Author: Mrs. Henry Wood (Née Ellen Price) (1814-1887)
Text type: Prose
Date of composition: 1873
Editions: 1873, 1874, 1880, 1882, 1890, 1892, 1897, 1898, 1900, 1903, 1906, 1908, 1913., 2011, 2012.
Source text:
Wood, Mrs. Henry. 1873. *The Master of Greylands.* Vol. I. London: Richard Bentley and Son.
e-text
Access and transcription: December 2013
Number of words: 65,931
Dialect represented: Worcestershire
Produced by Carmen Caballero Gavilán
Revised by María F. García-Bermejo Giner

THE

MASTER OF GREYLANDS

A Novel.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1873.

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THE MASTER OF GREYLANDS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE BANK PARLOUR.

STILBOROUGH. An old-fashioned market-town of some importance in its district, but not the chief town of the county. It was market-day: Thursday: and the streets wore an air of bustle, farmers and other country people passing and re-passing from the corn-market to their respective inns, or perhaps from their visit, generally a weekly one, to the banker's.

In the heart of the town, where the street was wide and the buildings were good, stood the bank. It was nearly contiguous to the town-hall on the one hand, and to the old

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church of St. Mark on the other, and was opposite the new market-house, where the farmers' wives and daughters sat with their butter and poultry. For in those days—many a year ago now-—people had not leaped up above their own sphere; and the farmers' wives would have thought they were going to ruin outright had anybody but themselves kept market. A very large and handsome house, this bank, the residence of its owner and master, Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

No name stood higher than Mr. Peter Castlemaine's. Though of sufficiently good descent, he was, so to say, a self-made man. Beginning in a small way in early life, he had risen by degrees to what he now was—to what he had long been—the chief banker in the county. People left the county-town to bank with him; in all his undertakings he was supposed to be flourishing; in realized funds a small millionnaire.

The afternoon drew to a close; the business of the day was over; the clerks were putting the last touches to their accounts previous to departing, and Mr. Peter Castlemaine sat alone in his private room. It was a spacious apartment, comfortably and even luxuriously furnished for a room devoted solely to business

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purposes. But the banker had never been one of those who seem to think that a hard chair and a bare chamber are necessary to the labour that brings success. The rich crimson carpet with its soft thick rug threw a warmth of colouring on the room, the fire flashed and sparkled in the grate: for the month was February and the weather yet wintry.

Before his own desk, in a massive and luxurious arm-chair, sat Mr. Peter Castlemaine. He was a tall, slender, and handsome man, fifty-one years of age this same month. His hair was dark, his eyes were brown, his good complexion was yet clear and bright. In manner he was a courteous man, but naturally a silent one; rather remarkably so; his private character and his habits were unexceptionable.

No one ever had a moment's access to this desk at which he sat: even his confidential old clerk could not remember to have been sent to it for any paper or deed that might be wanted in the public rooms. The lid of the desk drew over and closed with a spring, so that in one instant its contents could be hidden from view and made safe and fast. The long table in the middle of the room was to-day more than usually covered with papers;

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small marble slab between Mr. Peter Castlemaine's left hand and the wall held sundry open ledgers piled one upon another, to which he kept referring. Column after column of figures: the very sight of them enough to give an unfinancial man the nightmare: but the banker ran his fingers up and down the rows at railroad speed, for, to him, it was mere child's play. Seldom has there existed a clearer head for his work than that of Peter Castlemaine. But for that fact he might not have been seated where he was to-day, the greatest banker for miles round.

And yet, as he sat there, surrounded by these marks and tokens of wealth and power, his face presented a sad contrast to them and to the ease and luxury of the room. Sad, careworn, anxious, looked he; and, as he now and again paused in his work to pass his hand over his brow, a heavy sigh escaped him. The more he referred to his ledgers, and compared them with figures and papers on the desk before him, so much the more perplexed and harassed did his face become. In his eyes there was the look of a hunted animal, the look of a drowning man catching at a straw, the look that must have been in the eyes of poor Louis Dixhuit when they

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discovered him in his disguise and turned his horses' heads backwards. At last, throwing down his pen, he fell back in his chair, and hid his face in his hands.

"No escape," he murmured, "no escape! Unless a miracle should supervene, I am undone."

He remained in this attitude, that told so unmistakably of despair, for some minutes, revolving many things: problems working themselves in and out of his brain confusedly, as a man works in and out of a labyrinth, to which he has lost the clue. A small clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour, five, and then chimed an air once popular in France. It was a costly trifle that the banker had bought years ago. Paintings, articles of vertu, objects de luxe, had always possessed attractions for him.

The chimes aroused him. "I must talk to Hill," he muttered: "no use in putting it off till another day." And he touched the spring of his small hand-bell.

In answer, the door opened, and there entered a little elderly man with snow-white hair worn loner behind, and a good-looking, fair, and intellectual face, its blue eyes beaming with benevolence. He wore a black tail

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coat, according to the custom of clerks of that day, and a white cambric frilled shirt like that of his master. It was Thomas Hill; for many years Mr. Peter Castlemaine's confidential clerk and right hand.

"Come in, Hill; come in," said the banker. "Close the door—and lock it."

"The clerks are gone, sir; the last has just left," was the reply. But the old man nevertheless turned the key of the door.

Mr. Peter Castlemaine pointed to a seat close to him; and his clerk, quiet in all his movements, as in the tones of his voice, took it in silence. For a full minute they looked at each other; Thomas Hill's face reflecting the uneasiness of his master's. He was the first to speak.

"I know it, sir," he said, his manner betraying the deepest respect and sympathy. "I have seen it coming for a long while. So have you, sir. Why have you not confided in me before!"

"I *could* not," breathed Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "I wanted to put it from me, Hill, as a thing that could never really be. It has never come so near as it has come now, Hill; it has never been so real as at this moment of outspoken words."

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"It was not my place to take the initiative, sir; but I was wishing always that you would speak to me. I could but place facts and figures before you and point to results, compare past balances with present ones, other years' speculations with last year's, and—and give you the opportunity of opening the subject with me. But you never would open it."

"I have told you why, Hill," said Peter Castlemaine. "I strove to throw the whole trouble from me. It was a weak, mistaken feeling; nine men out of every ten would have been actuated by it under similar circumstances. And yet, "he continued, half in soliloquy, "I never was much like other men, and I never knew myself to be weak."

"Never weak; never weak," responded the faithful clerk, affectionately.

"I don't know, Hill: I feel so now. This has been to me long as a far-off monster, creeping onwards by degrees, advancing each day by stealthy steps more ominously near: and now it is close at hand, ready to crush me."

"I seem not to understand it," said poor Hill.

"And there are times when I cannot," returned Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

"In the old days, sir, everything you handled

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turned to gold. You had but to take up a speculation, and it was sure to turn out a grand success. Why, sir, your name has become quite a proverb for luck. If Castlemaine the banker's name is to it, say people of any new undertaking, it must succeed. But for some time past things have changed, and instead of success, it has been failure. Sir, it is just as though your hand had lost its cunning."

"Right, Hill," sighed his master, "my hand seems to have lost its cunning. It is—I have said it over and over again to myself—just as though some curse pursued me. Ill luck; nothing but ill luck! If a scheme has looked fair and promising to-day, a blight has fallen on it to-morrow. And I, like a fool, as I see now, plunged into fresh ventures, hoping to redeem the last one. How few of us are there who know how to pull up in time! Were all known, the public would say that the mania of gambling must have taken hold of me—"

"No, no," murmured the clerk.

"When it was but the recklessness of a drowning man. Why, Hill—if I could get in the money, at present due to me, money that I think will come in, perhaps shortly,

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though it is locked up now, we should weather the storm."

"I trust it will be weathered, sir; somehow. At the worst, it will not be a bad failure; there'll be twenty shillings in the pound if they will but wait. Perhaps if you called a private meeting and pointed things out, and showed them that it is only time you want, they'd consent to let you have it. Matters would go on then, and there'd be no exposure."

"It is the want of time that will crush me," said Peter Castlemaine.

"But if they will allow you time, sir !"

"All will not," was the significant answer, and Mr. Peter Castlemaine lowered his voice as he spoke it, and looked full at his clerk. "You know those Armannon bonds!"

Whether it was the tone, the look, or the question, certain it was that in that instant an awful dread, an instinct of evil, seized upon the old man. His face turned white.

"I had to use those bonds, Hill," whispered his master. "To mortgage them, you understand. But, as I am a living man, I believed when I did it that in less than a week they would be redeemed and replaced."

"Mortgaged the Armannon bonds!" ejaculated

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Thomas Hill, utterly unable to take in the fact, and looking the picture of horror.

"And they are not yet redeemed."

The clerk wrung his hands. "My master! my friend and master! How could you! Surely it was done in a moment of madness!"

"Of weakness, of wickedness, if you will, Thomas, but not madness. I was as sane as I am now. You remember the large payment we had to make last August! It had to be made, you know, or things would have come to a crisis then. I used the bonds to raise the money."

"But I—I cannot comprehend," returned the clerk slowly, after casting his recollection back. "I thought you borrowed that money from Mr. Castlemaine."

"No. Mr. Castlemaine would not lend it me. I don't know whether he smelt a rat and got afraid for the rest I hold of his. What he said was, that he had not so large a sum at his disposal. Or, it may be," added the banker in a dreamy kind of tone, "that James thought I was only going into some fresh speculation, and considers I am rich enough already. How little he knows!"

"Oh, but these deeds must be redeemed!" cried the old clerk, rising from his seat in excitement

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"At all sacrifice they must be got back, sir. If you have to sell up all, houses, and land, and else, they must be returned to their safe resting-place. You must not longer run this dreadful risk, sir: the fear of it would bring me down in suspense and sorrow to my grave."

"Then, what do you suppose it has been doing for me!" rejoined Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "Many a time and oft since, I have said to myself, 'Next week shall see those bonds replaced.' But the 'next week' has never come: for I have had to use all available cash to prop up the falling house and keep it from sinking. Once down, Hill, the truth about the bonds could no longer be concealed."

"You must sell all, sir."

"*There's nothing left to sell, Thomas*" said his master. "At least, nothing immediately available. It is *time* that is wanted. Given that, I could put things straight again."

A trying silence. Thomas Hill's face was full of pain and dread. "I have a little accumulated money of my own, sir: some of it I've saved, some came to me when my brother died," he said. "It is about six thousand pounds, and I have neither chick

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nor child. Every shilling of it shall be yours, sir; as soon as I can withdraw it from where it is invested."

His master grasped his hands. "Faithful man and friend!" he cried, the tears of emotion dimming his brown eyes. "Do you think I would accept the sacrifice and bring you to ruin as I have brought myself! Never that, Hill"

"The money shall be yours, sir," repeated the clerk, firmly.

"Hush, hush!" cried Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "Though I were dying of shame and hunger, I would not take it. And, do you not see, my friend, that it would be a useless sacrifice! Six thousand pounds would be swallowed up unheeded in the vortex: it would be but as a drop of water to the heaving ocean."

It was even so. Thomas Hill saw it. They sat down together and went into the books: the banker showing him amounts and involvements that he had never suspected before. The ruin seemed to be close at hand; there seemed to be no possible way out of it. Common ruin Thomas Hill might have got over in time; but this ruin, the ruin that threatened his master, would have turned

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his hair white in a night had time not already turned it.

And crimes were more heavily punished in those days than they are in these.

At a quarter to six o'clock, Peter Castlemaine was in his dining-room, dressed for dinner. He often had friends to dine with him on market-days, and was expecting some that night: a small social party of half a dozen, himself included. He stood with his back to the fire, his brow smoothed, his aspect that of complete ease; he could hear his butler coming up the stairs to show in the first guest. All the dwelling-rooms were on this first floor, the ground-floor being entirely appropriated to business.

