now. I'll not go in, Dalton; you must leave me at the castle to-night.'

'They have no room aired for your lordship—'

'Oh, that's no matter,' broke in the nobleman; 'I've roughed it too long at sea and on land—amongst civilization and savagery—to fear damp sheets or an unaired room. I came home to this infernal place—not that I care to stay here—but something drove me, and I am here. Come, Dalton, come.'

To hear was to obey; and they set forward together. As the peer and his servant walked along, for some time he was moody. At length he broke the silence:

'I'm not growing young, Dalton,' he said, 'and 'wicked Ralph's' race is likely enough to end with wicked Charles. What a career has mine been! and you have had a good hand in shaping it.'

'Me, my lord,' said Dalton.

'Yes, you! Who pandered to my evil passions as you did, and cheered me on in that road that, for its memories now, looks like to end in Gehenna? Who told me, against my conscience—for I had a conscience—a remnant of a conscience, at least—to marry the miller's daughter? and then, when my extravagance was terrified by the muster-roll of my debts, urged me to cast her off—because it was safe, as she was a Catholic,—and prompted me to marry an heiress, to retrieve my ruined house? Do you remember all that occurred after that? Do you remember how, half maddened with brandy, you made me go down to the shooting-lodge and tell

her of my determination? Do you remember how I went, and—brute that I was—when she fainted at the harsh announcement, let her live or die? Do you remember how I heard she was gone—fled—lost, and how I said she would come back? Do you remember how I rode down here some nights after, and you could not be found to accompany me, and I went alone, to see her? My God! to see her!—see her like an accuser before me; and then to close my ill-deeds towards her with murder! Do you remember that, and remember my flight and—no, I only remember the twelve years of sin since—sin whose retribution is despair! Hugh Dalton, you have a bad memory.'

'No, my lord, I have not,' answered his companion; 'I remember that every evil of your lordship's life arose from your own head-strong ungovernable will.'

'Well, that's good,' said the nobleman. 'It has consolation in it to whitewash Hugh Dalton, at least. But we are at the door; knock, and rouse them to their duty.'

We need not delineate the startled welcome given to Lord Warnham by the two old servants of his house—remnants of a splendid retinue. They were anxious to accommodate him with comfort, but pleaded the want of notice as their excuse for every shortcoming.

'Light a fire in the study—a good roaring fire; bring me a bottle of the old Warnham port; get me an easy chair, and don't mind a bedroom for this night.'

'Throth, I believe your lordship is right.—The study was the only room in the castle kept constantly warmed with a fire in your lordship's absence. The books would have been destroyed only for it,' was *Jemmy* the huntsman's answer; 'an' there is the lavias of a fire in it we lit this morning.'

'Lead the way with a light then,' said the nobleman; 'the sooner I am located the better. Come, Dalton,' he added.

A half-hour was hardly gone by when the study presented the aspect of comfort in the presence of a huge fire, whose flames flickered and roared up the ample chimney. Seated in an easy chair, half-reclining, half-propped up, was Lord Charles. A goblet of wine was placed on a table drawn close to his chair, and a half-emptied bottle incrustated with sawdust, in which it had lain in the cellar during twenty years, stood near it. Hugh Dalton was leaning against the mantelpiece on the other side, not presuming to take the liberty of sitting down in the presence of his master.

'So that is the way it was discovered who they were?' he asked, as if in reference to conversation they had been carrying on,—'the blood at the lodge and the track of the cart-wheels from it to the mill at Rye Water? It's a bad explanation, Dalton. It must have been the story of that idiot Phildy, that shipped the martingale.'

'Well, my lord,' said the other, 'he was tried for it, at all events. It seems he knew your lordship only as Charley—'

'Ay, she kept the secret well,' said Warnham, musingly.

'The jury thought he had killed the old man himself, his tale was so extraordinary; but they were not satisfied, and they found him not guilty, but got him sent to a madhouse. I never heard what became of him since.'

'I wish they'd hanged him,' said the peer; 'he put me in mortal terror of my life, at all events,—what no man ever did before or since. What noise is that?' he asked.

