

was Blanche herself. My young cousin seemed to avoid me since that eventful night; and of all the farewells that were said when I returned home, the coldest "good-bye" was Blanche's own.

We sailed for India; and for four years I went through the usual round of Indian duties and amusements, with no opportunities of active service, but a fair average of sport with gun, rifle, and boar-spear, with plenty of drill as well as dancing, and an occasional change of station as the chief military event of the year. During this time I sometimes received, though rarely, a letter from my aunt; but from home I often heard tidings of the Treherne, who no longer resided constantly at Bramshaw, but were often in London, on the Continent, or at English seaside watering-places. At the end of four years, my elder brother poor Tom, died, and my parents pressed me to leave the army and come home, the necessity for a profession in my case no longer existing. With some regret I bade adieu to my former life and its associations; but, after all, there is no great hardship in being the future proprietor of an entailed estate like ours, and with tolerable resignation I sent in my papers and renounced the career of arms.

I had not been long in England before an invitation to repeat my former Christmas visit to Bramshaw Hall reached me, couched in such affectionate terms, and so urgent, that I could not find it in my heart to decline. "Mind," said my father jestingly, "that you don't leave your heart behind you there, unless indeed you have left it in India. Miss Blanche, I am told by those who are judges of such matters, has turned out amazingly good-looking."

I laughed, and answered with a tone of perfect conviction that there was little prospect of any love-passages between my cousin, now sixteen years of age, and myself. I found that my father's account of Blanche's appearance hardly did justice to the reality. She had developed into a very pretty girl, who at moments, as when she sang, which she did in a sweet sad voice, and with much musical taste and skill, looked absolutely lovely. I took an opportunity to ask Lady Treherne, half-jocularly, whether "the ghost" was effectually exorcised, and sleep-walking a thing of the past. With perfect confidence my aunt replied in the affirmative. Care, and change of air and of scenes, amusement and study, had, she said, done wonders for Blanche's health, and whereas the extreme delicacy of her constitution had formerly caused much anxiety to her parents, they now considered her to be quite well and quite strong. "It was on her account, dear girl," said Lady Treherne, "that we quiet old folks have run about the world as we have done, travelling and pleasure-hunting; for you must know, Talbot, this is the first Christmas we have spent at the Hall since—since you were with us."

A curious coincidence. It was with snowy weather again, and with few exceptions the same company that I had formerly met had reassembled under Sir Charles's hospitable roof. As before, I had arrived on Christmas Eve; and as the dinner in its old style, and the dance, and the songs and music, and the games for the children, succeeded in precisely the same fashion, I could have imagined that the four last years were the baseless vision of a dream, and that this was my first and only Christmas at Bramshaw Hall. One change there certainly was. Blanche, no longer a child, was taken in to dinner by me, and she did not avoid me in the pointed, almost petulant, manner in which she had turned from me when she was but twelve years old, but I could make no way with her in conversation, nor did she meet my eyes frankly, but allowed hers to rest anywhere but on my face when I addressed her, answered my best things with monosyllables, blushed when I spoke carelessly of our former meeting, and altogether disconcerted me, who was perhaps a little vain of my powers of pleasing. I soon gave her up as hopeless, and directed my attentions elsewhere.

Never in my life had I felt myself less disposed for sleep than when, late on the night of Christmas Eve, I sat before the crackling wood fire in my bedroom—they had given me the Tapestry Room, as before—and meditated on all that had occurred, for good or ill, since last I was the tenant of that ancient chamber. Four years ago poor Tom, my elder brother, was hale and strong, and I a younger son, with no prospects but such as my profession might, in those, from a military point of view, hard times, open out before me. Four years ago I was sailing out to India, with scanty chances of revisiting familiar scenes and associating with old friends, until absence should have weakened the memories of the first, and thinned the numbers of the latter. Yes, four years ago; how strange was the adventure of that other Christmas-Eve, to which my thoughts flew back, no matter on what subject I might be pondering!