"Mr. Castlemaine."

The two brothers met in the middle of the room and shook hands. Mr. Castlemaine was the elder by two years, but he did not look so, and there was a very great likeness between them. Fine, upright, handsome men, both; with clear, fresh faces, well cut features, and keen, flashing, dark eyes. Very pleasant men to talk to; but silent men as to their own affairs. Mr. Castlemaine had just come in from his residence, Greylands' Rest: it was in contradistinction to him that the banker

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was invariably called Mr. *Peter* Castlemaine.

"All well at home, James!"

"Quite so, thank you."

"You were not in at market, to-day."

"No: I had nothing particular to call me in. Are you expecting a large party this evening!"

"Only six of us. Here comes another."

The butler's step was again heard. But this time he came not to announce a guest but to bring a note, just delivered. Peter Castlemaine's hand shook slightly as he opened it. He dreaded all letters now. It proved, however, to be only an excuse from one of the expected guests: and a strange relief sat on his face as he turned to his brother.

"Lawrence can't come, James. So there'll be but five of us."

"Lawrence is not much loss," said Mr. Castlemaine, slightingly. "You don't look quite yourself, Peter," he added to his brother; something in the latter's countenance having struck his observant eye. "I think you are working too hard; have thought so for some time. Don't let the love of money take all pleasure out of life. Surely you must

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have made enough, and might now take some rest."

The banker laughed. "As to taking rest, that's easier recommended than done, James. I am too young to give up work yet: I should be like a fish out of water."

"Ah well—we are all, I expect, wedded to our work—whatever it may be: creatures of habit," admitted Mr. Castlemaine. "I will just go and see Mary Ursula. She's in her room, I suppose. What a treasure you possess in that girl, Peter!"

"Beyond the wealth of Solomon; beyond all price," was the impulsive answer, and Peter Castlemaine's face glowed as he said it. "Yes, you will find her in her room, James."

Mr. Castlemaine went to the end of the wide and handsome passage, its walls lined with paintings, its floor covered with a carpet, rich and soft as moss, and knocked at a door there. A sweet voice bade him enter.

The small, choice room was brilliantly lighted with wax tapers; the fire threw a warmth on its dainty furniture. A stately lady, tall, slight, and very beautiful, who had been working at a sketch, put down her pencil, and rose. It was Miss Castlemaine, the banker's only child: as fair a picture as

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could be found in the world. She wore a white muslin dress, made low in the fashion of the day. On her queen-like neck was a string of pearls; bracelets of pearls clasped her pretty arms. Her face was indeed beautiful: it was like her father's face, but more delicately carved; the complexion was of a paler and fairer tint; her brown eyes, instead of flashing, as his did in his youth, had a subdued, almost a sad look in them. It was one of the sweetest faces ever seen, but altogether its pervading expression was that of sadness: an expression that in her childhood had led many an old woman to say, "She is too good to live." She had lived, however, in the best of strength and health, until now, when she was in her five-and-twentieth year. An accomplished lady, she, very much so for those days, and of great good sense; her conversational powers rare; a sound musician, and a fair linguist, fond of sketching and painting in water-colours. With it all, she was particularly gentle in manner, modest and retiring as a woman should be: there was at all times a repose upon her that seemed to exhale repose, and was most charming. Her father loved her with an ardent love; he had lost his wife, and this child was all-in-all to

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him. But for her sake, he might not have dreaded the coming disgrace with the intense horror he did dread it. His happiest hours were spent with her. In the twilight he would sit in the music-room, listening to her playing on the piano, or on the sweet-toned organ he had had built for her—the tones not more sweet though than her own voice when raised in song. Her gift of extemporising was of no mean order; and as the banker sat listening to the organ's sounds, its rise and fall, its swelling and dying away, he would forget his cares. She was engaged to William Blake-Gordon, the eldest son of Sir Richard Blake-Gordon; a poor, but very haughty baronet, unduly proud of his descent.

But for the vast amount of money Miss Castlemaine was expected to inherit, Sir Richard had never condescended to give his consent to the match: but the young man loved her for her own sake. Just now Miss Castlemaine was alone: the lady, Mrs. Webb, who resided with her as chaperone and companion, having been called away by the illness of a near relative. One word as to her name—Mary Ursula. A somewhat long name to pronounce, but it was rarely shortened by her relatives. The name had been

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old Mrs. Castlemaine's, her grandmother's, and was revered in the Castlemaine family.

"I knew it was you, Uncle James," she said, meeting him with both hands extended. "I knew you would come in to see me."

He took her hands in one of his and touched fondly her beautiful hair, that so well set-off the small and shapely head, and kissed her fondly. Mr. Castlemaine was fond of his niece, and very proud of her.

"Your face is cold, Uncle James."

"Fresh with the out-of-door cold, my dear. I walked in."

"All the way from Greylands!"

He laughed at her "all the way." It was but three miles; scarcely that. "I felt inclined for the walk, Mary Ursula. The carriage will come in to take me home."

"Is Ethel well, Uncle James! And— Mrs. Castlemaine!"

"Quite so, my dear. What are you doing here!"

She had sat down to the table again, and he bent his head over her to look at her drawing. There was a moment's silence.

"Why it is—it is the Friar's Keep!" exclaimed Mr. Castlemaine.

"Yes," she answered. "I sketched its outlines

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when at your house last summer, and I have never filled it in until now."

She sketched as she did everything else— almost perfectly. The resemblance was exact, and Mr. Castlemaine said so. "It seems to me already completed!" he observed.

"All but the shading of the sky in the back-ground."

"Why have you made those two windows darker than the rest!"

Miss Castlemaine smiled as she answered jestingly. "I thought there should be no opportunity given for the appearance of the Grey Friar in my drawing, Uncle James."

Mr. Castlemaine drew in his lips with a peculiar twist. The jest pleased him.

"Have you seen much of the Grey Sisters lately, Uncle James!"

This did not please him. And Mary Ursula, as she caught the involuntary frown that knitted his bold brow, felt vexed to have asked the question. Not for the first time, as she well recalled, had Mr. Castlemaine shown displeasure at the mention of the "Grey Sisters."

"Why do you not like them, Uncle James!"

"I cannot help thinking that Greylands might get on better if it were rid of them,"

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was the short reply of Mr. Castlemaine. But he passed at once from the subject.

"And we are not to have this fair young- lady-hostess at the dinner-table's-head to-night!" he cried in a different and a warm tone, as he gazed affectionately at his niece. "Mary Ursula, it is a sin. I wish some customs were changed! And you will be all alone!"

"Never less alone than when alone," quoted Mary Ursula: "and that is true of me, uncle mine. But to-night I shall not be alone in any sense, for Agatha Mountsorrel is coming to bear me company."

"Agatha Mountsorrel! I don't care for her, Mary Ursula. She is desperately high and mighty."

"All the Mountsorrels are that—with their good descent and their wealth, I suppose they think they have cause for it—but I like her. And I fancy that is her carriage stopping now. There's six o'clock, uncle; and you will be keeping the soup waiting."

Six was striking from the room's silver-gilt time-piece. "I suppose I must go," said Mr. Castlemaine. "I'd rather stay and spend the evening with you."

"Oh Uncle James, think of the baked

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meats!" she laughed. "Of the nectar-cup!"

"What are baked meats and a nectar-cup to the brightness of thine eyes, to the sweet discourse of thy lips! There's not thy peer in this world, Mary Ursula."

"Uncle, uncle, you would spoil me. Flattery is like a subtle poison, that in time destroys sound health."

"Fare you well, my dear. I will come and say good night to you before I leave."

As Mr. Castlemaine trod the corridor, he met Miss Mountsorrel coming up: a handsome, haughty girl in a scarlet cloak and hood. She returned his salute with a sweeping bow, and passed on her way in silence.

The dinner was one of those perfect little repasts that the banker was renowned for. The three other guests were Sir Richard Blake-Gordon; the Reverend John Marston, vicar of St. Mark's and also of Greylands, generally called by the public "Parson Mason;" and Mr. Knivett, family solicitor to the Castlemaines. The wines were excellent; the reunion was altogether sociable and pleasant; and the banker's brow gave no indication of the strife within. It's true Mr. Marston took his full share of the wine—as

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many a parson then appeared to think it quite religious to do—and talked rather too much accordingly. But the guests enjoyed themselves; and broke up before eleven. Mr. Castlemaine, who could drink his wine with any man, but took care never to take more than he could carry as a gentleman, proceeded to his niece's room to say good night to her; as he had promised to do.

"I hope I have not kept you up, my dear," he began as he entered.

"Oh no, Uncle James," was Mary Ursula's answer. "I never go to bed until I have sung the evening hymn to papa."

"Where's Miss Mountsorrel!"

"The carriage came for her at ten o'clock."

"And pray where's Master William, that he has not been here this evening!"

She blushed like a summer rose. "Do you think he is here *every* evening, Uncle James! Mrs. Webb warned him in time that it would not be etiquette, especially while she was away. And how have you enjoyed yourself!"

"Passably. The baked meats you spoke of were tempting; the nectar good. Of which nectar, in the shape of after-dinner port, the parson took slightly more than was necessary.

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What toast, do you suppose, he suddenly gave us!"

"How can I tell, Uncle James," she rejoined, looking up.

"We were talking of you at the moment, and the parson rose to his legs, his glass in his hand. 'Here's to the fairest and sweetest maiden in the universe,' said he, 'and may she soon be Lady Blake-Gordon!' "

"Oh, how could he!" exclaimed Miss Castlemaine, colouring painfully in her distress. "And Sir Richard present!"

"As to Sir Richard, I thought he was going frantic. You know what he is. 'Zounds! Sir Parson,' he cried, starting up in his turn, 'do you wish me dead ! Is it not enough that the young lady should first become *Mistress* Blake-Gordon! Am I so old and useless as to be wished out of the world for the sake of my son's aggrandisement!'—and so on. Marston pacified him at last, protesting that he had only said Mistress Blake-Gordon; or that, if he had not, he had meant to say it. And now, good night, my dear, for I don't care to keep my horses standing longer in the cold. When are you coming to stay at Greylands' Rest!"

"Whenever you like to invite me, Uncle

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James. I wish you could get papa over for a week. It would give him rest: and he has not appeared to be well of late. He seems full of care."

"Of business, my dear; not care. Though, of course, undertakings such as his must bring care with them. You propose it to him; and come with him: if he will come for anybody's asking, it is yours."

"You will give my love to Ethel; and—"

Mr. Castlemaine, stooping to kiss her, arrested the words with a whisper.

"When is it to be, Mary Ursula! When shall we be called upon to congratulate Mistress Blake-Gordon! Soon!"

"Oh uncle, I don't know." And she laughed and blushed, and felt confused at the outspoken words: but in her inmost heart was as happy as a queen.

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CHAPTER II.

THE GREY LADIES.

A ROMANTIC, picturesque fishing-village was that of Greylands, as secluded as any English village can well be. Stilborough was an inland town; Greylands was built on the sea-coast. The London coaches, on their way from Stilborough to the great city, would

traverse the nearly three miles of dreary road intervening between the town and the village, dash suddenly, as it were, upon the sea on entering the village, and then turn sharply off in its midst by the Dolphin Inn, and go on its inland road again. As to London, it was so far off, or seemed so in those quiet, nontravelling days, that the villagers would as soon have expected to undertake a journey to the moon.

