



DO THE DEAD HEAR?

BY IRLEN E. BEXFORD.

Do the dead hear us whenever we call?
Answer me, darling, if you can hear
Under the grass that covers you over,
Hark with the new life of the year.

Answer, darling, I long to know:
Often you told me, if you were dead
And lying under the sods and daisies,
You would answer the words I said.

Speak to me, love, and tell me now
All the secrets of death and life;
Are you cold, with the grass growing over,
That shuts your dwelling away from strife?

Are you lonely, darling? I pray you speak.
I am listening, love, your words to hear.
Does your dead heart yearn for the dear old voices?
Do you know, oh darling, that I am near?

You do not answer. I half believe
That the dead hear never the living's call;
Failed about with roses and violets,
They sleep as the flowers sleep in Fall.

When the Spring of new life shall come,
They will hear us and heed us, no longer dumb.

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THE DEAD WITNESS;
OR,
LILLIAN'S PERIL.

BY MRS. LEPROHON.

CHAPTER VI.
MRS. STUKELY AGAIN.

We must now return to the morning following Lillian's ever-memorable visit to the east wing of Tremaine Court, during which she had made the terrible discovery whose explanation we have given in our last chapter. She was sitting at the open window of her room, pale, still as a marble statue, when her sleeping sister suddenly raised her head, with a quick, terrified movement, from her pillow, and gazing at her with distended, anxious eyes, faintly ejaculated:

"Thank God, Lillian, you are here! Oh, my darling, what a terrible night I have passed, following you through dungeons and darkness, interposing constantly to shield you from the anger and violence of father or of Mrs. Stukely. My poor head is fairly reeling with pain."

"You are foolish, sister, and your restless dreams were the result of your anxiety, which often produces such an effect. Indeed you look very, very ill. Close your eyes awhile, and I will go down and prepare breakfast."

Still languid and heavy from the effects of her draft, suffering, too, from intense headache, Margaret passively obeyed, and her young sister left the room. Deftly, quickly, for her pulses were full of febrile activity, she swept out sitting and dining rooms, dusting and placing everything in perfect order. Then, done, she sought the kitchen, in which she had previously lighted a fire, and proceeded to toast thoroughly a thin slice of bread, with a cup of strong black tea, constituted her father's frugal breakfast. Then she prepared as daintily a repast for the poor invalid as the resources of the pantry permitted—a slice of crisp toast, a new-laid egg, a tiny spoonful of marmalade—which dainties she was arranging on a tray covered with a white napkin when Mrs. Stukely's angular form loomed up in the doorway.

Now Mrs. Stukely had passed a painful and a dreary time at the bedside of her married daughter, and the paternal love, that burned as strongly in the depths of the woman's cruel callous heart as in the bosoms of the best and gentlest of her sex, had been bitterly tried during the long dark watches of the preceding night. Harry Sampson, her son-in-law, was a worthless inebriate, and his poor young wife, still chained to a bed of sickness by alarming symptoms of rapid decline, which had set in some weeks previous, immediately after the birth of her first child, was doomed to listen daily to the brutal taunts and curses showered on her by her brutish husband. Even during the past night, whilst she was lying back in her mother's arms, a prey to an agonizing spasm of coughing that threatened to end in hemorrhage of the lungs, Sampson had roared into the room, cursed them both as a pair of lazy, lying scoundrels, and ordered his wife, with threatening gesture and appalling oaths, to rise at once and get him some supper, menacing at the same time to turn Mrs. Stukely out of the house. It was only by dint of money, liberally given him by the latter, that he was induced to return to the ale-house from which he had just come, and leave mother and daughter to their lonely and agonizing vigil.

"Thank you, poor mother, for your patience!" gasped the almost fainting girl. "Every angry look, every quick word you give him, he re-venge on me as soon as you leave us."

Mrs. Stukely's white teeth closed with a snap, her fingers clenched, and a wild wail went from her heart that she could have Harry Sampson, whilst under the influence of a drunken stupor, down in the vault of the east wing, for what purpose her relentless heart best knew.

With morning's light the sick woman fell asleep, and the trust-worthy nurse, who was liberally paid for her services by Mrs. Stukely, arriving to resume her post beside the invalid—she had obtained leave to spend the night at her own house for some special reason—the housekeeper took her way back to Tremaine Court. Suffering and sorrow soften some characters, but they had not that beneficial effect on Mrs. Stukely's, and she entered the house ready to expend on its younger inmates a por-



"SHE HAS TYRANNIZED OVER MYSELF AND THAT SUFFERING ANGEL, MARGARET, BUT SHE SHALL DO IT NO LONGER UNRESISTED."

tion of the bitterness that filled her whole being.

Had not been so deeply pre-occupied with thoughts of the sick bed she had just quitted, she could not have failed noting at the first glance the marble-like pallor of Lillian's cheek, the bright bloom of which usually rivaled that of a wild rose, as well as her pale lips and dark-ringed, though usually flashing, eyes, indications in one of her temperaments that any undue provocation would arouse her already excited nervous system to an uncontrollable degree.

