

GHOST STORIES.

THE SILVER LADY.

"Dear Huvwald, those who sleep will not disturb us." I started uncontrollably when she addressed me by my real name...

I was enchanted by these words and by her confidential tone. I was therefore most careful not to be excited by my feelings...

How long we conversed I know not; for the minutes flew with an inconceivable swiftness. Much that she said to me of my future seemed strange to me...

At last, she prepared to depart; first asking me whether I would grant her one request. Eagerly and passionately I promised to fulfill any wish of hers...

We were then standing directly before the gothic window which contained the altar with its carved saints. I treated her to give me also a remembrance of our meeting...

"Do not resist in this request, Huvwald. Believe me, my compliance with it would not increase your happiness. Trust to my words, and urge me no more."

She then quickly escaped through the secret door by which she had entered. When, however, I endeavored to open it to catch at least a last glance of her, the lock withstood all my efforts.

I passed the hour before daybreak in a confused dream of ecstasy, and morning had scarcely dawned, when Bentheim sent to inquire for my safety.

I was most anxious to see Adelaide, but a considerable time elapsed before she made her appearance at breakfast, and I thought her looking unusually pale. I asked her whether she had passed a restless night?

"On the contrary," she replied, "I slept so soundly that I heard nothing of the violent storm." "Has there really been a storm?" I asked.

"Well, certainly," rejoined the baron laughing, "no one can doubt the intrepidity of a person, who, in expectation of a mysterious adventure, could sleep through such a storm as that which occurred last night."

The storm almost knocked down the old tower. I assure you I was in much anxiety on your account; and was once even on my way to your room." I thought of the light which I had seen during the night in an opposite window, and related how welcome this gleam had been to me.

"Impossible," exclaimed the baron and Adelaide together. "That wing of the Castle is uninhabited!" added Bentheim.

"Probably a reflection, then," I said without further argument, for I feared I might betray my secret.

When we were alone, Adelaide asked if no mysterious circumstance occurred in the dreadful chamber? I assured her that on the contrary the fairest images had hovered near me. And then I related her a little on her evident fear of the haunted room.

But she refused to jest and reformed me that never, in her life, had she ventured to enter that room. "I do not," she added, "even know the way which leads to it."

"Perhaps," said I, "there are various passages which lead to it. You may imagine yourself to be in a distant part of the castle, but, seeing a bolt in the wall, you touch it, a secret door opens, and you find yourself in the mysterious chamber."

"For God's sake do not alarm me," said Adelaide, "but such an occurrence is impossible. The rooms which I occupy are too well known to me; and can lead to no secret chamber."

I had too certain proof of a connection between that very room and her own apartment, but of course I made no attempt to contradict her statement.

trampling to my arm and involuntarily I folded her to my breast. Suddenly old Hartmann, the gardener, rushed into the room, crying: "Where is the baron? The tower has fallen!"

Bentheim now appeared in the doorway, and Adelaide withdrew, blushing, from my willing embrace.

I followed the baron and Hartmann to the ruins. We went thither in absolute silence. We found the excited servants, in whom curiosity proved stronger than superstition, standing about the fallen mass of stone and mortar in little groups of two and three. One of them kicked something from out the ruins at his feet. Then he stooped and picked it up—a small iron casket incrustated with mortar and bits of stone as if imbedded in the wall.

Seeing the baron approaching the man came forward and handed the casket to him. Bentheim ordered it carried into his study, and soon afterward he invited me to go there with him and examine the contents—which proved to be only papers—but papers of great value—especially to me.

For there were the deeds and settlements of the whole vast domain of Bentheim in favor of my remote ancestor Wolf von Huvwald, his son and his son's heirs, and the autobiography of one Adelaide von Huvwald, mother of the said Wolf and widow of Wolf von Huvwald the elder, who was slain in the Crusades.

After the death of her husband this unfortunate lady had been incarcerated in the tower and cruelly persecuted for a time by her unnatural brother, Johann Bentheim, who then defrauded her and her child of their rights. The story of her suffering was told with simple pathos, and concluded with the hope that some day these written words, which, with the help of a faithful scribe, she intended to conceal somewhere in the tower, would meet the eyes of one who would right her son's heirs. She begged, that, if her bones were found beneath the tower, they should be given Christian burial, which her brother had sworn should be denied her.

