

# THE ACADIAN

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### THE ACADIAN.

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### The Master of the Wine.

BY ROBERT RUCHANAN.

In a large wooden building not far from the seashore, a building attached as school-house to "Munster's Boarding Academy for Young Gentlemen," I, Hugh Trelawny, then scarcely ten years old, was moping alone. I had only arrived two days before from London, where I had parted from my father, a travelling lecturer in the cause of what was then known as the New Moral World. My mother had long been dead, and I had led a somewhat neglected life, sometimes accompanying my father on his wanderings, more often being left to the care, or rather, carelessness, of strangers. At last I had been sent to Southampton to complete a very perfunctory education.

It was afternoon, and a half holiday; my schoolfellows were playing close by. For myself, I was too lonely to be very miserable, more often being left to the time I merely felt an outcast for the time being, and took no interest whatever

in my new associations. As I sat thus, I must have fallen into a brown study, from which a slight sound started me. Looking up, I met the flash of two brown eyes which were intently regarding me. "Are you the new boy?" said a clear voice. I nodded, and stared at my interrogator, a girl of about my own age, whose black eyebrows were knitted in a way very curious in so young a child as she seemed. Her arms and neck were bare, and she was fondling a kitten, whose bright eyes and limbo movements seemed to have something in common with her own beauty. I noticed, too, that she wore earrings, and that they were very bright and glistening. "What is your name?" she continued, in the same clear questioning tone, altogether with the manner of a superior who was not to be trifled with. "Hugh."

"Hugh what?"

"Hugh Trelawny."

I felt somewhat overawed by the

tone of the little lady, who, to my boyish eyes, seemed much more my equal than she was in reality.

She continued to regard me with the same keen scrutiny, and then said, looking at my attire,

"Who is dead?"

"I still wore black for my mother, and with a somewhat falling voice, I told her so."

"She did not seem surprised, and expressed no sympathy; but, walking to the school-room window, looked out saying, 'Why don't you go out and play with the other boys?'"

"I don't care about play. I am tired."

"Tired with what?" she questioned quickly.

"I made no reply, for I was not prepared for the question. I had meant to imply that I was low-spirited and dull, but had not cared to confess so much in so many words."

She understood me, however, and, although she seemed indifferent to my condition, troubled me with no more questions.

Glad to direct her attention from myself, for her bright eyes troubled me and made me feel ashamed, I stooped down and stroked the kitten, which she had placed upon the floor. Even as I did so, I could feel her eyes still fixed upon me; but when I looked up again with an annoyed expression, she turned her eyes away, and laughed.

"This emboldened me, and I began to question in my turn."

"Are you the schoolmaster's daughter?"

At this she laughed the more—so bright and pleasantly, with such a good-humored sympathy with my blunder, that my first impression of her began to improve, and I saw that, besides being a rather imperious, she was a very pretty, young lady.

"Why do you laugh?" I remarked. "At you," she replied; "because you take me for Mr. Munster's child. I am a stranger here, like yourself. My people live far away in South America, and are very rich. My mother is dead, and I don't remember her. My father has sent me here to be taught; but I shall soon go back to him. Have you a father?" she added, quickly.

"I nodded."

"Is he kind to you, and was it he that sent you to school?" she asked.

But without waiting for my reply to her questions, she continued: "My father cried when I left him, though he is a great man, and when he gave me these earrings, he told me my mother had worn them before me, and he kissed them. We live far away from here, in a brighter place. Don't you hate England?"

"This was rather a startling query, but being in a state of mind bordering on disgust for life in general, I readily assented. Her eyes gleamed."

"It is a dreary place," she cried; "dull and miserable, and it rains nearly every day. But it is different where I come from. It is always bright there, and there are flowers everywhere, and the trees are full of fruit; and there are bright insects, and beautiful snakes without stings, that can be taught to twist round your neck, and feed out of your hand."

As she spoke thus, indeed, it seemed that I was transported to the land of which she spoke; her eyes were so sparkling, her face so bright and sunny, her form so foreign in its slender beauty—and her earrings glistened, and her beautiful ivory teeth gleamed—and I saw her walking in that land, a wonder among all wonders there, with fruits and flowers over her head, and luminous snakes glistening harmless in her path, and dusky slaves waiting open her and doing her courtesies. For it must be borne in mind that I had been a studious boy, fond of reading wild books of travel and adventure, and of picturing in my mind the wonders of foreign lands. Much that I had fancied of dwellers in distant regions was realized in the face I now beheld for the first time.