The first object to be seen on drawing near

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to Greylands from Stilborough, was the small church; an old stone building on the left hand, with its grave-yard around it. On the opposite side of the road the cliffs rose high, and the sea could not be seen for them. The Reverend John Marston held the living of Greylands in conjunction with St. Mark's at Stilborough: the two had always gone together, and the combined income was but poor. Mr. Marston was fond of fox-hunting in winter, and of good dinners at all seasons: as many other parsons were. Greylands did not get much benefit from him. He was non-resident, as the parsons there had always been, for he lived at St. Mark's. Of course with two churches and only one parson to serve both, the services could but clash, for nobody can be doing duty in two places at once. Once a month, on the *third* Sunday, Mr. Marston scuffled over to Greylands to hold morning service, beginning at twelve, he having scuffled through the prayers (no sermon that day) at St. Mark's first. On the three other Sundays he held the Greylands service at three in the afternoon. So that, except for this Sunday service, held at somewhat uncertain hours—for the easy-going parson did not always keep his time, and on

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occasion had been known to fail altogether— Greylands was absolutely without pastoral care.

Descending onwards—an abrupt descent— past the church, the cliffs on the right soon ended abruptly; and the whole village, lying in its hollow, seemed to burst upon you all at once. It was very open, very wide just there. The beach lay flat and bare to the sea, sundry fishing-boats being generally high and dry there: others would be out at sea, catching fish. Huts and cottages were built on the side of the rocks; and some few on the beach. On the left stood the Dolphin Inn, looking straight across the wide road to the beach and the sea; past which inn the coach-road branched off inland again.

The village street—if it could be called a street—continued to wind on, up the village, the Dolphin Inn making a corner, as it were, between the street and the inland coach-road. Let us follow this street. It is steep and winding, and for a short distance solitary. Half way up the ascent, on the left, and built on the sea-cost, rises the pile of old buildings called the Grey Nunnery. This pile stands back from the road across a narrow strip of waste land on which grass grows. The cliff

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is low there, understand, and the Grey Nunnery is built right at its edge, so that the waves dash against its lower walls at high water. The back of the building is to the road, the front to the sea. A portion of it is in ruins; but this end is quite habitable, and in it live some ladies, twelve, who are called the Grey Sisters, or sometimes the Grey Ladies, and who devote themselves to charity and to doing good. In spite of the appellation, they are of the Reformed Faith; strict, sound Protestants: a poor community as to funds, but rich in goodness. They keep a few beds for the sick among the villagers, or for accidents; and they have a clay school for the village children. If they could get better children to educate, they would be glad; and some of the ladies are accomplished gentlewomen. Mr. Castlemaine, who is, so to say, head and chief of the village of Greylands, looking down on it from his mansion, Greylands' Rest, does not countenance these Sisters: he *dis*countenances them, in fact, and has been heard to ridicule the ladies. The Master of Greylands, the title generally accorded him, is no unmeaning appellation, for in most things his will is law.

Beyond the part of the building thus inhabited,

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there is a portion that lies in complete ruin; it was the chapel in the days of the monks, but its walls are but breast high now; and beyond it comes another portion still in tolerable preservation, called the Friar's Keep. The Friar's Keep was said to have gained its appellation from the fact that the confessor to the convent lived in it, together with some holy men, his brethren. A vast pile of buildings it must have been in its prime; and some of the traditions said that this Friar's Keep was in fact a monastery, divided from the nunnery by the chapel. A wild, desolate, grand place it must have been, looking down on the turbulent sea. Tales and stories were still told of those days; of the jolly monks, of the secluded nuns, some tales good, some bad—just as tales in the

generations to come will be told of the present day. But, whatever scandal may have been whispered, whatever dark deeds of the dark and rude ages gone by, none could be raised of the building now. The only inhabited part of it, that occupied by the good Sisters, who were blameless and self-denying in their lives, who lived but to do good, was revered by all. *That* portion of it was open, and fair, and above board; but some mysterious notions

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existed in regard to the other portion—the Friar's Keep. It was said to be haunted.

Now this report, attaching to a building of any kind, would be much laughed at in these later times. For one believer in the superstition (however well it might be authenticated) ten, ay twenty, would ridicule it. The simple villagers around believed it religiously: it was said that the Castlemaines, who were educated gentlemen, and anything but simple, believed it too. The Friar's Keep was known to be entirely uninhabited, and part of it abandoned to the owls and bats. This was indisputable; nevertheless, now and again glimpses of a light would be seen within the rooms by some benighted passer-by, and people were not wanting to assert that a ghostly form, habited in a friar's light grey cowl and skirts, would appear at the casement windows, bearing a lamp. Strange noises had also been heard—or were said to have been. There was not one single inhabitant of the village, man or woman, who would have dared to cross the chapel ruins and enter the Friar's Keep alone after nightfall, had it been to save their lives. It did not lack a foundation, this superstition. Tales were whispered of a dreadful crime that had been

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committed by one of the monks: it transpired abroad; and, to avoid the consequences of being punished by his brethren—who of course only could punish him after public discovery, whatever they might have done without it—he had destroyed himself in a certain room in the grey habit of his order, and was destined to "come abroad" for ever. So the story ran, and so it was credited. The good ladies at the Nunnery were grieved and vexed when allusion was made to the superstition in their presence, and would have put it down entirely if they could. They did not see anything themselves, were never disturbed by sounds: but, as the credulous villagers would remark to one another in private, the Sisters were the very last people who would be likely to see and hear. They

were not near enough to the Friar's Keep for that, and the casements in the Keep could not be seen from their casements.

The narrow common, or strip of waste land, standing between the street and the Grey Nunnery is enclosed by somewhat high palings. They run along the entire length of the building, from end to end, and have two gates of ingress. The one gate is opposite the porch door of the Grey Nunnery; the

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other gate leads into the chapel ruins. It should be mentioned that there was no door or communication of any kind between the Nunnery and the site of the chapel, and it did not appear that there ever had been: so that, if any one required to pass from the Nunnery to the ruins or to the Friar's Keep, they must go round by the road and enter in at the other gate. The chapel wall, breast high still, extended down to the palings, cutting off the Nunnery and its waste ground from the ruins.

In their secluded home lived these blameless ladies, ever searching for good to do. In a degree they served to replace the loss of a resident pastor. Many a sick and dying bed that ought to have been Mr. Marston's care, had they soothed; more than one frail infant, passing away almost as soon as it had been born, had Sister Mildred, the pious Superioress, after a few moments spent on her bended knees in silent deprecatory prayer, taken upon herself to baptize, that it might be numbered as of the Fold of Christ. They regretted that the clergyman was not more among them, but there it ended: the clergy of those days were not the active pastors of these, neither were they expected to be. The

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Grey Ladies paid Mr. Marston the utmost respect, and encouraged others to do so; and they were strict attendants at his irregular services on Sundays.

The origin of the Sisterhood was this. Many years before, a Miss Mildred Grant, being in poor health, had gone to Greylands for change of air. As she made acquaintance with the fishermen and the other poor families, she was quite struck with their benighted condition, both as to spiritual and temporal need. She resolved to do what she could to improve this; she thought it might be a solemn duty laid purposely in her path; and she took up her abode for good at one of the cottages, and was joined by her sister, Mary Grant. In course of time other ladies, wishing to devote their lives to good works, joined

them; at length a regular sisterhood of twelve was formed, and they took possession of that abandoned place, the old Grey Nunnery. Six of these ladies were gentlewomen by birth and breeding; and these six had brought some portion of means with them. Six were of inferior degree. These were received without money, and in lieu thereof made themselves useful, taking it in turns to see to the housekeeping, to do the domestic work, go

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on errands, make and mend the clothes, and the like. All were treated alike, wearing the same dress, and taking their meals together —save the two who might be on domestic duty for the week. At first the Sisterhood had attracted much attention and caused some public talk—for such societies were then almost entirely unknown; but Greylands was a secluded place, and this soon died away. Sister Mildred remained its head, and she was getting in years now. She was a clever, practical woman, without having received much education, though a lady by birth. Latterly she had been in very ill health; and she had always laboured under a defect, that of partial deafness. Her sister Mary had died early.

Immediately beyond the Friar's Keep, the rocks rose abruptly again, and the sight of the sea was there, and for some little way onwards, inaccessible to the eye. Farther on, the heights were tolerably flat, and there the preventive men were enabled to pace— which they did assiduously: for those were the days of real smuggling, when fortunes were made by it and sometimes lives marred. The coast-guard had a small station just beyond the village, and the officers looked

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pretty sharply after the beach and the doings of the fishermen.

Just opposite the Friar's Keep, on the other side the road, was a lane, called Chapel Lane, flanking a good-sized clump of trees, almost a grove; and within these trees rose a small, low, thatched-roof building, styled the Hutt. The gentleman inhabiting this dwelling, a slight, bronzed, upright, and active man, with black eyes and black hair, was named Teague. Formerly an officer on board a man-of-war, he had saved enough for a competency through prize money and else, and had also a pension. The village called him Commodore: he would have honestly told you himself that he had no right to that exalted rank—but he did not in the least object to the appellation. He was a vast favourite with the village, from the coast-guardsmen to the poor fishermen, fond of

treating them in his Hutt, or of giving them a sail in his boat, or a seat in his covered spring cart—both of which articles he kept for pleasure. In habits he was somewhat peculiar; living alone without a servant of any kind, male or female, and waiting entirely on himself.

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Chapel Lane—a narrow, pleasant lane, with trees meeting overhead, and wild flowers adorning its banks and hedges in summer—led into the open country, and went directly past Greylands' Rest, the residence of the Castlemaines. This lane was not the chief approach to the house: *that* was by the high coach-road that branched off by the Dolphin Inn. And this brings us to speak of the Castlemaines.

Greylands' Rest, and the estate on which it stood, had been purchased and entered upon many years before by the then head and chief of the family, Anthony Castlemaine. His children grew up there. He had three sons— Basil, James, and Peter. Basil was three or four years the elder, for a little girl had died between him and James; and if he were living at the present time, he would be drawing towards sixty years of age. It was not known whether he was living or not. Anthony Castlemaine had been a harsh and hasty man; and Basil was wild and wilful. After a good deal of unpleasantness at home, and some bitter quarrelling between father and son, in which the two younger sons took part against their brother, Basil quitted his home and went abroad. He was twenty-two then,

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and had come into possession of a very fair sum of money, which fell to him from his late mother. The two other sons came into the same on attaining their majority. Besides this, Mr. Castlemaine handed over to Basil his portion, so that he went away rich. He went to seek his fortune and to get rid of his unnatural relatives, he informed his friends in Greylands and Stilborough, and he hoped never to come back again until Greylands' Rest was his. He never had come back all those years, something like five-and-twenty now, and they had never heard from him directly, though once or twice incidentally. The last time was about four years ago, when chance news came that he was alive and well.

James Castlemaine had remained with his father at Greylands' Rest, managing the land on the estate. Peter had taken his portion and set up as a banker at Stilborough; we have seen with what success. James married, and took his wife home to Greylands' Rest; but

she died soon, leaving him a little son. Several years subsequently he married again: a widow lady; and she was the present Mrs. Castlemaine.

Old Anthony Castlemaine lived on, year

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after year, at Greylands' Rest, wondering whether he should see his eldest son again. With all Basil's faults, he had been his father's favourite: and the old man grew to long for him. It was more than either of Basil's brothers did. Basil had had his portion from both father and mother, and so they washed their hands of him, as the two were wont to observe, and they did not want him back again. They, at least, had their wish, though Mr. Castlemaine had not. The old man lived to the age of eighty-five and then died without seeing his eldest son; without, in fact, being sure that he was still alive. It was not so very long now since old Anthony died: they had just put off the mourning for him. James had come into Greylands' Rest on his father's death: or, at any rate, he had remained in possession; but of the real facts nothing transpired. Rumours and surmises went abroad freely: you cannot hinder people's tongues: and very frequently when nothing is known tongues flow all the faster. Some thought it was left to James in trust for Basil; but nobody knew, and the Castlemaines were close men, who never talked of their own affairs. The estate of Greylands' Rest was supposed to be worth about twelve hundred

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a-year. It was the only portion of old Mr. Castlemaine's property that there could be any doubt or surmise about: what money he had to dispose of, he had divided during his lifetime between James and Peter; Basil having had his at starting. James Castlemaine was the only gentleman of importance living at Greylands; he was looked up to as a sort of feudal lord by its inhabitants generally, and swayed them at will.