Blanche Treherne was a pretty girl—very pretty. Yes, my father had been accurately informed on that point. Accomplished too, but not, perhaps, a person of very deep feelings; or surely she might have been a little more cordial with a kinsman just returned from a four years' exile, and who had been once lucky enough to render her a service which—Well, well! that was an old story now, and young ladies have plenty to occupy their heads without treasuring up romantic gratitude for something that happened in their childhood.

I drew aside the heavy window-curtains and looked out. Snow, snow everywhere, as on that memorable night long ago. It was but a thin sprinkling as yet, however, for it had but begun to fall on the previous day. The sky was streak-

ed with clouds, through the rifts of which a wan new moon peeped coldly. There had been no moon to light the inky blackness of the night four years since, and so far there was a difference.

I could not go to bed. Somehow, do what I would, I remained wakeful and watchful, with an undefinable impression upon me that I was wanted, that I had a duty to perform, and that I must not sleep. I listened intently for the slightest sound, and even the moan of the wind without seemed to me like a human voice complaining. Again and again did I throw wood upon the fire, until my supply of fuel waned to such an extent that it was plain that I must soon retire to rest, or sit up fireless. "This will never do," said I; "I fancy is making a fool of me; and because something queer happened when I was last here, I cannot accept the prosaic view of life which is of course the true one. I'll just slip out and take a glance at the scene of

no dream—no creation of a disordered brain. No. It was Blanche herself; her bright, hair floating like pale gold over her shoulders, and wearing a loose pignora of white cashmere. While I stood speechless, she advanced, and with a slow but certain movement of the hand which was free, she began to unclasp the fastenings of the great French window.

For a moment I stood, as if rooted to the ground by horror. I tried to rush forward, but my feet seemed nailed to the floor, and my voice, when I essayed to call aloud, refused to obey my volition. The low creaking sound, as the window slowly opened, and the inward rush of the shrieking night-wind, dissolved the spell of my helplessness, and I darted along the gallery, shouting, or attempting to shout, though my voice reached my own ear but as a harsh and hollow murmur. The white figure, bending forward, seemed about to vanish in the blackness beyond. Suddenly the candle was



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my former adventure, and then come back and go to sleep for the rest of the dark hours."

"So saying," Blanche's candle, and emerged into the Gothic Gallery. Instinctively I turned to the point where, four years since, I had caught the gleam of the light in Blanche's hand. All was darkness now. Here, too, was the doorway into which I had retired to allow the separation, as I had deemed it, to pass. Smiling at the recollection of my own irrational alarm, I went on, walking softly, to the corner of the Oak Gallery. "So vivid is the imagination," said I, "that I almost expect to see the glimmer of the light, and the childish figure gliding on before me, as when—"

The words died away on my lips, for what I beheld was a sight that curdled my very life blood with horror.

At the other end of the Oak Gallery, receding from me, and within a few feet of the great west window, was a female figure fraped in white, distinctly visible, and carrying a lighted candle with the same impassive mechanical steadiness that I had noticed four years since; advancing slowly too, and noticeably, with the same air of being beckoned forwards by a viewless hand that had beckoned me in a similar narrow recess from a cruel death. It was

extinguished by a stronger gust of wind, and I uttered a cry of horror, for I thought that Blanche had actually fallen; but by Heaven's mercy I was in time, but just in time. My arm was round her waist, and was on her arm, as she was tottering on the very verge of the dread precipice; and by a quick and powerful exertion I drew her back. She awoke, with a low moaning cry, such as may often be heard on the lips of a child suddenly aroused from sleep. "What is this?" she said wildly—"where am I?—Cousin—what—where?" Then, as she looked around, and saw the reality of the position, she shuddered, and sank fainting and unconscious into my arms. Bearing her as swiftly and tenderly as I could along the Oak Gallery, I laid her on a sofa that stood in the adjacent corridor; and hurrying to Lady Treherne's door, aroused my aunt from her sleep, and related in few words what had befallen her daughter; and how, a second time, she had been providentially snatched from the jaws of death.

"It was the association of ideas that did the mischief—not a doubt of it," said the old family physician, who had known Blanche from her infancy; "the cure seemed complete, and in effect was so; but no doubt the Christmas spent for the first time at the old house and in the old

way; the similarity of the weather and of the evening's amusements; and, above all, Mr. Carew's presence, with the memory of the former adventure, influenced our young friend's fancy in a manner that might have been—but we won't talk of that now."

