

# MY LADY'S WALK.

(Concluded.)

"Mebbe," proceeded the old woman, curiously, "if ye be his dochter, ye've been far awa'?"

"Yes," answered Ethel, loosening her cloak, "but it will be different now. I shall remain and help you to nurse him. Where is he?"

"The meester's in his bed. But dinna greet, lassie; the danger's passed. He'll be up and himsel' again in a day or two."

So saying, she led the way upstairs to a room above; it was furnished plainly, only with simple necessities, but all scrupulously clean. In the bed lay her father asleep.

Her father! For a moment Ethel felt too overcome to approach; also she wanted no witness to this first meeting.

"I will not disturb him," she whispered. "I will remain here and wait his waking. Might I ask you for a cup of tea? I am weary and cold."

Left alone, pausing a second to control herself, she stepped to the bed, drew back the curtain, and looked upon her father. The father who had sacrificed himself for her—who had been content to die among strangers that her life should not be shadowed by his!

Could she feel other than love for him, though that fearful mark was on his brow?

Much agitated, Ethel looked at the sleeper, and the handsome face, grand almost in its resignation, trouble and despair, attracted her, even as it had on the hillside years ago. Nearer she bent, studying every feature. Then she cried, mentally, a thrill of joy in her heart:

"That is not the countenance of a Cain. No, I will not believe it. Father."

The name was whispered, as, stooping, she kissed the white hair straying on the pillow. She drew back quickly, for the old Highland servant entered with the tea.

"As ye are his dochter, maw," she said, "na doot it's been you he has, puir gentleman, been craving to see. In his delirium it was a 'If I could but see her ance. Ah! kind Heaven—but ance.'"

"It was not my fault I was not here earlier," said Ethel, softly. "I came directly I knew."

Then she took her seat by the bed and waited. Half an hour passed, when Arnold Winkworth opened his eyes. At first he did not see the girl. A sigh passed his lips.

"Again I wake to my loneliness and desolation," he murmured. "How long, oh! Heaven, how long?"

"Father!"

He sprang up with a cry, and turning, stared with wild eyes at her.

"Who are you? Father of Heaven, what does this mean?" he cried.

"That I know all, father. That I have come home. Father," bending forward, "you will not drive me from you!"

"Ethel—it is no dream," he gasped. "My child—here. I see her again—once again. Oh! happy—happy, my child!"

His trembling hands reached towards her. The daughter's arms went about his neck, and for a space there was silence.

But soon—curious, startled by her presence—he had drawn away, asking for an explanation, and she had told how everything had occurred. While he blessed her for her love he said she must go back. She must not renounce wealth, happiness for him. She had, as it was, made him happier than he had ever believed he could be again. But now she must return.

"Father, it is impossible!" she answered. "I have burnt my boats behind me. Sir Ughtred said I must decide. If I went to you I must never return to him—and—I am here—your home now is the only one I have—and—I am glad."

So passed Ethel's Christmas night. Often she thought of Roland, but never once did she repent the step she had taken. Before long she saw Arnold Winkworth grow brighter, stronger, under the influence of her presence.

There was one thing she was anxious to learn—the whole truth of the crime for which he had suffered; and one evening, as she sat on a low stool at his feet, before the parlor fire, leaning her cheek against his hand, she said:

"Father, will you tell me all about it now?"

And gladly, eagerly, he told her. How this man, Gerad Douglas, had found him a rich man, had deceived him, trafficked upon his innocence and his trust, and had left him a beggar. Had ruined him, the beautiful wife he had wedded, the infant child, for whom he had planned so brilliant a future. Gerad Douglas, a speculator and swindler, had done all this, and the law could not touch him.

"The blow killed my young wife," proceeded Arnold Winkworth. "I fled like a madman from her grave side; I wandered across the hills, fearful to rest, lest I should go mad indeed."

"As I hastened along a narrow mountain-path, on one side of which was the precipitous side of a ravine, having a swift river, bound seaward, at its base, Gerad Douglas stood before me. I can see his dark, mocking face now, as he listened to the wild words of blame, anger and accusation that poured from my lips. He laughed at my rage, my threats. He made a jest of my suffering, he goaded me to madness—and—I struck him—suddenly, without warning."

"He staggered, gave one cry, then fell from the path. At this moment I can see his body as it went crashing, rolling through the bushes!" exclaimed Arnold Winkworth. "I can hear the dull splash as it fell into the

torrent; and I knew that no man could fall down that ravine and live. I had killed him."

