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CHAPTER XXXVI.

The belief prevalent in the town ascribed the murder of Sir Philip to the violence of some vulgar robber, probably not an inhabitant of L—. Mr. Vigers did not favor that belief. He intimated an opinion which seemed extravagant and almost incredible. The murder had been committed in the missing purse but he currently believed and consulted one and that this insurance to which he had converted into egre- characteristic ac-

may, the coroner's inquest closed casting any light on so mysterious a crime. My own conjectures I scarcely admit—I certainly could not venture to. But my suspicions centered upon the man. That for some reason or other he had been afraid Sir Philip's presence in L— was a great reason to my reason. And how could my own reject all the influences which had been at work in my imagination, whether by the museum or my conversation with the deceased? But it was impossible to do much of this—impossible even to confide in them. I have told to any man he could produce to me in the museum, he would have considered me a liar or a madman. And in Sir Philip's accusations against Margrave there was nothing tangible, nothing that could bear repetition. Those accusations, if analyzed, vanished into air. What did they imply?—that Margrave was a magician, a monstrous prodigy, a creature exceptional to the ordinary conditions of humanity. Would the most credulous of mortals have ventured to bring against the worst of characters such a charge on the authority of a deceased witness, and to found on visions so fantastic the awful accusation of murder? But of all men, certainly I—a sober, practical physician—was the last whom the public could accuse of such a course. The incredible implications—and, finally, of it men, the last against whom any suspicion of heinous crime would be readily entertained—was that joyous youth in whose sunny life and conscience alike seemed to have no shadow. But I could not overcome my attempt to reason against the error of my detection that had succeeded to the fascinating attraction by which Margrave had been reconciled a liking founded rather on admiration than esteem.

In order to avoid his visits I kept away from the street in which I had habitually spent my evenings, and to which he had been accustomed to have access; and if he called at the house I directed my servant to tell him that I was not at home or engaged. He did endeavor the first few days to visit me as before, but my intention to shun him became so manifestly desired—naturally enough, as I often so pointedly repelled would have been from all those houses in which I had been wont to meet him. I went my professional visits in my carriage, so that I could not be accosted in his walks. One day, a few days after Sir Philip Derval's letter, I received a note from my old college acquaintance, saying that he was going to Derval Court that noon, which he should take with him the noor which he had found; and begging me to visit at his new home the next day and

be passed by another drawn up to the pavement, and I recognized the figure of Margrave standing beside the vehicle, and talking to some one seated within it. I looked back, as my own carriage whirled rapidly by, and saw, with uneasiness and alarm, that it was Richard Strahan to whom Margrave was thus familiarly addressing himself. How had the two made acquaintance? Was it not an outrage on Sir Philip Derval's memory that the heir he had selected should be thus apparently intimate with the man whom he had so sternly denounced? I became still more impatient to read the memoir; in all probability it would give such explanations with respect to Margrave's antecedents as, if not sufficing to criminate him of legal offenses, would at least effectually terminate any acquaintance between Sir Philip's successor and himself.

All my thoughts were, however, diverted to channels of far deeper interest even than those in which my mind had of late been so tumultuously whirled along; when, on returning home, I found a note from Mrs. Ashleigh. She and Lillian had just come back to L—, sooner than she had led me to anticipate. Lillian had not seemed quite well the last day or two, and had been anxious to return.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LET ME recall it—softly—softly! Let me recall that evening spent with her!—that evening, the last before darkness rose between us like a solid wall.

It was evening, at the close of summer. The sun had set, the twilight was lingering still. We were in the old monastic garden—garden so quiet, so cool, so fragrant. She was seated on a bench under the one great cedar-tree that rose sombre in the midst of the grassy lawn, with its little paradise of flowers. I had thrown myself on the sward at her feet; her hand so confidently lay in the clasp of mine. I see her still—how young, how fair, how innocent!

Strange, strange! So inexpressibly English; so thoroughly the creature of our sober, homely life! The pretty delicate white robe that I touch so timorously, and the ribbon-knots of blue that so well become the soft color of the fair cheek, the wavy silk of the brown hair! She is murmuring low her answer to my trembling question—

"As well as when last we parted? Do you love me as well still?"