On finishing his perusal of these extraordinary papers, Bentheim, who was the most generous and just of men, immediately thanked Heaven for having ordained that this disclosure should be made to him at a time when, with the enormous wealth he had himself accumulated, it would cost him so little effort to restore the unjustly acquired estate to its rightful heirs—if such, indeed, were living. Once he sighed deeply when his eyes rested through the casement over his beloved garden but through my heart throbbled in sympathy, I said nothing of my plans which would insure this home to him forever.

The baron was no less astonished than I was at discovering the name of Von Huvwald in the old MS, when I revealed to him my true name. But by a reference to my papers, I substantiated my claims; the whole of my genealogy was complete; and I stood before the wondering baron, no longer the obscure, penniless adventurer, and patronized mendicant, but the rightful and legal possessor of these proud domains.

The kind-hearted and generous noble attempted to offer me his congratulations; but I replied that all the riches in the world were worthless to me without Adelaide. The blushes of that dear girl then revealed to me a secret already half betrayed. Bentheim manifested no opposition; and thus our love was pledged.

While I was occupied in laying before the baron the various evidence of my right of inheritance, I recollected the ring which I had given to Adelaide, during her nocturnal visit to the haunted chamber.

"Another collateral proof of my descent," said I, smiling, "my bride can give you; on whose hand I placed it in a very memorable hour."

Adelaide appeared completely mystified, and an explanation was demanded by the baron; I now asked Adelaide whether she had never observed on her finger a ring which was unknown to her? To my surprise she answered in the negative. I then minutely described it, but she had no remembrance of it. At my instigation she then repaired to her own chamber to search for it among her ornaments; but she quickly returned, stating that she could discover no ring at all resembling mine. Consequently, I was forced to conclude, what was by no means agreeable to me, that this valued bequest of my remotest ancestor had dropped from the hand of the fair sleepwalker while returning to her room.

I was now obliged to relate every particular of this gift. The baron was much perplexed by the intelligence of the apparition of his daughter in the mysterious chamber; and Adelaide gravely assured us that she had never in her life been a sleepwalker. But even if she had unconsciously been subject to this dangerous propensity, there was no communication whatever between her own apartment, and the haunted one.

I but was too certain of the fact, to suffer myself to be much affected by this denial. I then begged her to examine carefully the way to the chamber of the Silver Lady; when she might not only discover some secret communication, but even find the ring.

Adelaide yielded at last, though reluctantly, to my entreaties; and, accompanied by the baron, we passed through a long closed desolate passage. A small flight of steps led upward, until we came to a door in the tapestry; when my assertion was confirmed. "His door communicated with the dreaded chamber; where, instead of a horrible spectre, the lovely Adelaide had appeared to me. Upon examination, however, it became inconceivable how the fair night wanderer could have contrived to open the locked and rusted door."

After a minute but ineffectual search, I was compelled to admit that the ring was irretrievably lost. We then prepared to quit these scenes of desolation; but the ruins of the fallen tower made any pass through the room impossible. Consequently we were obliged to retrace our steps, and return by our former route.

At the moment, the unholy sepulture of the lady whose dark fate we had just learned recurred to my mind; and I resolved to search for her remains. I immediately summoned Hartmann and some workmen with the proper implements; when the process of excavation commenced. We soon found the traces in a portion of the walls still standing, and with a large stone was removed, a coffin was discovered. I commanded the lid to be removed; and the lovely shape I had beheld in my dream, Adelaide's counterpart, lay bodily before me! She was clad in the well remembered drapery, embroidered with silver stars; her countenance was fair, as if untouched by death, and smiling in magic loveliness. Thus had Adelaide appeared to me on that eventful night, and in the dream which first led me to her beloved presence.