At what age is a beautiful human creature—and more particularly one belonging to the gentler sex—inaccessible to admiration? I am certain that my new friend perceived mine, and that it did not displease her. It was, at any rate, genuine homage, quietly expres-

ed, almost against my will, in the pleased yet timid glances of my eyes.

When she next spoke, her clear impetuous tone was greatly changed and softened, and a kinder light dwelt on her face.

"If you will come with me," she said, "I will show you the place. There is not much to see but the garden, and that I like well enough. Will you come?"

I rose awkwardly, as if at a word of command; and, taking my cap from the peg where it hung, swung it in my hand as I followed her to the door.

Ashamed, yet pleased, to be chaperoned by a girl, I wondered what my schoolfellows would think of it.

Close to the school-room were the playground, or rather the capacious piece of lawn dignified by that name.

My schoolfellows were playing cricket thereon. They paid no attention to me as I passed, but looked at my companion with a curious and not too friendly expression. She, for her part, passed along imperiously, without deigning to cast a single look in their direction; and I noticed that her dark brows were knitted with the former unpleasant expression. She said nothing, however, for some minutes.

Our first visit was to the top of a high knoll behind the house, whence we could see the surrounding country, and, some miles to the southward, the distant sea, with a white froth of billows on the edge of liver-colored sands.

"It was a quiet, sunless day; but far away there were gleams of watery light on the white sails of ships passing by under full canvas."

The girl looked seaward at the passing sails with much the same peculiar expression she had worn on our first encounter.

"How could I fathom her thoughts? I guessed she was thinking of her home, but I was wrong."

"Are you clever?" she asked, suddenly.

"This was a question which I, as a modest boy, felt totally unprepared to answer. I looked at the ground, peeped at her, and laughed. Her expression did not change."

"I mean, do you know much," she continued, in explanation, "Have you learnt much before?"

I explained to her, as well as possible, that my acquirements were very slender indeed, and merely consisted of the stray crumbs of knowledge which I had been enabled to pick up at day schools in the various towns where my father had resided during my childhood. In point of fact, I was a thoroughly uneducated little boy, and had never been crammed with the solid pabulum so much in vogue at our public schools. I could read and write, of course, and knew the arithmetic as far as the rule of three, and had got through the first four declensions in the Latin grammar; but all was a chaos, and I had no accomplishments."

"I did not explain all this to my interrogator; for I was too proud."

"If you are not clever, and know so little," observed the girl, thoughtfully, "take care of the other boys. Why don't you make friends with them? Why do you like to sit alone, and be so sullen? If there were girls here, I should make friends, I know. But boys are different; they have cruel ways, and they hate each other."

All this was said in a tone rather of reflection than of conversation; and she still kept her eyes on the distant ships, as if from some secret source far away the current of her thoughts was flowing.

"The boys hate me," she pursued, "because they think me proud. I am so proud, but I am quicker and cleverer than they are, and I come from a better place. I beat them in the class and at all things, except figures; and I have helped the biggest of them sometimes, when they were too stupid to understand."

All this was a revelation to me. Until that moment I had never supposed that my companion's place was among the common scholars. During my first two days in school she had been absent—a circumstance which she soon explained to me without any questioning.

"I have been away on a visit, and only returned this morning. I do not

come to school every day, because I have headaches, and my father will only have me learn when I please. Now let us go down and look at the garden. There are fruit-bushes there, and some of the fruit is ripe."

Still respectful and submissive, I followed, and we were soon wandering side by side in the quiet garden in the neighborhood of the school-house.

Ever and anon, as we walked, I heard the shouts and cries of my playmates; but they were wafted to me as from some forsaken life.

A spell had been passed upon me, and I was in a dream. As I write, the dream surrounds me still. Years ebb backward, clouds part, the old horizons come nearer and nearer, and I am again wandering in the quiet shade of trees with the shining young face at my side. I can no longer recall looks and words. All becomes a tremor. I see the one face only, but the voice becomes inarticulate.

What I remember last is a sudden sound dissolving a spell. A bell rung loudly from the house, and my companion uttered an exclamation—

"That is the bell for tea," she exclaimed. "You had better go."

And she ran before me up the path. She was nearly out of sight among the garden bushes when, urged by curiosity, I took courage, and called after her.

"What is your name?" I cried.

She nodded back with a smile. "Madeline," she replied. "Madeline Graham." With that she was gone. For a moment I stood bewildered, and then, with quite a new light in my eyes, I made the best of my way into the house, and joined the boys at the tea-table.