Following the coach-road that led off by the Dolphin for about half a mile, you came to a long green avenue on the right hand, which was the chief approach to Greylands' Rest. It was an old house, built of grey stone; a straggling, in-and-out, spacious, comfortable mansion, only two storeys high. Before the old-fashioned porch entrance, lay a fine green lawn, with seats under its trees, and beds of flowers. Stables, barns, kitchen gardens, and more lawns and flower beds lay around. The rooms inside were many, but rather small; and most of them had to be approached by a narrow passage: as

is sometimes the case in ancient houses that are substantially built. From the upper rooms at the *side* of the house could be seen, just opposite, the Friar's Keep, its casements

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and its broken upper walls; Commodore Teague's Hutt lying exactly in a line between the two buildings: and beyond all might be caught glimpses of the glorious sea.

It was a cold, bright day in February, the day following the dinner at the banker's. Mr. Castlemaine was busy in his study—a business-room, where he kept his farming accounts, and wrote his letters—which was on the upper floor of the house, looking towards the sea and the Friar's Keep, and was approached from the wide corridor by a short narrow passage having a door at either end. The inner door Mr. Castlemaine often kept locked. In a pretty room below, warm and comfortable, and called the Red Parlour from its prevailing colour, its ceiling low, its windows opening to the lawn, but closed today, sat the ladies of his family: Mrs. Castlemaine, her daughter Flora, and Ethel Reene.

It has been said that James Castlemaine's second wife was a widow—she was a Mrs. Reene. Her first marriage had also been to a widower, Mr. Reene, who had one daughter, Ethel. Mrs. Reene never took to this step-child; she was jealous of Mr. Reene's affection for her; and when, on Mr. Reene's death, which occurred shortly after the marriage,

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it was found that he had left considerably more money to his child than to his new wife, Mrs. Reene's dislike was complete. A year or two after her marriage with Mr. Castlemaine, a little girl was born to her— Flora. On this child, her only one, she lavished all her love—but she had none for Ethel. Mr. Castlemaine, on his part, gave the greater portion of his affection to his son, the child of his first wife, Harry. A very fine young man now, of some five-and-twenty years, was Harry Castlemaine, and his father was wrapt up in him. Ethel addressed Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine as "papa" and' "mamma," but she was in point of fact not really related to either. She was five years old when she came to Greylands' Rest, had grown up there as a child of the house, and often got called out of doors "Miss Castlemaine."

Ethel seemed to stand alone without kith or kin, with no one to love her; and she felt it keenly. As much as a young lady can be put upon and snubbed in a gentleman's well-appointed family, Ethel Reene was. Mr. Castlemaine was always kind to her, though perhaps somewhat indifferent; Mrs. Castlemaine was unkind and tyrannical; Flora—an

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indulged, selfish, ill-bred girl of twelve, forward enough in some things for one double her age—did her best to annoy her in all ways. And Mrs. Castlemaine permitted this: she could see no fault in Flora, she hated Ethel. Ethel Reene was nineteen now, growing fast into womanhood; but she was young for her years, and of a charming simplicity—not so rare in girls then as it is now. She was good, gentle, and beautiful; with a pale, quiet beauty that slowly takes hold of the heart, but as surely stays there. Her large eyes, full of depth, sweetness, and feeling, gazed out at you with almost the straightforward innocence of a child: and no child's heart could have been less free from guile. Her hair was dark, her pretty features were refined and delicate, her whole appearance lady-like and most attractive.

Ethel Reene had much to put up with in her every-day life: for Mrs. Castlemaine's conduct was trying in the extreme; Flora's worse than trying. She seldom retaliated: having learnt how useless retaliation from *her* was against them: and besides she loved peace. But she was not without spirit: and only herself knew what it had cost her to learn to keep that spirit under: sometimes when

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matters went too far, she would check her step-mother's angry torrent by a few firm words, and quietly leave the room to take refuge in the peace and solitude of her own chamber. Or else she would put her bonnet on and wander away to the cliffs; where, seated on the extreme edge, she would remain for hours, looking out on the sea. She had once been fond of taking her place in the chapel ruins, and sitting there, for the expanse of ocean seen from thence was most grand and beautiful; sometimes when the water was low, so that the strip of beach beneath could be gained, she would step down the low but dangerous rock to it—-which strip of beach was only accessible from the chapel ruins and at low tide. But one day Mr. Castlemaine happened to see her do this; he was very angry, and absolutely forbade her, not only to descend the rocks, but to enter,

under any pretence whatsoever, the site of the chapel ruins. Ethel was not one to disobey.

But to sit on the higher rocks farther up, by the coast-guard station, was not denied her; Mr. Castlemaine only enjoining her to be cautious. It had grown to be her favourite spot, and she often sat or walked there on the cliff's edge. The ever-changing water

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seemed to bring consolation to her spirit; it spoke to her in strange, soothing whispers; it fed the romance and the dreams that lie in a young girl's heart. When the sea was rough and the waves dashed against the cliffs, flinging up their spray mountains high and sprinkling her face as with a mist, she would stand, lost in the grandeur and awe of the scene, her hat off and held by its ribbons, her hair floating in the wind: the sky and the waves seemed to speak to her soul of immortality; to bring nearer to her the far-off gates of heaven. And so, for want of suitable companionship, Ethel Reene shared her secrets with the sea.

The glass doors of the red parlour were closed to-day against the east wind; the lawn beyond, though bright with sunshine, lay cold under its bare and wintry trees. Mrs. Castlemaine sat by the fire working at a pair of slippers; a little woman, she, dressed in striped green silk, with light hair, and a cross look on what had once been a very pretty, though sharp-featured face. Ethel sat near the window, drawing; she wore a bright ruby winter dress of fine merino, with some white lace at its throat and sleeves; a blue ribbon to which was suspended some small gold ornament

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encircled her delicate neck; drops of gold were in her ears; and her pretty cheeks were flushed to crimson, for Mrs. Castlemaine was hot in dispute and making her feel very angry. Flora, a restless damsel, in a flounced brown frock and white pinafore, with a fair, pretty, saucy face, and her flaxen curls tied back with blue, was perched on the music stool before Ethel's piano, striking barbarous chords with one hand and abusing Ethel alternately.

The dispute to-day was this. Miss Oldham, Flora's governess, had lately given warning precipitately, and left Greylands' Rest; tired out, as everybody but Mrs. Castlemaine knew, with her pupil's insolence. Mrs. Castlemaine had not yet found any one willing, or whom she deemed eligible, to replace her—for it must be remembered that

governesses then were somewhat rare. Weary of waiting, Mrs. Castlemaine had come to a sudden determination, and was now announcing it, that Ethel should have the honour of filling the post.

"It is of no use, mamma," said Ethel. '' I could not teach; I am sure I am not fit for it. And, you know, Flora would never obey *me"*

"That I'd not," put in Miss Flora, wheeling herself half round on the stool. "I hate

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governesses; and they do me no good. I don't know half as much as I did when Miss Oldham came, twelve months ago. Do I, mamma!"

"I fear you do not, my darling," replied Mrs. Castlemaine. "Miss Oldham's system of teaching was quite a failure, and she sadly neglected her duty; but—"

"Oh, mamma," interrupted Flora, peevishly, "don't put in that horrid 'but.' I tell you I hate governesses; I'm not going to have another. Nothing but learning lessons, lessons, lessons, all day long, just as though you wanted me to be a governess!"

"If you did not learn, Flora, you would grow up a little heathen," Ethel ventured to remark. "You would not like that."

"Now don't you put in your word," retorted the girl, passionately. "It's not your place to interfere with me: is it, mamma!"

"Certainly not, my sweet child."

Miss Flora had changed her place. Quitting the music stool for the hearth rug, she took up the poker; and now stood brandishing it around, and looking daggers at Ethel. Ethel, her sweet face still flushed, went steadily on with her drawing.

"She's as ill-natured as she can be! She'd

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like—mamma, she'd like—to see me toiling at geography and French grammar all night as well as all day. Nasty thing!"

"I can believe anything of Ethel that is ill-natured," equably spoke Mrs. Castlemaine, turning her slipper. "But I have made up my mind that she shall teach you, Flo, my love, under—of course, entirely, under—my superintendence. Miss Oldham used to resent interference."

"I do think, mamma, you must be joking!" cried Ethel, turning her flushed face and her beautiful eyes on her step-mother.

"When do I joke!" retorted Mrs. Castlemaine. "It will save the nuisance of a governess in the house: *and you shall teach Flora*."

"I'll give her all the trouble I can; she's a toad," cried Miss Flora, bringing the poker within an inch of her mother's nose. "And I'll learn just what I like, and let alone what I don't like. *She's* not going to be set up in authority over me, as Miss Oldham was. I'll kick you if you try it, Ethel."

"Stop, stop," spoke Ethel, firmness in her tone, decision on her pretty lips. "Mamma, pray understand me; I cannot attempt to do this. My life is not very pleasant now; it

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would be unbearable then. You know—you see—what Flora is: how can you ask me!"

Mrs. Castlemaine half rose, in her angry spirit. It was something new for Ethel to set her mandates at defiance. Her voice turned to a scream; her small light eyes dilated.

"Do you beard me in my own house, Ethel Reene! I say that you *shall* do this. I am mistress here—"

Mistress she might be, but Mr. Castlemaine was master; and at that moment the door opened, and he came in. Disputes were not very unusual in his home, but this seemed to be a frantic one.

"What is the meaning of this!" he inquired, halting in astonishment, and taking in the scene with his keen dark eyes. His wife unseemly angry, her voice high; Ethel in tears—for they had come unbidden; Flora brandishing the poker towards Ethel, and dancing to its movements.

Mrs. Castlemaine sat down to resume her wool-work, her ruffled feathers subdued to smoothness. She never cared to give way to unseemly temper, no nor to injustice, in the presence of her husband; for she had the grace to feel that he would be ashamed

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of it—ashamed for her; and that it would still further weaken the little influence she retained over him.

"Were you speaking of a governess for Flora!" he asked, advancing and taking the poker from the young lady's hand. "What has Ethel to do with that!"

"I was observing that Ethel has a vast deal of leisure time, and that she might, rather than be idle, fill it up by teaching Flora," replied Mrs. Castlemaine, as softly as though

her mouth were made of butter. "Especially as Ethel's French is so perfect. As a temporary thing, of course, if—if it did not answer."

"I do not find Ethel idle: she always seems to me to have some occupation on hand," observed Mr. Castlemaine. "As to her undertaking the teaching of Flora— would you like it, Ethel!"

"No, papa," was the brave answer, as she strove to hide her tears. "I have, I am sure, no talent for teaching; I dislike it very much: and Flora would never obey a word I said. It would make my life miserable—I was saying so when you came in."

"Then, my dear child, the task shall certainly not be put upon you. Why need you

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have feared it would be ! We have no more right to force Ethel to do what is distasteful to her, than we should have to force it on ourselves," he added, turning to his wife. "You must see that, Sophia."

"But—" began Mrs. Castlemaine.

"No buts, as to this," he interrupted.

"You are well able to pay and keep a governess—and, as Ethel justly observes, she would not be able to do anything with Flora. Miss Oldham could not do it. My opinion is, no governess ever will do it, so long as you spoil the child."

"I don't spoil her, James."