"There is no 'still' written here," said she, softly, pressing her hand to her heart. "Yesterday is as to-morrow in the Forever."

"Ah, Lillian! if I could reply to you in words as akin to poetry as your own."

"Fie! you who affect not to care for poetry." "That was before you went away—before I missed you from my eyes, from my life—before I was quite conscious how precious you were to me, more precious than common words can tell! Yes, there is one period in love when all men are poets, however the penury of their language may belie the luxuriance of their fancies. What would become of me if you ceased to love me?" "Of me if you could cease to love?"

"And somehow it seems to me this evening as if my heart drew nearer to you—nearer as if for shelter."

"It is sympathy," said she, with tremulous eagerness; "that sort of mysterious sympathy which I have often heard you deny or deride; for I, too, feel drawn nearer to you, as if there were a storm at hand. I was oppressed by an indescribable terror in returning home, and the moment I saw you there came a sense of protection."

Her head sank on my shoulder; we were silent some moments; then we both rose by the same involuntary impulse, and round her slight form I twined my strong arm of man. And now we were winding slow under the lilacs and acacias that belted the lawn. Lillian has not yet heard of the murder, which forms the one topic of the town, for all tales of violence and blood affected her as they affect a fearful child. Mrs. Ashleigh, therefore, had judiciously concealed from her the letters and the journals by which the dismal news had been carried to herself. I need scarcely say that the grim subject was not broached by me. In fact, my own mind escaped from the events which had of late perplexed and tormented it; the tranquillity of the scene, the bliss of Lillian's presence, had begun to chase away even that melancholy foreboding which had overshadowed me in the first moments of our reunion. So we came gradually to converse of the future—of the day, not far distant, when we two should be as one. We planned our bridal excursion. We would visit the scenes endeared to her by song, to me by childhood—the banks and waves of my native Windermere—our one brief holiday before life returned to labor, and hearts now so disquieted by hope and joy settled down to the calm serenity of home.

As we thus talked, the moon, nearly rounded to her full, rose amidst skies without a cloud. We paused to gaze on her solemn haunting beauty, as where the lovers have not paused to gaze? We were then on the terrace walk, which commanded a view of the town below. Before us was a parapet wall, low on the garden side, but inaccessible on the outer side, forming part of a straggling irregular street that made one of the boundaries dividing Abbey Hill from Low Town. The lamps of the thoroughfares, in many a line and row beneath us, stretched far away, obscured, here and there, by flowering roofs and tall church towers. The hum of the city came to our ears, low and mellowed into a lulling sound. It was not displeasing to be reminded that there was a world with-

out—its melody—foreign, unprophetic—its air and words not new to me. I heard the voice and chant of Margrave. I started and uttered an angry exclamation.

"Hush!" whispered Lillian, and I felt her frame shiver within my encircling arm. "Hush! listen! Yes; I have heard that voice before—last night—"

"Last night you were not here; you were more than a hundred miles away."

"I heard it in a dream! Hush, hush!"

The song rose louder; impossible to describe its effect, in the midst of the tranquil night, chiming over the serried roof-tops, and under the solitary moon. It was not like the artful song of man, for it was defective in the methodical harmony of tune; it was not like the song of the wild bird, for it had no monotony in its sweetness; it was wandering and various as the sounds from an Æolian harp. But it affected the senses to a powerful degree, as it remoted lands and in vast solitudes I have since found the note of the mocking-bird, suddenly heard, affect the listener half with delight, half with awe, as if some demon creature of the desert were mimicking man for its own merriment. The chant now had changed into an air of defying glee, of menacing exultation; it might have been the triumphant war-song of some antique barbarian tribe. The note was sinister; a shudder passed through me, and Lillian had closed her eyes, and was sighing heavily; then with a rapid change, sweet as the coo with which an Arab mother lulls her babe to sleep, the melody died away. "There, there, look," murmured Lillian, moving from me, "the same I saw last night in sleep; the same I saw in the space above, on the evening I first knew you!"