Although Mrs. Munster presided at the board, my new friend did not appear, and as I munched my bread and butter, I thought of her face with a kind of dreary pleasure, delicious to recall even now.

### CHAPTER II.

In my hasty sketch of school, I have made little or no mention of the schoolmaster and his wife. Indeed, so far as my present retrospection is concerned, they are accessories; and they form part of my story only in so much as they affected my relations with the leading actress in the life drama to which these chapters are the prelude.

Munster was a feeble-looking but talented little man, with a very high forehead, which he was constantly mopping with cold water, to subdue inordinate headaches; and Mrs. Munster was a kind creature, with an enormous respect for her lord, and quite a motherly interest in us boys, she having no children of her own.

The manner of these good people was kind towards all; but their treatment of Madeline Graham was blended with a sense of restraint almost bordering on fear. It was obvious that they had been instructed to treat her with more than ordinary solicitude, and it was equally obvious that they were liberally paid for so doing.

When she broke from all restraints, as was the case occasionally, their concern for her personal welfare was not unmingled with a fear lest open rupture might rob them of the installments derived from their wealthiest pupil.

Madeline, on her part, was perfectly conscious of this; but, in justice, it must be said that she seldom took undue advantage of her position.

The mere I saw of Madeline Graham, the mere I observed her manners and general bearing, the mere the thought of her possessed me, and blended with my quietest dreams.

After that first interview, she held somewhat aloof for many days, but her eyes were constantly watching me in school and at meals, though without any approach to further familiarity. She seemed desirous of keeping me at a distance, for reasons which I could not possibly penetrate.

Gradually, however, we came together again.

Madeline had not exaggerated when she boasted of excelling the other scholars in brightness and intelligence. Her memory was extraordinary, and tasks which taxed all the energies of boyhood were easily mastered by her quick and restless brain.

She was taught with the rest of us in the open school, and was generally

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at the head of her class.

It so happened that I myself, although in many things dull and indifferent, was also gifted with a memory of uncommon tenacity. In all tasks which demanded the exercise of this function I took a foremost place.

Madeline was my most formidable rival, and we began, quietly at first but afterwards with energy, to fight for the mastery.

The competition, instead of severing, brought us closer to each other.

Madeline respected the spirit which sometimes subdued her, and I for my part, loved her the better for the humanizing touches of passion which my victory frequently awakened.

We had been friends six months, the quiet road of school life had become familiar and pleasant to me, when, one day at breakfast, I noticed that Munster wore a very troubled expression, as he broke open the largest of a number of letters lying before him. The envelope was of peculiar yellow paper, and the postmark looked foreign.

Madeline, who sat close by, turned white and eager, and her great eyes fixed themselves on the strange missive.

Within the letter to Munster was a smaller one, which he handed to Madeline silently.

With impetuous eagerness, she opened and read it. It was very short. As she glanced over it, her bosom rose, and fell, her eyes brightened and filled with tears.

To hide her trouble, she rose and left the room.

Meanwhile, Munster evinced similar surprise and consternation. He bit his lips as he read his letter, and passed his hand nervously through his hair. Then, with a significant look, he passed the letter to his wife, who, reading it, in her turn became similarly troubled.

As he passed the letter to her, something dropped rustling to the floor, and Munster, looking rather red, stooped and picked it up. It was a curiously printed paper, and looked like the note of some foreign bank.

Breakfast was finished—school began—but Madeline did not appear. Munster still looked fidgety and uneasy.

As for myself, I was torn by sensations to which my little heart had been hitherto a stranger. I felt on the brink of a precipice, down which all that I held dear was disappearing. I could not eat, I could not say my tasks, I could not think. What was going to happen? I asked myself wildly again and again.

At two o'clock, when we were summoned to dinner, no sight of Madeline. But by this time some hint of the truth was forcing itself upon me.

A whisper had passed round the school—"Madeline Graham is going away."

Going away? Whither? To that far distant, that mysterious land whence she had come, and whither I might never follow her? Going away for ever! Passing westward, and taking with her all that made my young life beautiful and happy. Could this be?

I shall never forget the agony of that day. I have had blows since, but none harder, I have felt desolation since, but none deeper.

After school, I hung round the house, haunted every spot where she might be expected to appear. I yearned to hear the truth from her own lips. I peered to and fro like a criminal awaiting his sentence. I could not bear the sight of the other boys, but kept to the secret places, moody and distracted.

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