Mr. Castlemaine lifted his dark eyebrows: the assertion was too palpably untrue to be worthy a refutation. "The better plan to adopt with Flora would be to send her to school, as Harry says—"

"That I will never do."

"Then look out for a successor to Miss Oldham. And, my strong advice to you, Sophia, is—let the governess, when she comes, hold entire control over Flora and be allowed to punish her when she deserves it. I shall not care to see her grow up the self-willed, unlovable child she seems to be now."

Mrs. Castlemaine folded up her slipper

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quietly and left the room; she was boiling over with rage, in spite of her apparent calmness. Flora, who stood in fear of her father, flew off to the kitchen, to demand

bread and jam and worry the servants. Ethel was going on with her drawing; and Mr. Castlemaine, who had a taste for sketching himself, went and looked over her.

"Thank you, papa," she softly said, lifting to him for a moment her loving eyes. "It would have been bad both for Flora and for me."

"Of course it would," he replied: "Flora ought to have a good tight rein over her. What's this you are doing, Ethel! The Friar's Keep! Why what a curious coincidence! Mary Ursula was filling in just the same thing last night."

"Was she, papa! It makes a nice sketch."

"You don't draw as well as Mary Ursula does, Ethel."

"I do nothing as well as she does, papa. I don't think anybody does."

"What are those figures in the foreground!"

"I meant them for two of the Grey Sisters. Their cloaks are not finished yet."

"Oh," said Mr. Castlemaine, rather shortly.

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"And that's a group of fishermen, I see: much the more sensible people of the two."

"What did Mary Ursula say last night, papa!"

"Say! Nothing particular. She sent her love to Ethel."

"Did she dine at table!"

"Why of course not, child. Miss Mountsorrel spent the evening with her."

"And papa," whispered Ethel with a pretty little laugh and blush, "is it fixed yet !"

"Is what fixed !"

"The wedding-day."

"I don't think so—or you would have heard of it. I expect she will ask you to be her bridesmaid."

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CHAPTER III.

AT THE DOLPHIN INN.

THE Dolphin Inn, as already said, stood in the angle between the village street and the high road that branched off from the street to the open country. It faced the road, standing, like most of the dwellings in Greylands, somewhat back from it. A substantial, low-roofed house, painted yellow, with a flaming sign-board in front, bearing a dolphin bright with various hues and colours, and two low bow-windows on either side the door.

Beyond lay a yard with out-houses and stables, and there was some good land behind. Along the wall, underneath the parlour windows and on either side the entrance door, ran a bench on which wayfarers might sit; at right angles with it, near the yard, was a

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pump with a horse-trough beside it. Upon a pinch, the inn could supply a pair of post-horses: but they were seldom called for, as Stilborough was so near. It was the only inn of any kind at Greylands, and was frequented by the fishermen, as well as occasionally by more important guests. The landlord was John Bent. The place was his own and had been his father's before him. He was considered to be a "warm" man; to be able to live at his ease, irrespective of custom. John Bent was independent in manner and speech, except to his wife. Mrs. Bent, a thrifty, bustling, talkative woman, had taken John's independence out of him at first setting off, so far as she was concerned; but they got on very well together. To Mr. Castlemaine especially John was given to show independence. They were civil to each other, but there was no love lost between them. Mr. Castlemaine would have liked to purchase the Dolphin and the land pertaining to it: he had made more than one strong overture to do so, which John had resisted and resented. The landlord, too, had taken up an idea that Mr. Castlemaine did not encourage the sojourn of strangers at the inn; had done his best in a quiet way to discourage

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it, as was observed in regard to the Grey Ladies. Altogether, John Bent did not favour the Master of Greylands.

On one of the days of this self-same month of February, when the air was keen and frosty and the sea sparkled under the afternoon sunshine, John Bent and his wife sat in the room they mostly occupied, which was called the best kitchen. Called so in familiar parlance only, however, for it was really used as the sitting-room of the landlord and his wife, and not for cooking. The room was on the side of the house, its large, low, three-framed window and its door facing the beach. Outside this window was another of those hospitable benches, for customers to sit down on to drink their ale when it pleased them. Mrs. Bent herself liked to sit there when work was over, and criticise the doings of the village. Whatever might be the weather, this door, like the front one, stood open; and

well-known guests, or neighbours stepping in for a gossip, would enter by it. But no customer attempted to call for pipe or drink in the room, unless specially permitted.

Mrs. Bent stood at the table before the window, picking shrimps for potting. She was slim and active, with dark curls on either

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side her thin and comely face. Her cap had cherry-coloured ribbons in it, her favourite colour, and flying strings; her cotton gown, of a chintz pattern, was drawn through its pocket hole, displaying a dark stuff petticoat, and neat shoes and stockings. John Bent sat at the blazing fire, as near to it as he could get his wooden chair in, reading the "Stilborough Herald."

"It's uncommon cold to-day!" he broke out presently, giving a twist to his back. "The wind comes in and cuts one like a knife. Don't you think, Dorothy, we might shut that door a bit these sharp days!"

"No I don't," said Mrs. Bent.

"You'll get rheumatism yet before the winter's over, as sure as you're a living woman. Or I shall."

"Shall I!" retorted Mrs. Bent, in her sharply decisive tones. "Over forty years of age I am now, and I've been here nigh upon twenty, and never had a touch of it yet. I am not going to begin to shut up doors and windows, John Bent, to please you or anybody else."

Thus put down, John resigned himself to his paper again. He was a spare, middle-sized man, some few years older than his

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wife, with a red, healthy face and scanty grey hair. Presently he laid the newspaper aside, and sat watching his wife's nimble fingers.

"Dorothy, woman, when those shrimps are done, you might send a pot of 'em over to poor Sister Mildred. She's uncommon weak, they say."

The very idea that had been running through Mrs. Bent's own mind. But she did not receive the suggestion courteously.

"Suppose you attend to your own concerns, John. If I am to supply the parish with shrimps gratis, it's about time I left off potting."

John picked up his paper again with composure: he was accustomed to all this: and just then a shadow fell across the room. A fisherman was standing at the open door with some fish for sale.

"It's you, Tim, is it!" cried Mrs. Bent in her shrillest tones. "It's not often your lazy limbs bring me anything worth buying. What is it to-day!"

"A splendid cod, Mrs. Bent," replied the man. "Never was finer caught."

"And a fine price, I dare be bound!" returned the landlady, stepping aside to inspect the fish. "What's the price!"

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Tim named it: putting on a little to allow of what he knew would ensue—the beating down. Mrs. Bent spoke loudly in her wrath.

"Now look here, Tim Gleeson!—do you think I'm made of money; or do you think I'm soft! I'll give you just half the sum. If you don't like it you may take yourself off and your fish behind you."

Mrs. Bent got the cod at her price. She had returned to her shrimps, when, after a gentle tap at the open door, there entered one of the Grey Sisters. Sister Ann—whose week it was to help in the domestic work and to go on errands—was a busy, cheerful, sensible woman, as fond of talking as Mrs. Bent herself. She was dressed entirely in grey. A grey stuff gown of a convenient length for walking, that is, just touching the ankles; a grey cloth cloak reaching down nearly as far; and a round grey straw bonnet with a white net border close to the face. When the ladies took possession of the Grey Nunnery, and constituted themselves a Sisterhood, they had assumed this attire. It was neat, suitable, and becoming; and not of a nature to attract particular attention when only one or two of them were seen abroad together. From the dress, however, had arisen the appellation applied

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to them—the Grey Ladies. In summer weather the stuff used was of a lighter texture. The stockings worn by Sister Ann were grey, the shoes stout, and fastened with a steel buckle. The only difference made by the superior sisters was, that the material of their gowns and cloaks was finer and softer, and their stockings were white.

"Lack-a-day! these shrimps will never get done!" cried Mrs. Bent, under her breath. "How d'ye do, Sister Ann!" she said aloud, her tones less sharp, out of respect to the Order. "You look as blue as bad news. I hope there's no fresh sickness or accident."

"It's the east wind," replied Sister Ann. "Coming round that beach corner, it does seize hold of one. I've such a pain here with it," touching her chest, "that I can hardly draw my breath."

"Cramps," said Mrs. Bent, shortly. "John," she added, turning sharply on her husband, "you'd better get Sister Ann a spoonful or two of that cordial, instead of sitting to roast your face at that fire till it's the colour of red pepper."

"Not for worlds," interposed Sister Ann, really meaning it. But John, at the hospitable suggestion had moved away.

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"I have come over to ask if you'll be good enough to let me have a small pot of currant jelly, Mrs. Bent," continued the Grey Sister.

"It is for Sister Mildred, poor thing— —"

"Is she no better!" interrupted Mrs. Bent. "Not a bit. And her lips are so parched, poor lady, and her deafness is so worrying—" "Oh, as to her deafness, *that'*ll never be better," cried Mrs. Bent. "It will get worse as she grows older."

"It can't be much worse than it is: it has always been bad," returned Sister Ann, who seemed slightly to resent the fact of the deafness. "We have had a good bit of sickness in the village, and our black currant jelly is all gone: not that we made much, being so poor. If you will let me buy a pot from you, Mrs. Bent, we shall be glad."

For answer, Mrs. Bent left her shrimps, unlocked a corner cupboard, and put two small pots of jelly into the Sister's hand.

"I am not sure that I can afford both today," said Sister Ann, dubiously. "How much are they!"

"Nothing," returned Mrs. Bent. "Not one farthing will I take from the ladies: I'm always glad to do the little I can for any of you. Give them to Sister Mildred with my

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respects; and say, please, that when I've done my shrimps I'll bring her over a pot of them. I was intending to do it before you came in."

The landlord returned with something in a wine-glass, and stopped the Sister's thanks by making her drink it. Putting the jelly in her basket, Sister Ann, who had no time to stay for a longer gossip that day, gratefully departed.

"It's well the Master of Greylands didn't hear you promise the shrimps and give her them two pots of jelly, wife," cried John Bent, with a queer kind of laugh. "He'd not have liked it."

"The Master of Greylands may lump it."

"It's my belief he'd like to drive the Grey Sisters away from the place, instead of having 'em helped with pots of jelly."

"What I choose to do, I *do* do, thank goodness, without need to ask leave of anybody," returned independent Mrs. Bent.

"I can't think what it is puts Mr. Castlemaine against 'em," debated John Bent, thoughtfully. "Unless he fancies that if they were less busy over religion, and that, we might get the parson here more as a regular thing."

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"We should be none the better for him," snapped Mrs. Bent. "For my part, I don't see much good in parsons," she candidly added. "They only get into people's way."

The silence that ensued was broken by a sound of horses in the distance, followed by the blowing of a horn. John Bent and his wife looked simultaneously at the eight-day clock, ticking in its mahogany case by the fire, and saw that it was on the stroke of four, which was the time the London coach came by. John passed through the house to the front door; his wife, after glancing at herself in the hanging glass and giving a twitch to her cap and her cherry ribbons, left her shrimps and followed him.

It was not that they expected the coach to bring visitors to them. Passengers from London and elsewhere were generally bound to Stilborough. But they as regularly went to the door to be in readiness, in case any did alight; to see it pass, and to exchange salutations with the coachman and guard. It was an event in the Dolphin's somewhat monotonous day's existence.

"I do believe, wife, it's going to stop!" cried John.

It was doing that already. The four

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horses were drawing up; the guard was descending from his seat behind. He opened the door to let out a gentleman, and took a portmanteau from the boot. Before John Bent, naturally slow of movement, had well bestirred himself, the gentleman, who seemed to be remarkably quick and active, had put some money in the guard's hand and caught up his portmanteau.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said John, taking it from him. "You are welcome, sir: will you be pleased to enter!"

