

RETURNED FROM THE GRAVE

By MRS. HENRY WOOD: Author of "East Lynne," "Oswald Gray," etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.—CONTINUED.

"She shall be no bride of yours, Lord Dane, said William, a radiant expression lighting his countenance. "Not at least if I can prevent it, and I think I shall have my voice on my side. Be firm, my darling; he whispere, bending lower; put your trust in me, and believe that I will make good all the words I have ever said to you. Though indeed," he called out, as he walked away with Mr. Blair, who had come up, "Should things turn out as they may, there does, I fear, stand a chance that you may be Lord Dane's."

"Maria could neither understand the words nor the expression of his face, save that it spoke of deep, earnest love for her. She turned toward her home, and Lord Dane, all fire, strode by her side.

"No, no; I will never mistrust him," Maria was repeating over to her own heart. "The instinct that attracted me to him first, whispering that I might confide in him as I would in myself. Let the whole world turn against him, I will not. Was it unkindly to say what I did? Lord Dane should not have provoked me; and this dreadful fear, which I dare not mention, as to the real truth of last night's work, is terrifying me beyond control. Lord Dane is rich, powerful, and he is William Lydney's enemy; but God's mercy is over all."

"At the outer gate of Danesheld Hall they met Squire Lester, who appeared somewhat perturbed. "Dane, have you heard this extraordinary news?" he began, when he was still some yards from them. "One of my servants declares that Lydney is at liberty, and walking about unmolested; he ran home hastily to tell me."

"He is at liberty," said Lord Dane, arresting his steps. Maria stopped also. "I was coming to inform you. The police have set him at liberty on their own responsibility."

Squire Lester looked as though he could not understand. The police set at liberty a prisoner who had broken into his house, and been committed by Lord Dane? What could the world be coming to? "And the first use he made of his liberty was to dare to stop Maria in the street, take her hand, and converse with her in private," resumed Lord Dane. "Mr. Lester, I beg you to allow for my thus speaking to you. You have sanctioned my addresses to your daughter, and that must be my excuse; surely this intimacy with a banned man is neither seemly for her, as Miss Lester, or as my future wife. Had she permitted me to remonstrate against it, I should not have called upon you to do so."

"How could you, for shame, suffer him to speak to you?" demanded Mr. Lester, turning his angry face on Maria. "Papa," she answered, in a low tone, "he is not guilty; he is not what you think him." "Your warrant for saying so, young lady?" Mr. Lester contemptuously rejoined.

"I have none of my own heart," she answered, much distressed. "The conviction of your own folly," returned Mr. Lester. "Am I to have two disobedient children? Go to your room, Miss Lester, and spell over the word 'disgrace.' Do not come from it until you can tell me why you eschew it. I am proceeding to the police-station, and you had better accompany me," he added to Lord Dane. "If the police dare to hear me, I will convey this man to prison myself. Last night's work shall be investigated."

"Oh, papa, don't, don't!" uttered Maria, clinging to him as if to hold him back, as she burst into tears. "You don't know what you may do—what dreadful secrets it might bring to light. Has it never struck you that some one else may have been concerned in this instead of Mr. Lydney?"

"Why, what do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Lester in consternation. "Are you going mad?" "I dare not say what I think—I dare not say it. But, papa, if you have any regard for your own honor and happiness, you will not press for an investigation into last night's work."

She retreated toward the house as she spoke, sobbing grievously. Mr. Lester looked after her in angry perplexity. "What does she mean? Is she really mad? or can she have become so enthralled by that cursed adventurer as to fear his being brought to public punishment?" soliloquized Mr. Lester, while Lord Dane tossed his haughty head, and curled his lip with withering scorn.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was evening, and Lawyer Appery was walking at a strapping pace toward Danesheld. Not to call upon its master—for Lord Dane and Mr. Lester, and several more dons of the vicinity were assembled in Danesheld, at a county-dinner, and the fact was well-known. Airing himself at the castle-gate in the cold—a pastime he rather favored—was Mr. Blair. He gave the good-evening to the lawyer as the latter came up. "At the request of Lord Dane. He is waiting for you."

"ghost," uttered Bruff, diadinely. "Like a man who has not many hours off his death-bed, I was going to say. Some sudden pain or inward illness must have attacked him. Perhaps it's the same thing now. Pray goodness he gets over it!"