Whilst they were talking, the door, which was not wholly shut, noiselessly opened and a figure glided through towards the upper end of the apartment. A large folding screen, drawn round the place where the nobleman was seated, concealed the stealthy intruder from his eyes; and Hugh Dalton, as he stood,—his back towards the entry to the room,—could not see him without turning wholly round. The noise was caused by the new-comer attempting to conceal himself behind the curtains that hung down from the casing of the window. Dalton heard the noise too as well as his master, and looked in the direction from whence it came.

'It's a draught of wind, my lord,' he answered, 'among the curtains.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' said Warnham; 'and this subject leaves me excitable. We have had enough of it to-night. I ought to fear nothing with this,' he said, taking out a double-barrelled pistol from his coat, of exquisite workmanship. 'This answers for the lives of two men; and I think two more could not beat Charles Warnham. To-morrow I will startle the neighborhood. Come early, as I shall commence at once, and gather workmen to put the castle in order. I have roamed over all the world since you saw me, Dalton in very restlessness. I have lived among the buccaners of the Spanish main, and gone adventuring amongst the Indians of the far West. The cities of the Incas of Peru have had my footsteps along their ways; I have traded and I have battled, and come home now the richest Warnham that ever stood amongst our race. To-morrow I may tell you more; but never was the old house to be more splendidly revived than by me. Good-night, Dalton, and come early.'

'Good-night, my lord,' said the man. 'I shall be with your lordship at cockerow.'

So saying Dalton walked away, shutting the door behind him with a heavy bang. His steps echoed along the corridor and then rose faintly, as he turned down into the great hall which led him to the door.

Lord Charles threw a few more logs on the fire, sipped his wine, and mused for some time, looking dreamily into the blaze. He grew heavy, and his eyelids began to droop. For a moment he roused himself, filled his goblet again and drank it at a draught, and then, leaning back in his chair, composed himself to sleep. The heat of the cheery fire, the warm air of the room in which he was, the fatigues of the day, and the wine which he had drunk, made him drowsy; and in a few minutes Lord Warnham was fast asleep.

How long he slept he knew not, but he started from a fearful dream, to be struck with a fearful reality. Bending over the fire-light, which had sunk down to a red glare, and blazed no more, was a man of herculean proportions, looking intently at the pistol which Warnham had taken from his breast before Hugh Dalton. He turned it over and over, and examined it with eyes of curiosity. Warnham in his terror and surprise started.

'Ha, ha!' said the stranger, turning full round to him, 'so we meet again Charley.'

Warnham, with eyes bursting from their sockets, scanned the being before him. He was clad literally with rags. His hair unkempt, his beard unshorn, were matted and grizzled; in his eyes alone was a brilliant and flashing light, that redeemed the squalor of his person; but the light was like the beacon of the wrecker gleaming to destroy.

'Don't you know Phildy Lee?' said the man; 'don't you know Phildy Lee? You wor nearly shooting me, Charley; an' they wor near hangin' me, because you shot purty Nancy's father.—They shut me in a madhouse—me that never did hurt nor harm to a human being; but I watched, an' watched, an' watched, and got free at last; how, I won't tell you, Charley. I ken down to her house; don't you know,' said he whispering, 'ly,—the house where her father an' me tuk her; the house from where I tuk her with her father home to the mill again, to berry them both together, either you killed them? You—mind you!—your hand an' your word killed them. Oh, but they had the fine funeral; I wondher,' said he, with abrupt questioning, 'will you have as good? You won't, oh, you won't; it's not in nathur you would. They wor good—good to every body—good to the poor; an' shure angels might follow them, they wor so like themselves. Do you know how I found you out, Charley,' he said with a cunning leer,—do you know, now?'

'How? tremblingly asked Warnham.

'I knew you didn't. Look up at that picture; that's you,' said Phildy, pointing at a painting above the mantelpiece; 'an' she had the same in her house. After I got out of the madhouse,' said he, looking round furtively, 'I