The stranger was on the point of stepping in-doors, when he halted and looked up at the sign-board—at the dolphin depicted there in all the hues of the rainbow, its tail lashing up spouts of imaginary water. Smiling to himself, almost as though the dolphin were an old acquaintance, he went in. Mrs. Bent curtseyed low to him in the good old respectful fashion, and he returned it with a bow.

A fire was blazing in one of the parlours, and to this room the guest was conducted by both landlord and landlady. Taking off his upper coat, which was warmly slashed with dark fur, they saw a slight, active man of some eight-and-twenty years, under the middle

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height, with a fresh, pleasant, handsome face, and bright dark eyes. Something in the face seemed to strike on a chord of the landlord's memory.

"Who the dickens is he like!" mentally questioned John. "Anyway, I like his looks."

"I can have a bed-chamber, I suppose!" spoke the stranger; and they noticed that his English, though quite fluent as to words, had a foreign ring in it. "Will you show me to one!

"At your service, sir; please step this way," said Mrs. Bent, in her most gracious tones, for she was habitually courteous to her guests, and was besides favourably impressed by this one's looks and manners. "Hot water directly, Molly," she called out in the direction of the kitchen; "and John, do you bring up the gentleman's luggage."

"I can't think who it is his face puts me in mind of," began John, when he and his wife got back to their room again, and she set on to make hasty work of the shrimps.

"Rubbish to his face," spoke Mrs. Bent. "The face is nice enough, if you mean that. It's late to get anything of a dinner up; and he has not said what he'll have, though I asked him."

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"And look here, wife—that portmanteau is not an English one."

"It may be Dutch, for all it matters to us. Now John Bent, just you stir up that fire a bit, and put some coal on. I may have to bring a saucepan in here, for what I know."

"Tush!" said John, doing as he was bid, nevertheless. "A chop and a potato: that's as much as most of these chance travellers want."

"Not when they are from over the water. I don't forget the last foreign Frenchman that put up here. Fifteen dishes he wanted for his dinner, if he wanted one. And all of 'em dabs and messes."

She had gone to carry away her shrimps when the stranger came down. He walked direct into the room, and looked from the open door. The landlord stood up.

"You are Thomas Bent, I think," said the stranger, turning round.

"John Bent, sir. My father was Thomas Bent, and he has been dead many a year."

"And this is your good wife!" he added, as the landlady came bustling in. "Mistress of the inn."

"And master too," muttered John, in an undertone.

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"I was about to order dinner, Mr. Bent —"

"Then you'd better order it of me, sir," put in the landlady. "His head's no better than a sieve if it has much to carry. Ask for spinach and cauliflower, and you'd get served up carrots and turnips."

"Then I cannot do better than leave my dinner to you, madam," said the young man, with a pleasant laugh. "I should like some fish out of that glorious sea; and the rest I leave to you. Can I have an English plum-pudding!"

"An English plum-pudding! Good gracious, sir, it could not be made and boiled!"

"That will do for to-morrow, then."

Mrs. Bent departed, calling to Molly as she went. The inn kept but two servants; Molly, and a man; the latter chiefly attending to out-of-door things: horses, pigs, and such like. When further help was needed in-doors, it could be had from the village.

"This must be a healthy spot," remarked the stranger, taking a chair without ceremony at John Bent's fire. "It is very open."

"Uncommon healthy, sir. A bit bleak in winter, when the wind's in the east; as it is to-day."

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"Have you many good families residing about!"

"Only one, sir. The Castlemaines."

"The Castlemaines !"

"An old family who have lived here for many a year. You'd pass their place, sir, not long before getting out here: a house of grey-stone on your left hand. It is called Greylands' Rest."

"I have heard of Greylands' Rest—and also of the Castlemaines. It belonged, I think, to old Anthony Castlemaine."

"It did, sir. His son has it now."

"I fancied he had more than one son."

"He had three, sir. The eldest, Mr. Basil, went abroad and never was heard of after: leastways, nothing direct from him. The second, Mr. James, has Greylands' Rest. He always lived there with his father, and he lives there still—master of all since the old gentleman died."

"How did it come to him!" asked the stranger, hastily. "By will!"

"Ah, sir, that's what no soul can tell. All sorts of surmises went about; but nobody knows how it was."

A pause. "And the third son! Where is he!"

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"The third's Mr. Peter. He is a banker at Stilborough."

"Is he rich!"

John Bent laughed at the question. "Rich, sir! Him! Why, it's said he could almost buy up the world. He has one daughter; a beautiful young lady, who's going to be married to young Mr. Blake-Gordon, a son of Sir Richard. Many thought that Mr. Castlemaine—the present Master of Greylands— would have liked to get her for his own son. But—"

In burst Mrs. Bent, a big cooking apron tied on over her gown. She looked slightly surprised at seeing the stranger seated there; but said nothing. Unlocking the corner cupboard, and throwing wide its doors, she began searching for something on the shelves.

"Here you are, Mrs. Bent! Busy as usual."

The sudden salutation came from a gentleman who had entered the house hastily. A tall, well-made, handsome young fellow, with a ready tongue, and a frank expression in his dark brown eyes. He stood just inside the door, and did not observe the stranger.

"Is it you, Mr. Harry!" she said, glancing round.

"It's nobody else," he answered. "What

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an array of jam pots! Do you leave the key in the door! A few of those might be walked off and never be missed."

"I should like to see anybody attempt it," cried Mrs. Bent wrathfully. "You are always joking, Mr. Harry."

He laughed cordially. "John," he said, turning to the landlord, "did the coach bring a parcel for me!"

"No, sir. Were you expecting one, Mr. Harry!"

Mrs. Bent turned completely round from her cupboard. "It's not a trick you are thinking to play us, is it, sir! *I* have not forgotten that other parcel you had left here once."

"Other parcel! Oh, that was ever so many years ago. I am expecting this from London, John, if you will take it in. It will come to-morrow, I suppose. Mrs. Bent thinks I'm a boy still."

"Ah no, sir, that I don't," she said. "You've long grown beyond that, and out of my control."

"Out of everybody else's too," he laughed. "Where I used to get cuffs I now get kisses, Mrs. Bent. And I am not sure but they are the more dangerous application of the two."

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"*I* am very sure they are," called out Mrs. Bent, as the young man went off laughing, after bowing slightly to the stranger, who was now standing up, and whose appearance bespoke him to be a gentleman.

"Who was that!" asked the stranger of John Bent.

"That was Mr. Harry Castlemaine, sir. Son of the Master of Greylands."

With one leap, the stranger was outside the door, gazing after him. But Harry Castlemaine, quick and active, was already nearly beyond view. When the stranger came back to his place again, Mrs. Bent had locked up her cupboard, and was gone.

"A fine-looking young man," he remarked.

"And a good-hearted one as ever lived —though he is a bit random," said John. "I like Mr. Harry: I don't like his father."

"Why not!"

"Well, sir, I hardly know why. One is apt to take dislikes sometimes."

"You were speaking of Greylands' Rest— of the rumours that went abroad respecting it when old Mr. Castlemaine died. What were they!"

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"Various rumours, sir; but all tending to one and the same point. And that was, whether Greylands' Rest had, or had not, legally come to Mr. James Castlemaine."

"Being the second son," quietly spoke the stranger. "There can be no question, I should think, that the rightful heir was the eldest son, Basil."

"And it was known, too, that Basil was his father's favourite; and that the old man during his last years was always looking and longing for him to come back," spoke John Bent, warming with the subject: "and in short, sir, everybody expected it would be left to Basil. On the other hand, James was close at hand, and the old man could leave it to him if he pleased."

"One glance at the will would set all doubt at rest."

"Ay. But it was not known, sir, whether there was a will, or not."

"Not known!"

"No, sir. Some said there was a will, and that it left all to Mr. Basil; others said there was no will at all, but that old Anthony Castlemaine made Mr. James a deed of gift of Greylands' Rest. And a great many said, and still say, that old Mr. Castlemaine only

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handed him over the estate in *trust* for Mr. Basil—or for any sons Mr. Basil might leave after him."

The stranger sat in silence. On his little finger shone a magnificent diamond ring, evidently of great value; he twirled it about unconsciously.

"What is *your* opinion, Mr. Bent!" he suddenly asked.

"Mine, sir! Well, I can't help thinking that the whole was left to Mr. Basil, and that if he's alive the place is no more Mr. James's than it is mine. I think it particularly for two reasons: one because the old man always said it would be Basil's; and again, if it was given to Mr. James, whether by will or by deed of gift, he would have taken care to

show abroad the will or the deed that gave it him, and so set the rumours at rest for good. Not but what all the Castlemaines are close and haughty-natured men, never choosing to volunteer information about themselves. So that—"

"Now then, John Bent! It's about time you began to lay the cloth and see to the silver."

No need to say from whom the interruption came. Mrs. Bent, her face flushed to the

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colour of the cherry ribbons, whisked in and whisked out again. John followed; and set about his cloth-laying. The stranger sat where he was, in a reverie, until called to dinner. It was a small, but most excellent repast, the wine taken with it some of the Dolphin's choice Burgundy, of which it had a small bin. John Bent waited on his guest, who dined to his complete satisfaction. He was about to leave the bottle on the table after dinner, but the guest motioned it away.

"No, no more; I do not drink after dinner. It is not our custom in France."

"Oh, very well, sir. I'll cork it up for tomorrow. I—I beg your pardon, sir," resumed the landlord, as he drew the cloth from the table, "what name shall I put down to you, sir!"

The stranger rose and stood on the hearthrug, speaking distinctly when he gave his name.

Speaking distinctly. Nevertheless John Bent seemed not to hear it, for he stared like one in a dream.

"What!" he gasped, in a startled tone of terror, as he staggered back against the

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sideboard; and some of the fresh colour left his face. "What name did you say, sir!"

"Anthony Castlemaine."

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CHAPTER IV.

FORESHADOWINGS OF EVIL.

THE stone walls of Greylands' Rest lay cold and still under the pale sunshine of the February day. The air was sharp and frosty; the sun, though bright to the eye, had little warmth in it; and the same cutting east wind that John Bent had complained of to the traveller who had alighted at his house the previous afternoon, was prevailing still with an equal keenness.

Mr. Castlemaine felt it in his study, where he had been busy all the morning. He fancied he must have caught a chill, for a slight shiver suddenly stirred his tall, fine frame, and he turned to the fire and gave it a vigorous poke. The fuel was wood and coal mixed, and the blaze went roaring up the

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chimney. The room was not large: standing with his back to the fire, the window was on his right hand; the door on his left; opposite to him, against the wall, stood a massive piece of mahogany furniture, called a bureau. It was a kind of closed-in desk, made somewhat in the fashion of the banker's desk at Stilborough, but larger; the inside had pigeon-holes and deep drawers, and a slab for writing on. This inside was well filled with neatly arranged bundles of papers, with account books belonging to the farm business and else, and with some few old letters: and the Master of Greylands was as cautious to keep this desk closed and locked from the possibility of the view of those about him as his brother Peter was to keep his. The Castlemaines were proud, reticent, and careful men.

For a good part of the morning, Mr. Castlemaine had been busy at this desk. He had shut and locked it now, and was standing with his back to the fire, deep in thought. Two letters, of the large size in vogue before envelopes were used, and sealed with the Castlemaine crest in red wax, lay on the side-table, ready to be posted. His left hand was inside his waistcoat, resting on the broad

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plaited shirt-frill of fine cambric; his bright dark eyes had rather a troubled look in them as they sought that old building over the fields opposite, the Friars Keep, and the sparkling sea beyond. In reality, Mr. Castlemaine was looking neither at the Friar's Keep nor the sea, for he was deep in thought and saw nothing.

The Master of Greylands was of a superstitious nature: it may as well be stated candidly: difficult though it was to believe such of so practical a man. Not to the extent of giving credit to stories of ghosts and apparitions; the probability is, that in his heart he would have laughed at that; but he did believe in signs and warnings, in omens of ill-luck and good-luck.