"Lillian, pray who is that daintily-spread tray for?" asked the new comer.

"For poor Margaret. She was very ill last night, and has scarcely eaten a morsel for twenty-four hours past."

"You are wonderfully attentive," was the sarcastic comment, as the speaker's eye took in the tray and its contents. "Is that really intended for Margaret?"

"Yes, Mrs. Stukely. Why not?"

"Put down that salver instantly. Lay the table in the usual way, and let your sister come down to her food in the usual manner. I want no playing at fine ladies in Tremaine Court."

"And by what authority do you issue such peremptory orders in my father's house, Mrs. Stukely?"

The housekeeper fell back a step, silent from sheer amazement and wrath, and then recovering breath and speech, she fiercely retorted:

"Are you mad, Lillian Tremaine, that you bravo me thus? Put down that tray and tell Margaret that I send her strict orders to come down at once. Do you hear me, I say?"

The young girl looked at her calmly and deliberately, as if studying some moral phenomenon, and then a faint, scornful smile stole over her beautiful face as she replied, without making an intonation of her voice:

"I hear you, Mrs. Stukely, but I will neither convey your orders to my sister nor yet obey them myself."

A gust of passion swept over the housekeeper, and under its stormy influence she fairly trembled from head to foot. Balfefully she glared at her companion, who stood there calm and defiant, and a species of intuition told the woman that further attempt at scolding this suddenly awakened nature would be fruitless.

"Well, Miss Lillian Tremaine," she said with a desperate attempt at enmity, "I see I can do nothing with you, but there is one whose authority you will not dare to question, nor his

power either. Ah, he'll crush down the devilish pride that has awakened all at once in you, even if he crush out your life in the attempt. I go to him now."

Without any tokens of outward agitation, the young girl took up the tray that had been the cause of so stormy an altercation, and bore it to her sister's room. The latter still feeling wretchedly ill and faint, gratefully expressed her thanks for the loving attention, and then Lillian, pleading morning work, tenderly kissed her and descended again to the kitchen, where she addressed herself at once to some household task.

There was a rustle at the door, and Mrs. Stukely's hard, sinister face showed itself in the entrance.

"Your father wants you in his room, girl?"

CHAPTER VII.

A STORMY ALTERCATION.

Now, incredible as it may seem in one who had seen and suffered so much from Mr. Tremaine's ungovernable violence as his youngest daughter had done, no thrill of fear ran through her frame as she prepared to obey the summons; but with the impassable, unmoved look she had worn throughout her dispute with the housekeeper that morning, she entered her father's apartment. The horrors of the previous night seemed to have steered her against all other troubles.

Mr. Tremaine was sitting up in his arm-chair, attired in dressing-gown and slippers, one leg and foot swathed in flannel, and elevated on a footstool, whilst a dark scowl rested on his face, that looked stern at all times, even when he was smiling.

"Lillian, what is the matter with you?" he questioned, looking at her menacingly from beneath his black brows. "Mrs. Stukely tells me you have been insultingly insolent today."

"I was about bringing up breakfast, father, to poor Margaret, who was very ill last night and is still unable to leave her bed, when Mrs. Stukely ordered me to leave the tray down and convey her commands to my sick sister to descend at once and take her food in the usual manner, both of which injunctions I disobeyed."

"And why so, girl? If I repeat them will you still refuse compliance?"

"Certainly not, father. To you I owe both respect and obedience—to her, none!"

"I tell you, Mr. Tremaine, that the girl, this morning, seems possessed not by one devil only but by twenty."

"I will answer at least for her possessing the family one—pride," he grimly rejoined.

Without seeming to heed these remarks, Lillian, pointing her slender finger at the housekeeper, resumed:

"Almost from my birth she has tyrannized over myself and that suffering angel, Margaret, but she shall do it no longer unresisted. I have awoken to the consciousness that I am a woman, with a woman's will and heart."

"Take care, you insolent vixen," broke in Mrs. Stukely, almost livid with rage, "take care that in the conceit of your new-found womanhood you are not tempted out to beg your bread from door to door."

"What say you to that?" asked Mr. Tremaine, the frown on his face ominously deepening.

"O father!" rejoined the girl, with a pathetic sadness in her voice that was inexpressibly touching, "do you think that could be worse than the joyless, wretched life I now lead? Months ago, but for poor Margaret's sake, I would have left this home to seek one among strangers. With half the labors and privations I endure here, I could earn enough to place me above want or charity."

Mrs. Stukely laughed loud and scornfully.

"What! Miss Lillian Tremaine, of Tremaine Court, engaging out as maid—as menial! I have I heard aright?"

"Even so. Better than to be tyrannized over, in my own home, by one who was nothing but a mental herself in my mother's lifetime."

"Silence, you she-devil!" thundered Mr. Tremaine.

"Father, I will—I must speak," passionately retorted the girl, her superb form dilating, her eyes flashing, till she looked like an inspired Pythoness that men in olden times would have listened to, and worshipped with blind devotion.