"I did not fancy you owned any ultra fondness for his lordship." "Not as I did for the past family," spoke Bruff, with emotion; "especially for the old lord, and for Mr. Harry. I never did greatly like Mr. Herbert. But he rest is dead and gone, and he is Lord Dane. He is a good master."

"Could the old family—any one of them—rise from their graves to life, should you deem yourself bound to serve them or the present Lord?" "Why, the present Lord would not be Lord Dane in that case," debated Bruff, after a minute given to consideration. "Of course he would not."

"I should naturally serve the old family, whichever of them it might be," returned Bruff. "But where's the use of reaping up impossible speculations, sir?" "Very true. Better put forth our steps to the Sailor's Rest!" echoed Bruff in astonishment. "Have you then taken my lord there? What in the name of stupidity, did they do that for? If they moved him at all, they should have brought him home."

Mr. Appery said little more. Arrived at the Sailor's Rest, he marshalled Bruff upstairs and introduced him to the chamber. Bruff cast an impatient glance around; he saw Ravensbird, young Mr. Lydney, and some one seated on the sofa, whom he took but a passing glance at. "Where is my lord?" he cried. "There," said Mr. Appery.

Lord Dane rose from the sofa, took a few steps alone, and stood before Bruff with a smile. Bruff's face grew long as he gazed, and he backed against the wall. "Don't you know me, Bruff? I am real flesh and blood."

"It's—its the living image of what Mr. Harry once was, save the hair!" ejaculated Bruff, staring from one to another in hopeless perplexity. "But it can't be." "Yes it can, Bruff. Mr. Harry was not killed by his fall over the cliff, and Mr. Harry is alive still. I thought you would have known me better."

The water rushed into Bruff's eyes, and his very hands trembled with emotion, as he knelt down before Lord Dane. "My lord! my true and veritable lord! I do know you now?" he uttered, the tears streaming down his cheeks. "Old Bruff has lived long enough now that he will see one of the real family reigning at the castle!"

Lord Dane extended his hand, and bade him rise. "I shall never reign there, and you will not serve me Bruff; for, to the best of my belief, a few days will see me where I am supposed to be—in the castle-crypt. But," added Lord Dane, motioning his son toward him, and resting his hand upon his shoulder, "I hope you will serve another, as truly and loyally as you would serve me. This will be the castle's future lord."

"He is—?" "Another Geoffrey, Bruff; the Honorable Geoffrey William Lydney Dane; he is my only son. Be faithful to him, for his father and grandfather's sake."

"I said he was a chieftain?" declared Bruff, his delighted eyes glistening; "the first time he ever came to the castle, I saw he was born to be a chieftain. Miss Dane declared he was like my lady; she did indeed!" "Like my mother? Yes, the resemblance has struck me; but he has the high Dane features, too. I am dying, Bruff; and I require a service at your hands first. Will you execute it?"

"Ay, my lord; anything for you and yours. Though it should be to the laying down of my life." "But, understand, Bruff, it will involve treachery to him at the castle. We must meet treachery with treachery. He has been treacherous to me, and now comes my turn. You don't ask who it was who sent me over the cliff?"

Bruff did not ask even now. A dark suspicion was stealing over him. "It was Herbert Dane. But not in treachery. It was treachery touching that lies in his being duped everybody afterward by passing himself off for innocent and unconscious. It is done and over; but something else remains. Where's that box, Bruff?"

uncertainty of what was turning up, and what should bring it back in England, would make him desperate. "We shall have a pull, to carry it from here to the cart."

"I say Mr. Appery," cried Bruff, in a whisper, "only to think of its having been—Mr. Herbert who threw the captain over the cliff. Didn't he?"

"He could do a paltry trick or two, could Herbert Dane? He served me one; it was about the lease of the Sailor's Rest. I accepted Mitchell for tenant, under the old lord's approbation, and the deposit was paid; my lord turns it all topsy turvy as soon as he comes into power, gives it to Ravensbird, and I had my trouble and some cost for my pains. Steady, Bruff; get firm hold of the end. The case is of lead, you see; it is that which causes it to be so heavy."