On this self-same morning he had awoke with an impression of discomfort, as if some impending evil were hanging over him; he could not account for it, for there was no

conducing cause; and at the time he did not connect it with any superstitious feeling or fancy, but thought he must be either out of sorts, or had had some annoyance that he did not at the moment of waking recollect; something lying latent in his mind. Three or four little hindrances, or mishaps, occurred

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when he was dressing. First of all, he could not find his slippers: he hunted here; he looked there; and then remembered that he had left them the previous night in his study —a most unusual thing for him to do—and he had to go and fetch them, or else dress in his stockings. Next, in putting on his shirt, he tore the button-hole at the neck, and was obliged to change it for another one. And the last thing he did was to upset all his shaving water, and had to wait while fresh was brought.

"Nothing but impediments: it seems as though I were not to get dressed to-day," muttered the Master of Greylands. "Can there be any ill-luck in store for me!"

The intelligent reader will doubtless be much surprised to hear him ask so ridiculous a question. Nevertheless, the same kind of thing—these marked hindrances—had occurred twice before in Mr. Castlemaine's life, and each time a great evil had followed in the day. Not of the present time was he thinking, now as he stood, but of one of those past days, and of what it had brought forth.

"Poor Maria!" he softly cried—alluding to his first wife, of whom he had been passionately fond. "Well, and merry, and loving

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in the morning; and at night stretched before me in death. It was an awful accident! and I—I have never cared quite so much for the world since. Maria was—what is it! Come in."

A knock at the door had disturbed the reflections. Mr. Castlemaine let fall his coat tails, which he had then caught up, and turned his head to it. A man servant appeared.

"Commodore Teague wants to know, sir, whether he may get those two or three barrow-loads of wood moved to the Hutt to-day. He'd like to, he says, if it's convenient."

"Yes, he can have it done. Is he here, Miles!"

"Yes, sir; he's waiting in the yard!"

"I'll come and speak to him."

And the Master of Greylands, taking the two letters from the side-table, left the room to descend, shutting the door behind him.

We must turn for a few minutes to the Dolphin Inn, and to the previous evening. Nothing could well have exceeded John Bent's consternation when his guest, the unknown stranger, had revealed his name. Anthony Castlemaine! Not quite at first,

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but after a short interval, the landlord saw how it must be—that he was the son of the late Basil Castlemaine. And he was not at all best pleased to hear it in the moment's annoyance.

"You ought to have told me, sir," he stammered in his confusion. "It was unkind to take me at a disadvantage. Here have I been using liberties with the family's name, supposing I was talking to an utter stranger!"

The frank expression of the young man's face, the pleasant look in his fine brown eyes, tended to reassure the landlord, even better than words.

"You have not said a syllable of my family that I could take exception to," he freely said. "You knew my father: will you shake hands with me, John Bent, as his son!"

"You are too good, sir; and I meant no harm by my gossip," said the landlord, meeting the offered hand. "You must be the son of Mr. Basil. It's a great many years since he went away, and I was but a youngster, but I remember him. Your face is nearly the same as his was, sir. The likeness was puzzling me beyond everything. I hope Mr. Basil is well, sir."

"No," said the young man, "he is dead.

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And I have come over here, as his son and heir, to claim Greylands' Rest."

It was even so. The facts were as young Anthony Castlemaine stated. And a short summary of past events must be given here.

When Basil Castlemaine went abroad so many years ago, in his hot-blooded youth, he spent some of the first years roaming about: seeing the world, he called it. Later, circumstances brought him acquainted with a young English lady, whose friends lived in France, in the province of Dauphiné: which, as the world knows, is close on the borders of Italy. They had settled near a place called Gap, and were in commerce there,

owning some extensive silk-mills. Basil Castlemaine, tired probably of his wandering life and of being a beau garçon, married this young lady, put all the money he had left (it was a very tolerably good sum) into the silk-mills, and became a partner. There he had remained. He liked the climate; he liked the French mode of life; he liked the business he had engaged in. Not once had he re-visited England. He was by nature a most obstinate man, retaining anger for ever, and he would not give token of remembrance to the father and brothers who, in his opinion, had been too glad to get rid of

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him. No doubt they had. But, though he did not allow them to hear of him, he heard occasionally of them. An old acquaintance of his, who was the son of one Squire Dobie, living some few miles on the other side Stilborough, wrote to him every two years, or so, and gave him news. But this correspondence (if letters written only on one side could be called such, for all Tom Dobie ever received back was a newspaper, sent in token that his letter had reached its destination) was carried on en cachette; and Tom Dobie never disclosed it to living mortal, having undertaken not to do so. Some two years before the present period, Tom Dobie had died: his letters of course ceased, and it was by the merest accident that Basil Castlemaine heard of the death of his father. He was then himself too ill to return and put in his claim to Greylands' Rest; in fact he was near to death; but he charged his son to go to England and claim the estate as soon as he should be no more; nay, as he said, to enter into possession of it. But he made use of a peculiar warning in giving this charge to his son; and these were the words.

"Take you care what you are about, Anthony, and go to work cautiously. There

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may be treachery in store for you. The brothers—your uncles—who combined to drive me away from our homestead in days gone by, may combine again to keep you out of it. Take care of yourself, I say; feel your way, as it were; and beware of treachery."

Whether, as is supposed sometimes to be the case, the dying man had some prevision of the future, and saw, as by instinct, what that future would bring forth, certain it was, that he made use of this warning to young Anthony: and equally certain that the end bore out the necessity for the caution.

So here was Anthony Castlemaine. Arrived in the land of his family to put in his claim to what he deemed was his lawful inheritance, Greylands' Rest, the deep black band worn for his father yet fresh upon his hat.

Mrs. Castlemaine sat in the red parlour, reading a letter. Or, rather, re-reading it, for it was one that had arrived earlier in the morning. A lady at Stilborough had applied for the vacant place of Governess to Miss Flora Castlemaine, and had enclosed her testimonials.

"Good music, singing, drawing; no

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French," read Mrs. Castlemaine aloud, partly for the benefit of Miss Flora, who stood on a stool at her elbow, not at all pleased that any such application should come; for, as we have already seen, the young lady would prefer to bring herself up without the aid of any governess. "Good tempered, but an excellent disciplinarian, and very firm with her pupils—"

"I'm not going to have *her*, mamma," came the interruption. "Don't you think it!"

"I do not suppose you will have her, Flora. The want of French will be an insuperable objection. How tiresome it is! One seems unable to get everything. The last lady who applied was not a sufficient musician for advanced pupils, and therefore could not have undertaken Ethel's music."

"As if Ethel needed to learn music still! Why she plays as well—as well," concluded the girl, at any loss for a simile. "Catch me learning music when I'm as old as Ethel!"

"I consider it nonsense myself, but Ethel wishes it, and your papa so foolishly gives in to her whims in all things that of course she has to be studied in the matter as much as you. It may be months and months before we get a lady who combines all that's wanted *here*."

Mrs. Castlemaine spoke resentfully. What with one thing and another, she generally was in a state of resentment against Ethel.

"I hope it may be years and years!" cried Flora, leaning her arms on the table and kicking her legs about. "I hope we shall never get one at all."

"It would be easy enough to get one, but for this trouble about Ethel's music," grumbled Mrs. Castlemaine. "I have a great mind to send her to the Grey Nunnery for her lessons.

Sister Charlotte, I know, is perfect on the piano; and she would be thankful for the employment."

"Papa would not let her go to the Nunnery," said the sharp girl. "He does not like the Grey Ladies."

"I suppose he'd not. I'm sure, what with this disqualification and that disqualification, a good governess is as difficult to fix upon as— get off the table, my sweet child," hastily broke off Mrs. Castlemaine: "here's your papa."

The Master of Greylands entered the red parlour, after his short interview in the yard with Commodore Teague. Miss Flora slipped past him, and disappeared. He saw a good deal to find fault with in her rude, tomboy

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ways; and she avoided him when she could. Taking the paper, he stirred the fire into a blaze, just as he had, not many minutes before, stirred his own fire upstairs.

"It is a biting-cold day," he observed. "I think I must have caught a little chill, for I seem to feel cold in an unusual degree. What's that!"

Mrs. Castlemaine held the letters still in her hand; and by the expression of her countenance, bent upon the contents, he could perceive there was some annoyance.

"*This* governess does not do; it is as bad as the last. She lacked music; this one lacks French. Is it not provoking, James!"

Mr. Castlemaine took up the letters and read them.

"I should say she is just the sort of governess for Flora," he observed. "The testimonials are excellent."

"But her want of French! Did you not observe that!"

"I don't know that French is of so much consequence for Flora as the getting a suitable person to control her. One who will hold her under firm discipline. As it is, she is being ruined."

"French not of consequence for Flora!"

repeated Mrs. Castlemaine. "What can you mean, James!"

"I said it was not of so much consequence, relatively speaking. Neither is it."

"And while Ethel's French is perfect!"

"What has that to do with it!"

"I will never submit to see Flora inferior in accomplishments to Ethel, James. French I hold especially by: I have felt the want of it myself. Better, of the two, for her to fail in music than in speaking French. If it were not for Ethel's senseless whim of continuing to take music lessons, there would be no trouble."

"Who's this, I wonder!" cried Mr. Castlemaine.

He alluded to a visitor's ring at the hall bell. Flora came dashing in.

"It's a gentleman in a fur coat," she said. "I watched him come up the avenue."

"A gentleman in a fur coat!" repeated her mother. "Some one who has walked from Stilborough this cold day, I suppose."

Miles entered. On his small silver waiter lay a card. He presented it to his master and spoke. "The gentleman says he wishes to see you, sir. I have shown him into the drawing-room."

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The Master of Greylands was gazing at the card with knitted brow, and haughty lips. He did not understand the name on it.

"What farce is this!" he exclaimed, tossing the card on the table in anger. And Mrs. Castlemaine bent to read it with aroused curiosity.

"*Anthony Castlemaine*."

"It must be an old card of your father's, James," she remarked, "given most likely years ago, to some one to send in, should he ever require to present himself here—perhaps to crave a favour."

This view, just at the moment it was spoken, seemed feasible enough to Mr. Castlemaine, and his brow lost its fierceness. Another minute, and he saw how untenable it was.

"My father never had such a card as this, Sophia. Plain 'Anthony Castlemaine,' without hold or handle. His cards had 'Mr.' before the name. And look at the strokes and flourishes—it's not like an English card. What sort of a person is it, Miles!"

"A youngish gentleman, sir. He has a lot of dark fur on his coat. He asked for Mr. James Castlemaine."

"Mr. *James* Castlemaine!" echoed the

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Master of Greylands, sharply, as he stalked from the room, card in hand.

The visitor was standing before a portrait in the drawing-room, contemplating it earnestly. It was that of old Anthony Castlemaine, taken when he was about fifty years of age. At the opening of the door he turned round and advanced, his hand extended and a pleasant smile on his face.

"I have the gratification, I fancy, of seeing my Uncle James!"

Mr. Castlemaine kept his hands to himself. He looked haughtily at the intruder; he spoke frigidly.

"I have not the honour of your acquaintance, sir."

"But my card tells you who I am," rejoined the young man. "I am indeed your nephew, uncle; the son of your elder brother. He was Basil, and you are James."

"Pardon me, sir, if I tell you what *I* think you are. An impostor."

"Ah no, do not be afraid, uncle. I am verily your nephew, Anthony Castlemaine. I have papers and legal documents with me to prove indisputably the fact; I bring you also a letter from my father, written on his death-bed. But I should have thought you

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might know me by my likeness to my father; and he—I could fancy that portrait had been taken for him"—pointing to the one he had been looking at. "He always said I greatly resembled my grandfather."

