

THE PANGS OF REMORSE — OR — A COMPLICATED TANGLE.

CHAPTER XVII.

"But," said Lillian, with a sudden start, breaking into their hurried deliberations, "how did you find me out, and how did you enter this room? You have not explained that, which seems to me the most wonderful of all."

His face clouded and he turned his eyes moodily to her face.

"Lillian," he said, in a low voice, "I knew this house, this room, years ago."

"You did!" she exclaimed, and her eyes filled with a strange, ineffable satisfaction. "You have been in this room—lived here?"

"I have," he said, solemnly.

"I thought so," she said.

"Why?" he asked, astonished.

She blushed a bright crimson and hid her face.

"Because," she faltered, "Oh, must I tell? Because I seemed to love the room though it was a prison to me. I seemed to have known it before; and I never looked round it but I thought of you. Surely your shadow must have been sitting in it!"

He smiled, but she noted that he did so sorrowfully.

"Yes," he said, with a sigh. "This house gives us the clue; without it we might wander through this maze hopelessly. Yes, Lillian, my darling, I spent my boyhood years in this house, in this room, almost a prisoner as close as you are now."

She gazed at him in speechless astonishment.

"Were you born here?" she said.

"You have told me that you did not know where you were born."

"That is true," he said. "No, I cannot believe that I was born here; but I do not know. I remember the house only, and the man only, my master, my taskmaster, and my jailer, the man who has worked us both so much harm."

Lillian drew her breath hard and turned pale.

"Not Dr. Bromwell, not he?" she murmured.

"Yes, he," he replied, "though known to me by another, by many names. I knew him as Melchior, a criminal, a murderer—do not tremble, my darling; I know the fear that has struck you cold, but trust me. It is groundless. Sir Ralph is alive and well, and—be calm—in this house."

Notwithstanding the warning she started to her feet and her arms went up with a stifled cry.

He was prepared for her, however, and caught her to his breast. He feared she would faint, but she did not.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" she breathed. "I will forgive him all the rest if papa is safe. Oh, let me cry Clarence, or my heart will break!"

He let her cry, still holding her, and when she was calm again went on hurriedly, for he felt that every moment the chances of an interruption were increased:

"This man, this Melchior, for some dark ends of his own—revenge, or ambition, or avarice—has plotted your ruin and mine. He has plotted and worked with the ingenuity and mercilessness of a fiend. That catlike serpent of a woman was his tool. How many more he may have Heaven knows, for his webs are laid over other countries than this, and his ingenuity has gained him an infamous notoriety all over the world. Let his object be what it may he has our concealment at heart, yours, Sir Ralph's and mine. By this time, no doubt, he has obtained possession of Rivershall."

"No, that is impossible," said Lillian. "Rivershall, at papa's and my death, would go to Lady Melville."

Clarence started and turned white.

"Lady Melville!" he said. "Where have I heard that name? Impossible!"

She is incapable of such horrible crimes."



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So great was his emotion, though he felt quite unable to account for it, that he groaned aloud.

Lillian clung to him in distress.

"Oh, what have I said?" she moaned.

"Oh, what dreadful net is this around us?"

"Dreadful, indeed," he groaned, recovering himself and stopping to kiss her hand. "Let us talk no more for tonight. I must sleep on all this—or, rather, think it over quietly. Heaven send me some solution. Now, darling, and he drew her to the chair as he spoke, "for our plan of escape."

She breathed hard and sank into the chair.

He knelt at her side with his arm around her waist.

"Will you, come with me now?" he murmured. "Will you trust yourself to me?"

"I cannot leave him here," she sobbed.

It was what Clarence had expected and he had schooled himself to bear it.

"I will not ask you, my love," he said. "You shall both leave here together, or I shall think Heaven has deserted me. Let me think, let me think." He clasped his forehead with his strong hand in silent pining for a few minutes, then looked up with an eager light in his eyes. "I have it!" he said. "To-night you shall be free in his arms."

She stopped him with an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, papa, papa!"

"You shall," he repeated, rejoicing in her joy. "But to obtain such a glorious result I must leave you for a while, darling."

Her face fell at that, but with commendable bravery she tried to smile.