Just about the time that they were moving the box, or a little earlier, Maria Lester was quitting her own house for a hasty visit to her brother's. She had not seen her father since the afternoon when he sent her to her room. Whether the mandate implied that she was to keep it exclusively until restored to favor, she did not know; had it been so, she was too miserable to obey. That Wilfred had been the real criminal of the preceding night, she had little doubt, and the fears, the distress that haunted her, nearly drove her what Mr. Lester had called her—mad. She did not dare to hint at her suspicions to her father; she believed he might be capable of prosecuting Wilfred; but, ever and anon, in the midst of her sick suspense, there would rush over her a vision of hope of brightness—that, after all, she was judging him wrongly; that he was not, and could not be guilty of so base a deed.

Have you ever felt the rack of suspense, reader? How far more terrible it is to endure than the actual reality? Then you can understand why Maria Lester stole out of her own house almost like a criminal, hoping to gain some tidings, some little word of certainty, whether it might be of good or evil, did she go for five minutes to her brother's. It was a dark night, but she took no attendant. Was she not about to visit her proscribed brother? was she not disobeying commands in going out at all? She drew a veil over her face, and walked swiftly along.

"Where is Wilfred?" asked Edith glancing nervously around the room. "He has just stepped out to take a walk—expecting, I fancy, to meet Mr. Lydney," replied Edith. "I do not think he is very well."

"Who? Wilfred?" "I mean Wilfred. He has been in quite a nervous state all day; actually nervous, Maria. So extraordinary for Wilfred, who is naturally careless and calm."

"Nervous in what manner?" asked Maria, her heart beating. "Disturbed; restless. When people have come to the door, he has started to the kitchen window to peep out and see who it might be; once there was a loud knock; he happened to be in the passage, and he came rushing in here and held the door to. I asked what he feared? what was the matter? he would not speak, but he was certainly agitated. He has seemed all day to be frightened at his own shadow."

Terrific confirmation! Maria sat on, feeling frightened at her own. Mrs. Lester resumed. "Maria, what can be the true meaning—the facts of that business last night at the hall? Wilfred will not say a word. Any one would suppose that he might have gone out to-day, and learned the details, but he did not; I can never believe that Mr. Lydney is guilty; and he has been released from custody!"

"Yes, he is released," murmured Maria. "Upon what grounds? That his innocence has been indisputably proved?" "Sarah, too, has been in rather a queer way all day," pursued Edith. "When she heard that Mr. Lydney was arrested, it put her out unaccountably, for she has taken a wonderful fancy to him. And she has seemed as fidgety as Wilfred over the knocks at the door, recognizing from the window before she would open it to any one."

"Was Wilfred out last night?" inquired Maria, in a low tone. "Well, now, that's what I'm unable to tell you. I went to bed very early, and fell into one of those sound sleeps from which you do not wake easily. I suppose it is my weakness sleeping itself off. Wilfred was in bed when I woke this morning. I asked him what time he came up, and he said he thought the clock had gone eleven. But, Maria, there was a tone in his voice, which did not sound a true one, and I fancied he might be deceiving me; so I asked Sarah, and she answered in that cross way she has, when put out, 'What should he have taken him out?' Between the two I can get at nothing satisfactory."

Maria rose. In her desperate fear she would have put the question plainly to Wilfred, could she have seen him, and implored him to tell her the best and the worst; but it was uncertain what time he might come in, and she did not like to remain out long; not caring that Lady Adelaide should miss her. She wished Edith good-night, and Sarah, having her departure, went to the front door and opened it.

"It's quite dark, Miss Lester. Shall I put on my bonnet and run with you?" "Oh, no, it will not do to leave your mistress alone, and I shall be home in a trice. You don't happen to know which way my brother is walking, I suppose, Sarah? I would meet him if I could, for I wish to speak to him."

she felt that she would willingly sacrifice herself for Wilfred. "I took the pins out, and I burnt the nasty edge of crapes," added Sarah. "And, I'm sure every knock that has come to the door to-day has brought my heart to my mouth, thinking it might be the officers of justice. If it comes out to Miss Edith's bother! I'm always forgetting and calling her that!—it will just kill her."

Maria walked away with her shivering dread. In every tree she feared an enemy; in every turn of the road an ambush; the officers of justice, as Sarah called them, watching for her brother. She was in the corner of her own home, and was passing the corner of the wood where Thibe was wont to favor young Shad with her presence, when she came upon a tall, still figure, gathered under the shade of the trees. At the first moment she thought it was Wilfred, and threw up her veil.

"Is it you? out here alone?" The speaker was William Lydney. He took Maria's hand in his, and told her he was looking for her brother, who promised to meet him somewhere about there that evening, but who did not appear to be in a hurry to remember his appointment.