"But," cried Ethel, "you did not intend he should thus fall—you did not mean it?"

"No; but when I knew he had fallen and must be dead, my heart rejoiced. I was glad—I had been avenged on the man who had ruined me, and killed my young wife. I shouted with an insane sense of relief. It was but for a space. My brain cleared. I was seized with horror at the deed I had done, and—still madman-like I fled, unconscious that there had been a witness of the deed."

"I was captured; the torrent had swept Gerad Douglas's body to the sea, but there was proof enough of his death, and how he had died. You know the end, my darling—Sir Ughtred told you. For years now I have dwelt here a recluse, unable to face my fellow men. Gerad Douglas's vengeance will pursue me to the grave."

"Father," said Ethel, softly, "you were mad—you never meant this crime. You have repented; your life shall not be lonely again. I say Heaven forgive Gerad Douglas. It was he who most needed pardon."

The weeks passed, but no word came from Sir Ughtred. Ethel had written; there had been no reply. She understood he held her unpardonable. Of Roland Goldhurst she heard nothing.

Sometimes she wondered if he loved her still—if, offended, he had forgotten her, or taken one to his affections he deemed more worthy? She told herself she hoped so, yet all the while knew otherwise. Sorrow and sadness brooded in her heart, but Arnold Winkworth never was aware of it. To him she was bright, cheerful, and the care lifted from his face settled on hers.

To him the time sped swiftly. Spring burst into all the glory of summer. The hills were purple with heather. Then came the north wind rushing down on its wintry wings, and shook over the land the feathery snow.

On the hills they said there had not been such a winter for years. Terrible accounts were brought in of cattle and shepherds lost in huge drifts; railways being snowed in.

From the casements of Wildheath Cottage nothing was seen but a world of snow—splendid, but chill and drear.

Sadly drear had it seemed to Ethel, as she gazed forth at it on Christmas-eve. One little year ago how different had been her life!—how far care and trouble had seemed!—and how near, how very near, they had been!

The thought of the merry skating-party at the Melton Regis lake; and when evening settled down, and she sat alone by the firelight, Arnold Winkworth lying down awhile in his room, she thought of the happy group around the hall fire, of that suggestion to visit My Lady's Walk; and then how the big—big trouble had come.

She yet seemed to see Roland's face in the red shadow, looking out at her, with the passionate love-light in his eyes. Now they were parted. He was merry with others on this Christmas-eve. Would he think of her as she thought of him!

"My dearest!—my dearest!" she murmured, and the tears flowed down her cheek.

But suddenly she sprang up. What was that? A sound in the air, a voice that seemed to call a name.

She stood, white and trembling, grasping her chair, her gaze fixed wildly on the casement, for the voice had sounded like Roland's, the name had seemed hers.

"I have been dreaming!" she gasped. "Or—oh, Heaven!—can my darling be dead? Has his spirit come thus to blame me? No, no! Dreaming—that is it! All is still."

But even while she says so there is a hand on the latch, a step in the little passage, then, without ceremony, the parlor-door opens, and a pyramid of snow almost, Roland stands before her.

"Roland!" she cried.

"Ethel, my darling! Found at last!"

Before she was aware, regardless of the snow, he has her in his arms; his lips press her brow, words of blended reproach and love fall from him. Still he is happy and content, for he has found her!

In a space, however, she tried to break away.

"No, no, Roland!" she pleaded. "Release me. You do not know!"

"I know everything," he answered. "I forced Sir Ughtred to tell me. Ethel, he is breaking his heart for you. I know it, though he will not confess. Dearest, this awful year is over; we never part again."

He stooped to kiss her, when she started back, for the door opened, and, scared, the old servant entered.

"Mees—mees!" she exclaimed. "My certie, sir, and who are ye?" she broke off amazed.

"A friend," laughed Roland, "come to wish Miss Winkworth and your master a merry Christmas."

"Then its weel ye've arrived safe," was the response. "Ye've mair luck nor some, for there be a puir body, I fear, mees, in the snaw on the fell. I hae just heard him shout."

"On the fell on such a night!" exclaimed Ethel, alarmed.

"Ay. Come; now, hist."

She led the way to the back, and breathlessly they listened. Faintly a shout rose, then fell.

Roland shouted back, but no answer came.

"Oh," cried Ethel, "he may be dying! We must go to him! We must save him!"

"I will go, not you, darling!"

"You!" and the girl laughed more gaily than she had for a year. "Why, before you had gone a hundred paces you would be lost yourself. Come too, but follow me."