He looked himself heart-broken at the necessity, but went on, quickly:

"Only for an hour or two, Lillian; only for an hour or two. Heaven will have you in its keeping while I am from your side until I return to save you."

She put her hands in his with a simple trust that set his lips quivering:

"And now," he said, "listen. To-night—when do you leave this room?"

"At ten," she said; "the women come for me and takes me to a room above."

He nodded.

"At nine, then," he added, "I shall be here."

She began trembling.

"Oh, it seems too good to be true!"

He chided her lovingly for mistrusting him.

"At nine I shall be here—before, if I can—and at ten the plan I have bit upon will be executed. At the next meal the woman brings eat as heartily as you can, and be careful to do nothing that may excite her suspicions. Be in look and manner, just as usual."

"Trust me!" said the beautiful girl, all aglow with hope.

"That is all you have to do," he said, "the rest is for me."

Then he said he should have to go and took her in his arms to say good-by.

But the saying took a long while, and it was not until a footstep warned them of the woman's approach that he could tear himself away.

Softly unbolting the door, he caught up his revolver, and made his escape through the secret door, waiting with it ajar, to hear if anyone but the old woman had entered. She was alone and had brought some food, for Clarence heard the rattling of plates.

Waiting still a few seconds to hear if his darling spoke, he closed the ironed door softly—though it was unnecessary caution—and hurried through the passage.

Rats might scurry over his feet, and water might drip from the damp roof by pailfuls for all he cared now; his heart had risen from the grave, and he was alive again.

So full of meaning had been their first embrace, so much had their eyes told each other, that he had not wasted the precious moments by asking her if she had been silent to marry Harry Besant, nor she by requesting the name of the lady for whom he had fought the duel.

They had felt within their souls that though all things else were antedated in the web of falsehood and mystery their loves had stood out clear, burning brightly through it all.

CHAPTER XIX.

For the first time Clarence Clifford found the earlier associations of his life of great and material use to him.

With a speed which only the wings of love could have rendered him capable of, he traversed the underground passage, and made his way to his lodging.

His landlady, a poor but respectable woman, answered his hurried summons, and in reply to his question said that she had apartments which could accommodate a gentleman and his daughter.

"They are friends of mine coming from the country," said Clarence, "and I expect them here to-night. Can you have everything ready for them?"

"Yes, sir," said the woman. "What time am I to expect them?"

"Some time after ten," he said. "I am going up to the coach to meet them, and shall bring them back with me."

She courted, offered to show him the rooms and he followed her.

(To be continued.)

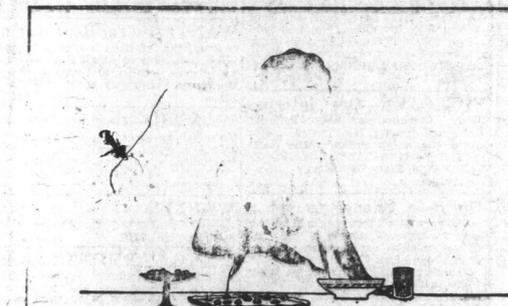


July 27, 1906

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Just a month ago she married William James Augustus Snide; by the village church I tarried to behold the blooming bride and the orange wreath she carried in her loveliness and pride. From her wedding trip returning, I see symptoms, signs of care, and two hectic spots are burning on her cheeks so round and fair; in her eyes there is a yearning that I think should not be there. I am old and fond of spilling to the weary and distressed; in my counsel there is healing, younger folk have oft confessed; when their joy has hit the ceiling I can tell them what to heat. This young matron I invited to confide her woes to me; "That your grievous wrongs are righted, if such wrongs there are, I'll see." "Radio," she cried, "has blighted all my happiness and glee. I am not a meddling Mattie, and I'd see my husband gay; but my husband's going batty on this radio. I say. Not a topic I can mention draws him from his wireless mill; he will give me no attention, but he bids me to be still, and I feel like taking gentian, which, they say, will sometimes kill." "Patience is the porous plaster that will heal the bruise you know; let your truant lord and master tinker with his radio; fast the madness came and faster it will shrivel up and go. Patience is the soothing lotion that young married people need; living largely on emotion, they let judgment go to seed; but with patience their devotion will to peace triumphant lead."



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