"I have been to his house," she answered, "and going there, did not desire any of the servants to attend me. I—I—" "You are ill—or agitated?" he rejoined, perceiving that she could scarcely speak. "Which is it, Maria?"

"Both, both!" she uttered, giving vent to the feelings that so terribly oppressed her. "Oh, William, tell me the truth about last night! The suspense is killing me." "The truth! You do not doubt me, Maria?" "Doubt you!" she echoed, clasping his hand between hers in her heart's trust, in her deep agitation. "I know that you are the firmest friend man can possess—that you have suffered this guilt to rest upon yourself to shield Wilfred. It was he who was the house-breaker last night. He was one of those men with the crapes on their faces! he had crape on his! it has been told to me beyond dispute. I suspect that you followed him to draw him out of the crime."

He did not answer. "Will you not let there be confidence between us, Mr. Lydney? It will not betray to me more of my brother than I already know."

"Call me William! call me William!" he hastily exclaimed. "The name sounds sweeter to me from your lips than it ever did before. You are right. Wilfred did so far forget himself as to join those men—or rather get them to join him. The knowledge that they had entered the hall came to me in a singular manner, and I made speed to enter it also, with the view of getting Wilfred out of it. But I arrived when the deed was done. Wilfred was already gone. I found him, tore the crape from his hat, and saw him safely home. That's the whole truth, Maria."

"And his object? That deed?" William nodded. "As I supposed. Did he get it?" "He did."

"Papa has not discovered its loss then?" "No! I gathered that this morning. Had he done so, it might have helped him to guess at the real offender."

"And you have generously borne the odium to shield him! you are bearing it still. While Danesheld is calling you thief, adventurer—turning you from its doors. If they did not know what they are doing? and I may not declare it. You can never be repaid."

"I am amply repaid now," he whispered, as he threw his arm around Maria, and drew her beside him. "Let them say of me what they will, so long as you will be my heart's confidant, and take my part, their words fall on me as the idle wind."

"But I cannot take it openly." "That will come yet, Maria. A little time, my dearest, a very little time, and I may ask Mr. Lester to give you to me."

"Oh, William, do not speak of it," she interrupted; "it may never come. All this day, since this new and dreadful fear has been upon me touching Wilfred, now it is a certainty, I have asked myself whether I ought not to sacrifice myself for him."

Maria hesitated, deliberating whether it were better should they be met that she were seen abroad after dark with William Lydney, or by herself. However, the distance was so short that she made no objection. He drew her arm round her, and they walked on, slowly enough, but must be confessed.

"We are not to assure children that they are never doing anything wrong; they are dropped upon them. Just as it happened with William Lydney and Maria; though whether they were doing anything wrong, the reader must decide for himself. They had all but reached the gate when two persons came hastily out of it, and faced them—Mr. Appery and the Lady Adelaide Lester."

The box had arrived in triumph at the Sailor's Rest. Covered over with a cloth, that it might not attract attention going in, and so set some tongues to work before their legitimate time, it was lifted from the truck and up the stairs. Lord Dane's mouth worked convulsively as he saw it, and the leaden case was intact, for now any doubts that might have arisen reflecting on his much loved son were dispelled forever. He silently leaned back on the sofa, covered his face, and gave thanks to God.

But, just previously to this, William had gone out on the fruitless errand of meeting Wilfred Lester, who never came to his appointment. He met Maria instead, which was perhaps, to him quite as satisfactory. Anxious enough, though, was he to see Wilfred, to get a promise from him, if possible, that he would henceforth forswear these disgraceful and dangerous escapades—for that was his hope and purpose. The previous night, or rather early morning, when he had found Wilfred in the shrubs, escaping from his father's house, and had hurried him to his home, he asked him to appoint an interview, for that was no moment for speaking, and Wilfred had done so for the following night after dark. "Somewhere in the road skirting the wood near the hall," he named; he probably feared that a chance word might reach the ears of Edith, did he fix it at his own home. It thus happened that when the box came in, William was absent.

"Put it there for security," said Lord Dane, indicating a closet at the foot of his bed, "and give the key into my possession. That may prove a safer stronghold than the secret closet at the castle; it is certainly a more legitimate one. And now, Appery, do me a favor; go and get Lady Adelaide here."