"Why is it, father, I ask, that we—the children of the fair young wife who brought you both lands and gold—should be allowed to want almost the common necessities of life, whilst that woman yonder, who was but an upper servant whilst our mother lived, fares now sumptuously every day—wears fabrics of soft, fine texture, and more than that, supports in com-

fort, as is well known throughout Brompton village, her married daughter and that daughter's idle husband?"

"Who are you that you should dare pry thus into business of mine, you daring young vixen?" queried the housekeeper, furious that her shortcomings should be laid thus squarely before the master of the house.

"A Tremaine every inch!" retorted the girl. "A true daughter of a race that has ever proved stiff-necked and unyielding, eye even to the death. Think not you will subdue again the fierce spirit that your own tyrannous oppression has awoken within me."

"But I, your father, will and can subdue it," slowly said Mr. Tremaine; "yes, utterly crush it," and he threateningly caught up a heavy rule from the table beside him.

Dunantly the girl met his gaze, and as she stood there confronting him, with the regal port of an empress, she slowly rejoined:

"The worst you could do, father, would be to kill me, and then—why do you know that sooner or later murder will out?"

Whether it was the mere mention of the word itself, or that there was a something vague, intangible, looking out from those liquid expressive eyes, a something speaking of hidden knowledge and hidden menace, an inexplicable change came over his countenance, and in a quick, husky voice he said:

"Stukely, warn that girl out of the room, and get me a glass of brandy. Hang all women! They are more spiteful in their rights than cats."

Without a word Lillian turned from the apartment, and, hastening to the library, bolted herself in, that she might give vent to her pathetically excited, over-strung feelings. No thought of triumph awoke within her at the comparative victory she had just achieved, no self-gratulation over the memory of the merciless truths she had so boldly spoken, even to her father's own ear. Instead, there was that peculiar feeling of isolation—of being at enmity with those around her—so painful to a generous heart; a fear that she had gone too far in recriminations and implied threats, and a dread of the pain and regret the knowledge of all that had passed in that interview would bring to Margaret. But she would go to that dear sister at once, and on her loving breast pour forth her faults and troubles.

Bitterly Margaret wept over the recital, deploring an altercation that could only embitter their lot still further, and infuse fresh venom into Mrs. Stukely's evident hatred. All, faint as she felt, she insisted on dressing and going down stairs, and induced Lillian to resume her ordinary household duties, so as to give the housekeeper no further cause of irritation. All went on quietly, however, and Margaret was just beginning to hope the storm would pass without any further ill results when Mrs. Stukely ordered the room where she was sewing, and in a brief imperative tone said:

"Help your sister to put her clothes in order. Your father, who finds her presence in the house unbearable, wishes to send her off, as soon as she can be got ready, to a boarding-school, where the pride and insolence that would otherwise lead her to perdition, will soon be trampled out of her. I will buy her a couple of cheap dresses in Brompton, which you will make up between you. No trills or fineries on them, remember, to foster her miserable vanity, but plain as they can be made, and with this parting thrust the impenitent woman left the apartment, closing the door violently behind her.

Tears rose to the young girl's eyes as she thought of the fearful blank her life would be when her warm-hearted young loving sister would have left the roof under which she dwelt; of the long sleepless nights of pain and days of sickness that so often fell to her portion, and which Lillian's sunny, cheerful tenderness had heretofore so generously soothed and aided, but which would now be passed in solitude and gloom.

Margaret Tremaine, however, had obtained already from her Heavenly Father that pearl of great price—the gift of unquestioning resignation to His Divine will, and in this, as in every other instance, she meekly accepted the challenge as soon as it was commended to her lips. There was a gleam of joy, too, for her in the thought that her impenitent, high-spirited sister, who the tyranny that reigned in the household seemed to have become suddenly intolerable, would be removed from its soul-withering influence, at least for a time, and her young heart and sunny nature be allowed to retain their innocent illusions and natural joyousness.

Lillian, when told of the new arrangement, exhibited little emotion, assuring Margaret that but for the grief of leaving her, it would be a welcome and desirable change. Firm and unalterable, however, she remained her intention of fully solving the terrible mystery of the oak chest by paying another visit to the east vault before her departure from Tremaine Court. Swiftly the preparations for her departure went on, Mrs. Stukely entreaching herself all the while in a grim, stony reserve, which none of the sisters cared to break in upon. The youngest at length began to fear that no opportunity of putting her project into execution would present itself, when the housekeeper received word one afternoon that her sick daughter required her presence immediately. On hearing this she turned to Margaret—Lillian's presence she had entirely ignored since the day of their dispute—and said in the curt, imperative tone in which she generally addressed the daughters of the household:

"Mr. Tremaine's orders are that you should have your sister's clothes packed without delay. I will buy her hat and shawl while in Brompton, and we will start to-morrow, as soon as I return from my daughter's. I will have to spend the night with her; so, see that your father gets his meals at the usual hour, and bring them to him yourself. He wants no further intercourse with your sister."

Very sorrowful that bright sunny day proved