Her eyes were fixed—her hand raised; my look followed hers, and rested on the face and form of Margrave. The moon shone full upon him, so full as if concentrating all its light upon his image. The place on which he stood (a balcony to the upper story of a house about fifty yards distant) was considerably above the level of the terrace from which we gazed on him. His arms were folded on his breast, and he appeared to be looking straight toward us. Even at that distance the lustrous youth of his countenance appeared to me terribly distinct, and the light of his wondrous eye seemed to rest upon us in one lengthened, steady ray through the limpid moonshine. Involuntarily I seized Lillian's hand, and drew her away almost by force, for she was unwilling to move, and as I led her back, she turned her head to look round; I, too, turned in jealous rage. I breathed more freely. Margrave had disappeared.

"How came he there? It is not his hotel. Whose house is it?" I said aloud, though speaking to myself. Lillian remained silent; her eyes fixed upon the ground as if in deep reverie. I took her hand; it did not return my pressure. I felt cut to the heart when she drew coldly from me that hand, till then so frankly cordial. I stopped short: "Lillian, what is this? you are chilled toward me. Can the mere sound of that man's voice, the mere glimpse of that man's face, have—?" I paused; I did not dare to complete my question.

Lillian lifted her eyes to mine, and I saw at once in those eyes a change. Their look was cold; not haughty, but abstracted. "I do not understand you," she said, in a weary, listless accent. "It is growing late; I must go in."

So we walked on moodily, no longer arm in arm, nor hand in hand. Then it occurred to me that the next day Lillian would be in that narrow world of society; that there she could scarcely fail to hear of Margrave, to meet, to

Lillian's brother instead of her pet. I have never done so before this night—I must address to you a prayer which I implore you not to regard as the dictate of a suspicious unworthy you and myself. The person whom you have just heard and seen is at present much courted in the circles of this town. I entreat of you not to permit any one to introduce him to you. I entreat you not to know him. I can not tell you all my reasons for this petition; enough that I pledge you my honor that those reasons are grave. Trust, then, in my truth as I trust in yours. Be assured that I stretch not the rights which your heart has bestowed upon mine in the promise I ask, as I shall be freed from all fear by a promise which I know will be sacred when once it is given."

"What promise?" asked Lillian, absently, as if she had not heard my words.

"What promise? Why to refuse all acquaintance with that man; his name is Margrave. Promise me, dearest, promise me."

"Why is your voice so changed?" said Lillian. "Its tone jars on my ear," she added, with a peevishness so unlike her that it startled me more than it offended; and without a word farther, she quickened her pace and entered the house.

For the rest of the evening we were both taciturn and distant toward each other. In vain Mrs. Ashleigh kindly sought to break down our mutual reserve. I felt that I had the right to be resentful, and I clung to that right the more because Lillian made no attempt at reconciliation. This, too, was wholly unlike herself, for her temper was ordinarily sweet—sweet to the extreme of meekness; saddened if the slightest misunderstanding between us had ever vexed me, and yearning to ask forgiveness if a look or a word had pained me. I was in hopes that before I went away peace between us would be restored. But long ere her usual hour for retiring to rest she rose abruptly, and complaining of fatigue and headache, wished me good-night, and avoided the hand I sorrowfully held out to her as I opened the door.

"You must have been very unkind to poor Lillian," said Mrs. Ashleigh, between jest and earnest, "for I never saw her so cross to you before. And the first day of her return, too!"

"The fault is not mine," said I, somewhat sullenly; "I did but ask Lillian, and that is a humble prayer, not to make the acquaintance of a stranger in this town, a man whom I have reasons for distrust and aversion. I know why that prayer should dispense her."

"Nor I. Who is the stranger?"

"A person who calls himself Margrave. Let me at least entreat you to avoid him?"

"Oh, I have no desire to make acquaintances with strangers. But, now Lillian is gone, tell me all about this dreadful murder? The servants are full of it, and I can not keep it long concealed from Lillian. I was in hopes that you would have broken it to her."

I rose impatiently; I could not bear to talk thus of an event the tragedy of which was associated in my mind with circumstances so mysterious.

I became agitated and even angry when Mrs. Ashleigh persisted in rambling woman-like inquiries—Who was suspected of the deed? Who did I think had committed it? What sort of a man was Sir Philip? Who was that strange story about a "pet?" Breaking