"Lady Adelaide Lester! To-night, my lord?" "I have a fancy for seeing her. I shall see everybody by degrees, now the box is found. What's the hour?" "It's between eight and nine. What shall I say to Lady Adelaide to induce her to come? And she may not be at home!"

"Anything you please, save telling her who it is that wants her. It is the evening of all others that she is likely to be home, and the evening when she could best come. This county party takes the husbands, and the wives are solitary."

Mr. Appery proceeded to the hall, and was shown into Lady Adelaide's presence, who was alone. He had been concocting his tale as he went along. What her ladyship should think of him afterward he little heeded; all his business was to obey Lord Dane.

"An old friend of mine came to Danesheld, and lying ill at the Sailor's Rest—and wants to see me instantly!" cried Lady Adelaide. "I never heard of such a thing!" "I may go further than an old friend, my lady, and say a relation," pursued Mr. Appery. "I beg your ladyship not to delay; I will attend you thither."

"But I never heard such a thing," she repeated. However, Mr. Appery contrived to gain his point, and she went off with him. It was at this juncture that they met William Lydney and Maria.

"Ah, ha, Mr. William, so we have caught you, have we," cried the lawyer, while Lady Adelaide stood in speechless astonishment. "Beating about the young ladies, sir. I shall acquaint Lord Dane."

Now, of course, the words "acquaint Lord Dane" bore very different sounds for their several hearers. William only laughed; Maria's pulses beat with confusion; Lady Adelaide in her pride, recalled the indecorous familiarity.

"Do I see you here, Miss Lester?" she haughtily asked. "And with that man?" Maria would have withdrawn her arm from Mr. Lydney's. He would not suffer it; he held her under his protection, and stood with her, frank and upright, before Lady Adelaide. "Mamma, I have been to Wilfred's, I had an urgent reason for going," she said, her voice trembling. "It was but at the corner, here, in returning, that I met Mr. Lydney."

themselves for having suffered his companionship. "Except Miss Lester's part in the lawyer, who appeared somewhat given to aggravation that night. She sees no shame in his companionship, if one may judge by sight."

"Were Miss Lester's eyes open, I should ask what right you dare claim to speak of her to me, stiffly rejoined Lady Adelaide. "Let it be as her hands of her and her doing; if she chooses to go unmitigatedly to the bad, as her brother has done, by allying herself to this evil character, she must do it."

"She might go further and fare worse, my lady." "She might—what?" ejaculated Lady Adelaide. "She might go further and fare worse than in allying herself to William Lydney; that is what I said, my lady," was the composed answer of Mr. Appery.

"Of course she might. She might ally herself to Jack Ketch, the hangman; rather the worse of the two, than one who probably will come to be hung," was the vexed retort of my lady.

"Very true, so it would," quoth Mr. Appery. "I expect my madcap brother has arrived at Danesheld, and is playing me this trick," resumed her ladyship, loftily quitting the previous topic. "It would be just like him; to send me word he was dying, and then laugh at me when he gets me there."

"No, I do assure you you are mistaken, my lady. I had the honor of seeing the Earl of Kirkdale when he visited Danesheld; this gentleman does not resemble him in the least; is an old man, in fact."

Lady Adelaide vouchsafed no reply. She had little doubt that it would prove to be the Earl of Kirkdale, and she observed silence until she entered the Sailor's Rest. Mrs. Ravensbird came forward, full of obedience to her former lady.

"Sophie," began Lady Adelaide, walking unceremoniously into Sophie's parlor. "is it Lord Kirkdale who is here?" "Sophie was overwhelmed with astonishment. First at the Lady Adelaide's coming there at all; secondly, at her question, touching the earl.

"His lordship my lady!" she repeated. "His lordship has not been here; I don't know anything of him."

"No! Who is it then that wants me?" "My lady, I am unaware that any one does. I don't understand, Mrs. Ravensbird."

"Don't come to hasty conclusions, Mrs. Ravensbird," said the lawyer. "The invalid upstairs asked to see her ladyship."

"Oh!" uttered Mrs. Ravensbird; and the accent expressed so much consternation, not to say alarm, that Lady Adelaide gazed alternately at her and at Mr. Appery. The latter quitted the room.

"Sophie, what is this mystery? Who is it that can want me?" "Oh, my lady, I cannot tell; I dare not. I never thought he would be sending for you."

"Will you walk up, Lady Adelaide," said Mr. Appery, re-entering. "He is waiting for you."