

expression on her brother's countenance, and his warning finger; "it's simply a legend, and I thought it would please you and kill time."

"Oh I am so thankful it is not, dear, for verily I believe I should have died with fright if I had believed it really, and seen anything, you know."

"There is nothing at Ravenscourt more uncanny than me," Wally said, as the two girls wheeled him into his bed-chamber.

"Well, children, I hear the waits or carols, whatever they style themselves in the front of the house," said a kind, cheery voice, as Sir John Ravenscourt popped his head into his son's bed room to say good night.

"Do let us go and listen," Essy said, catching hold of her new friend.

"Not so fast, madcap," her father replied. "I will take you both down when you have kissed your brother."

"I am chained here unable to move a leg," groaned Wally, rebelliously, as old Betsey the nurse entered to undress him for the night; "a kind of pet monkey to be petted and stared at."

"Wally, my boy, you pain us deeply to hear you talk so thoughtlessly," reproved the baronet.

"I'm no hypocrite," retorted the lad, curtly.

"But you are a christian gentleman," put in his father.

"A gentleman, yes in position and rank, but not in person," he retorted bitterly.

"Who has ruffled you to-night, my boy?" he asked, a wealth of tenderness in his voice. "I thought with so nice a girl as Miss Hamlyn to amuse you both you would be happy as birds."

"So we are, it is only one of my desponding fits, sir," Wally interposed.

"Come, Miss Hamlyn," Sir John observed, holding out his hand as he did the other to his little daughter. "I will conduct you where you can both see and hear these serenaders."

Very diffidently she put her hand in his outstretched brown one, that the sun had tanned in fierce, torrid climes.

His eyes watched the dainty, supple form flit here and there in the grand oak-panelled dining-room, followed by Essy, preparing mulled wine for the singers and musicians, and he thought the ancient room had never appeared so bright and homely since the day he last saw his wife in the hey-day of her matronhood.

"I had no idea she was so pretty and winning," he thought. "The rector never hinted that she was so sweet, though her lineage is, I know, above reproach."

When Sheila was duly installed in her chamber by Essy that night, she glanced hurriedly round with a vague expression of nervousness, as if she expected to see a dark gloomy apartment that would scare her.

Her *mignon* face became merry once more at its dainty brightness, at its rose silk curtains, and shrouds of lace, pure as snow, covering windows, toilet-table, chairs, couches and ottomans, and the fragrant hot-house flowers freshly gathered in a vase on a table strewn with books.

"What a love of a room," she ejaculated with delight. "Its too kind of you, dear Essy; but is it really mine?"

"Yes, because I love you," she confessed candidly; "it was mamma's boudoir, and when I saw you and what a darling you were I—I—"

"Had this bower of loveliness fitted up for me, eh?"

"Well, yes, I didn't quite like the one Mrs. Barlow ordered, you see."

"And all this has been going on while you have been inventing that dreadful ghost story."

Essy was just about to blurt out in her innocent fashion it was a true legend of the house of Ravenscourt, when the memory of the dark forbidding look of her brother flashed upon her, and she said:

"Yes, it was a kind of fairy tale, you know, like the Arabian Nights. They say I am rather good at telling them."

"Please do not tell me any more, dear Essy," she pleaded, as she kissed her new little friend affectionately, and bade her good-night.

"What a love of a place this is, and what a pet Essy is to give me such a room. Heigho! I am a lucky girl after all, to win their hearts like this. Fancy a ghost inhabiting a sweet place such as this, why it's preposterous, it was only Essy's imagination enlarging upon some absurd story from that old nurse."

And with this thoroughly comforting idea she crept into the lace adorned bed and slept like a top, as she termed it, till the next morning, when the madcap made a raid and jumped like a kitten into bed beside her, and wound her spare young arms, spare in their childish leanness, around her neck as she chirped:

"Papa likes you very much, so do I, so does Wally. Come, kiss me for that nice speech."

The two young heads were blended into one as it were, the two shades of hair making one harmonious whole, and two winsome faces, pure as the snow that carpeted the earth, nestled together, making a sweet picture worthy the study of a sculptor.

## CHAPTER II.

There was a large heap of evergreens piled up on the rug in the cosy library, ready for the nimble fingers of Essy and Sheila to fashion into fantastic wreaths and other devices. Old Betsey, with her neat fluffed cap of snowy whiteness tied under her chin and twinkling grey eyes, and a face looking as fresh as a winter apple, was fussing about Wally, patting his pillows while she crooned an old carol of bygone days.

"What a buzzing old fly you are," he said ungratefully.

"Don't go for to say that," she pleaded. "Why when you was a tiny fellow you used to ask me to sing to you."

"Come and help us to thread these ivy leaves," Essy said, coming to her rescue.

(To be Continued.)

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