"The Silver Lady!" cried Hartmann, in horror. "This exclamation, and the drapery with silver stars, which I had never seen Adelaide wear, now first awakened in me a terrible doubt whether the night wanderer were really a mortal being! My glance, at that accursed moment of ineffable agony, while the blood stagnated in my veins, and the hair bristled on my head, fell on the hands of the corpse; and—O God!—all my fears were confirmed!"

My ring was on its finger! and I—was the affianced husband of a dead bride! I had stood, perhaps, for some minutes, dumb and motionless, when Hartmann asked me tremblingly what was to be done with the body? "I heard him distinctly; yet I was utterly incapable of reply. My grosser faculties were paralyzed, and my disordered imagination was morbidly banqueting in the grave, amidst mould and worms and all the elements of corruption. With a harrowing minuteness was I recalling each successive event of that terrific night, when, in an unhalloed and loathsome communion, the quick wood and the dead; when, in the fulness of my heart and my confidence, I expended all the best feelings of my nature, lavished all my tenderest and purest affections on a fair but foul deception, a treacherous incarnation of a resentful spirit, an outcast inhabitant of the dark and ghastly regions of the grave!"

Now, all that was mysterious in the conduct of the figure, while—O horror! I had believed it to be my own fair love, was but too easily explained. She received my ring as a proof of my intention to fulfil her desires; but she would make no gift to me which might exist as a fearful pledge of the union of the dead to the living. Her injunction too, that when I should next behold my ring on her finger, "I was to guess her unspoken wishes and scrupulously fulfil them," was now equally intelligible. And when I gazed again upon the remains of this long-persecuted and suffering being, lying in her lonely and unholy grave, afar from all the coffins of her race, and thought that to her vigilance and affection I was indebted for the happiness which I now possessed, my heart was seized, and my retrospection subsided. I felt that she ought to appear to me what she really was, the protecting spirit of my love and my fortunes. I resolved that I would scrupulously fulfil what I believed to be her wishes; her body should straightway be removed from its ignominious and unhalloed abode, and interred in consecrated ground, with all holy honors and rites.

I was now alive to the anxious inquiries of the baron and Adelaide, whom my strange trance had much alarmed. Unwilling, however, to incur the risk of renewing the horrible sensations which I had escaped, I had evaded explanation at that moment; and, addressing myself Hartmann, desired that the corpse should be conveyed to the castle, and preparations commenced for its solemn interment in the family vault.

The baron approved of my design; for both he and Adelaide believe that in the inhabitant of the coffin they beheld the ancestress of my house. Previously to the conclusion of the performance of the ceremonies, I resolved to look once more on the ring which had occasioned me so much horror, and still caused me anxious thoughts. For this purpose, the lid of the coffin was raised, when I discovered that the corpse, lately so lovely, had fallen to ashes; a painful, yet a consolatory change, for I believed it to indicate that the soul of the wronged wanderer was at last at rest. Among this mortal dust, however, my ring had disappeared. The sacred service proceeded; the lid of the coffin was secured, and all that was material of

the Silver Lady was left to its final repose.

On the night before my betrothal to Adelaide was solemnized I had a singular dream.

Once again, I thought, I entered the Silver Lady's chamber in the old demolished tower. I saw the same faded hangings which time had blurred to one nondescript hue, the same mouldering furniture and the carved saints on their altar behind the crumbling screen. But I felt no sense of fear nor yet of desolation. I went over to the Gothic window and stood before the altar. I seemed to be waiting for some one. A beautiful, moonlight fell about me and gradually I saw the form of the Silver Lady all in her star-wrought drapery gently detach itself from this dazzling light and stand, or rather float, near me. For even her most delicate beauty was now etherealized and her beautiful, shadowy form wore but the transparent semblance of human shape. Her lips parted and a voice like far music murmured the names of Adelaide and Huvwald, while her translucent eyes shed their mysterious light about me. With her spirit hands she placed on one of my own the ring of my ancestor Wolf von Huvwald, and with that soft, cool, mysterious touch upon me, I awoke.

I was alone—in my own room—but in the soft radiance of the night lamp burning beside my bed the jewels of my ancestral ring sparkled on my finger.



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