The Trehernes left Bramshaw at once; and at their earnest wish I accompanied them, and paid the remainder of my visit at their house in London. Here it was that I learned to find Blanche very, very dear to me; and that after some weeks I ventured to ask her to be my wife. "I thought," said I, as I took her little hand, unresisting, in mine, "that you rather disliked me than otherwise formerly; but perhaps now—"

"Do you remember four years ago?" she asked, interrupting me, and with a burning cheek and a glance, half arch, half shy, that puzzled me greatly.

"Yes, of course I do," answered I, perplexed. "Because I have loved you ever since—ever since—oh—first—"

—and she shuddered, and hid her beautiful blushing face on my shoulder. Sir Charles and Lady Treherne gave their willing sanction to the engagement between Blanche and myself, which was equally welcome to my own parents; but on account of the youth of the bride-elect, it was thought better to postpone the wedding for another year, till Miss Treherne should have passed her seventeenth birthday.

When I asked her, as in duty bound, to name the day for that all-important ceremony, the dear girl hesitated for a moment, and then, with tears, but not of sorrow, sparkling in her loving eyes, she softly made answer, "Christmas Eve."

For the Favorite.

CHRISTMAS IN SHADOW AND SUNSHINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONVENT.

"THE time draws near the birth of Christ"—I wonder why it is that those words always have for me a more sad and solemn sound than a joyful one? Perhaps it is that the Christ born in Bethlehem came to live such a sad and lonely life and to die such a bitter death when all forsook him and fled, or perhaps it is that from my fifteenth to my twentieth year Christmas Eve was to me a season of solemn worship, and then I had two Christmas Eves, one of which was spent in anger with myself, indignation against others, a weary longing for a far off home; and then another Christmas Eve came when my heart, torn with misery such as falls but to the lot of one in thousands and my poor brain racked and wrung—alone—steeped in misery and wretchedness in the city of Montreal, I must have gone crazy for very misery, had not the dear Christ himself sent his angel to help me.

We lived a quiet life in the old French chateau on my father's Seigneurie in Lower Canada, so that when in my fifteenth year I accompanied my father and mother to Europe and was placed in one of the educational convents in the environs of Paris the change was to me rather an accession to gaiety than otherwise.

I was an only girl at home taught by a resident governess with no companion of my own age except in winter when we went for a couple of months either to Quebec or Montreal. In the convent, I was one among eighty girls from seven years old to twenty, there were large pleasure grounds surrounding the convent where we had swings, croquet grounds, balls and hoops, in short every thing that would tend to make us take exercise and be merry. Christmas Eve was to me the dearest night in the year. At my father's Seigneurie we went to midnight mass it is true, but we had a large party of relatives who always came to the old Chateau that they might with us keep a merry Christmas.

My father, although a Frenchman every inch of him, was the son of an English lady who had told him tales of the Christmases kept in her own land, and imbued him with a desire for making Christmas Eve as much a holiday time as one for religious observance.

I missed the jollity and Christmas gifts of my old home, when during the Christmas eve spent in the convent we wore all, big girls as well as the least, sent trooping to bed after our early six o'clock supper that we might be able to rise at eleven, and feeling fresh and wide-awake from our long rest, be ready to take part in the midnight services.

My twentieth year came at last, and with it came General Rosenham, a relative of my father's from England, who brought me to spend the next two months of November and December in his own beautiful English home in Kent. My father's aunt, Mrs. Rosenham, welcomed me kindly to her home, where I was at once introduced to what seemed to me, then, the gay world, visitors as many as twenty at a time constantly coming in succession to the large handsome house and its hospitable owners.

The evening of my arrival I was introduced to an officer in the Guards, Colonel Deyveraux, a handsome man with most fascinating manners whom my aunt and indeed her guests called young, but whom I, with my French Canadian notions, looked on as a very grown-up man. In the early days of my acquaintance with him when I heard those around me talking of him as being a handsome young man, always ready