There could be no dispute as to the likeness. The young man's face was the Castlemaine face exactly: the well formed, handsome features, the clear and fresh complexion, the brilliant dark eyes. All the Castlemaines had been alike, and this one was like them all; even like James, who stood there.

Taking a letter from his pocket-book, he handed it to Mr. Castlemaine. The latter broke the seal—Basil's own seal; he saw that —and began to peruse it. While he did so, he reflected a little, and made up his mind.

To acknowledge his nephew. For he had the sense to see that no other resource would be left him. He did it with a tolerably good grace, but in a reserved cold kind of manner. Folding up the letter, he asked a few questions; which young Anthony freely answered, and gave a brief account of the past.

"And Basil—your father—is dead, you say! Has been dead four weeks. This letter, I see, is dated Christmas Day."

"It was on Christmas Day he wrote it,

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uncle. Yes, nearly four weeks have elapsed since his death: it took place on the fourteenth of January; his wife, my dear mother, had died on the same day six years before. That was curious, was it not! I had meant to come over here immediately, as he charged me to do; but there were many matters of business to be settled, and I could not get away until now."

"Have you come over for any particular purpose!" coldly asked Mr. Castlemaine.

"I have come to stay, Uncle James. To take possession of my inheritance."

"Of your inheritance!"

"The estate of Greylands' Rest."

"Greylands' Rest is not yours," said Mr. Castlemaine.

"My father informed me that it was. He brought me up to no profession: he always said that Greylands' Rest would be mine at his own death; that he should come into it himself at the death of his father, and thence it would descend to me. To make all sure, he left it to me in his will. And, as I have mentioned to you, we did not hear my grandfather was dead until close upon last Christmas. Had my father known it in the summer, he would have come over to put in his

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claim: he was in sufficiently good health then."

"It is a pity you should have come so far on a fruitless errand, young man. Listen. When your father, Basil, abandoned his home here in his youth, he forfeited all claim to the inheritance. He asked for his portion, and had it; he took it away with him and *stayed* away; stayed away for nigh upon forty years. What claim does he suppose that sort of conduct gave him on my father's affection, that he should leave to him Greylands' Rest!"

"He always said his father would leave it to no one but him: that he knew it and was sure of it."

"What my father might have done had Basil come back during his lifetime, I cannot pretend to say: neither is it of any consequence to guess at it now. Basil did not come back, and, therefore, you cannot be surprised that he missed Greylands' Rest; that the old father left it to his second son— myself—instead of to him."

"But did he leave it to you, uncle!"

"A superfluous question, young man. I succeeded to it, and am here in possession of it."

"I am told that there are doubts upon

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the point abroad," returned Anthony, speaking in the same pleasant tone, but with straightforward candour.

"Doubts upon what point!" haughtily demanded Mr. Castlemaine.

"What I hear is this, Uncle James. That it is not known to the public, and never has been known, how you came into Greylands' Rest. Whether the estate was left to you by will, or handed over to you by deed of gift, or given to you in *trust* to hold for my father. Nobody knows, I am told, anything about it, or even whether there was or was not a will Perhaps you will give me these particulars, uncle!"

Mr. Castlemaine's face grew dark as night. "Do you presume to doubt my word, young man! I tell you that Greylands' Rest is mine. Let it content you."

"If you will show me that Greylands' Rest is yours, Uncle James, I will never say another word upon the subject, or give you the smallest trouble. Prove this to me, and I will stay a few days in the neighbourhood, for the sake of cementing family ties—though I may never meet any of you again—and then go back to the place whence I came. But if you do not give me this proof, I must prosecute my claim, and maintain my rights."

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"Rights!" scoffed Mr. Castlemaine, beginning to lose his temper. "How dare you presume to talk to *me* in this way! A needy adventurer—for that is what I conclude you are, left without means of your own—to come here, and— "

"I beg your pardon," interrupted the young man; "I am not needy. Though far from rich, I have a fair competency. Enough to keep me in comfort."

"It is all one to me," said Mr. Castlemaine. "You had better do as you say—go back to the place whence you came."

"If the estate be truly and lawfully yours, I should be the last to attempt to disturb you in it; I should not wish to do so. But if it be not yours, Uncle James, it must be mine; and, until I can be assured one way or the other, I shall remain here, though it be for ever."

Mr. Castlemaine drew himself up to his full height. He was perfectly calm again; perhaps somewhat vexed that he had allowed himself to betray temper; and rejoined, coolly and prudently,

"I cannot pretend to control your movements; to say you shall go, or you shall come; but I tell you, frankly, that your staying will

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not serve you in the least. Were you to remain for ever—as you phrase it—not one tittle of proof would you get from me. Things have come to a pretty pass if I am to be bearded in my own house, and have my word doubted."

"Well, Uncle James," said the young man, still speaking pleasantly, "then nothing remains for me but to try and find out the truth for myself. I wish you had been more explicit with me, for I am sure I do not know how to set about it," he added, candidly.

A faint, proud smile curled Mr. Castlemaine's decisive lips. It seemed to say, "Do what you please; it is beneath my notice." His nephew took up his hat to depart.

"May I offer to shake hands with you, Uncle James! I hope we need not be enemies!"

A moment's hesitation, and Mr. Castlemaine shook the offered hand. It was next to impossible to resist the frank geniality; just the same frank geniality that had characterised Basil; and Mr. Castlemaine thawed a little.

"It appears to be a very strange thing that Basil should have remained stationary all

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those years in France; never once to have come home!"

"I have heard him say many a time, Uncle James, that he should never return until he returned to take possession of Greylands' Rest. And during the time of the great war, travelling was dangerous and difficult."

"Neither could I have believed that he would have settled down so quietly. And to engage in commerce!"

"He grew to like the bustle of business. He had a vast capacity for business, Uncle James."

"No doubt; being a Castlemaine," was the answer, delivered with conscious superiority. "The Castlemaines lack capacity for nothing they may choose to undertake. Good morning; and I wish you a better errand next time."

As Anthony Castlemaine, on departing, neared the gate leading to the avenue, he saw a young lady approaching it. A fisherman, to whom she was speaking, walked by her side. The latter's words, as he turned away, caught the ear of Anthony.

"You will tell the master then, please, Miss Castlemaine, and say a good word to him for me!"

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"Yes, I will, Gleeson; and I am very sorry for the misfortune," the young lady answered. "Good day."

Anthony gazed with unfeigned pleasure on the beautiful face presented to him in—as he supposed—his cousin. It was Ethel Reene. The cheeks had acquired a soft rose flush in the crisp air, the dark brown hair took a wonderfully bright tinge in the sunshine; and in the deep eyes glancing so straight and honestly through their long dark lashes into those of the stranger, there was a sweet candour that caused Anthony Castlemaine to think them the prettiest eyes he had ever seen. He advanced to her direct; said a few words indicative of his delight at meeting her; and, while Ethel was lost in astonishment, he suddenly bent his face forward, and kissed her on either cheek.

For a moment, Ethel Reene was speechless; bewildered with confused indignation at the outrage; and then she burst into a flood of tears. What she said, she hardly knew; but all bespoke her shivering, sensitive sense of the insult. Anthony Castlemaine was overwhelmed. He had intended no insult, but only to give a cousinly greeting after the

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fashion of his adopted land; and he hastened to express his contrition.

"I beg your pardon a million times. I am so grieved to have pained or offended you. I think you cannot have understood that I am your cousin!"

"Cousin, sir," she rejoined—and Mr. Castlemaine himself could not have spoken with a more haughty contempt. "How dare you presume! I have not a cousin or a relative in the wide world."

The sweet eyes were flashing, the delicate face was flushed to crimson. It occurred to Anthony Castlemaine that he must have made some unfortunate mistake.

"I know not how to beg your pardon, sufficiently," he continued. "I thought indeed you were my cousin, Miss Castlemaine."

"I am not Miss Castlemaine."

"I—pardon me!—I assuredly heard the sailor address you as Miss Castlemaine."

Ethel was beginning to recover herself. She saw that he did not look at all like a young man who would gratuitously offer any lady an insult, but like a true gentleman. Moreover, there flashed upon her perception the strong likeness his face bore to the Castlemaines; and she thought that what he

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had done he must have done in some error.

"I am not Miss Castlemaine," she condescended to explain, her tone losing part of its anger, but not its pride. "Mr. Castlemaine's house is my home, and people often call me by the name. But—and if I were Miss Castlemaine, who are you, sir, that you should claim to be my cousin! The Castlemaines have no strange cousins."

"I am Anthony Castlemaine, young lady; son of the late Basil Castlemaine, the heir of' Greylands. I come from an interview with my Uncle James; and I—I beg your pardon most heartily once more."

"Anthony Castlemaine, the son of Basil Castlemaine!" she exclaimed, nearly every emotion forgotten in astonishment; but a conviction, nevertheless, seizing upon her that it was true. "The son of the lost Basil!"

"I am, in very truth, his son," replied Anthony. "My father is dead, and I have come over to claim—and, I hope, enter into —my patrimony, Greylands' Rest."

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CHAPTER V.

THE BALL.

LIGHTS gleamed from the rooms of the banker's house in Stilborough. A flood of light blazed from the hall, and was reflected on the pavement outside, and on the colours of the flowering plants just within the entrance. Mr. Peter Castlemaine and Miss Castlemaine gave a dance that night; and it was the custom to open the door early, and keep it open, for the arrival of the expected guests.

The reception-rooms were in readiness, and gay with their wax lights and flowers. They opened mostly into one another. The largest of them was appropriated to dancing. All its furniture and its carpet had been removed; benches occupied the walls, under the innumerable sconces bearing lights; and the floor

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was chalked artistically, in a handsome pattern of flowers, after the fashion of the day.

In the small apartment that was her own sitting-room, stood Mary Ursula. In her rich robes of white silk and lace, and in the jewels which had been her mother's, and which it was her father's wish she should wear on grand occasions, she looked, with her stately form and her most lovely face, of almost regal beauty. Excitement had flushed her cheeks to brightness; on her delicate and most perfect features sat an animation not often seen there. Whatever evil might be overhanging the house, at least no prevision of it rested on Miss Castlemaine; and perhaps few young ladies in all the kingdom could be found who were possessed of the requisites for happiness in a degree that could vie with the banker's daughter, or who had so entire a sense of it. Beautiful, amiable, clever, rich; the darling of her father; sheltered from every care in her sumptuous home; loving and beloved by a young man worthy of her, and to whom she was soon to be united! In the days to come, Mary Ursula would look back on this time, and tell herself that the very intensity of its happiness

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might have warned her that it was too bright to last.

He, her lover, was by her side now. He had come early, on purpose to be for a few minutes alone with her, before the arrival of the other guests. They stood together on the hearth-rug. A quiet-looking young man of middle height, with dark hair, just the shade of hers, and rather a pensive and mild cast of face: a face, however, that did not seem to proclaim much moral strength. Such was William Blake-Gordon.

They were conversing of the future; the future that to both of them looked so bright; of the home and home life that ere long would be theirs in common. Mr. Blake- Gordon had been for some little time searching for a house, and had not met with a suitable one. But he thought he had found it now.

"It seems to me to be just the thing, Mary," he was saying—for he never called her by her double name, but "Mary" simply. "Only four miles from Stilborough on the Loughton road; which will be within an easy distance of your father's home and of Sir Richard's. It was by the merest chance I heard this morning that the Wests were going;

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and we can secure it at once if we will, before it goes into the market."

Miss Castlemaine knew the house by sight; she had passed it many a time in her drives, and seen it nestling away amid the trees. It was called by rather a fanciful name—Raven's Priory.

"It is not to be let, you say, William; only bought."

"Only bought. There will be, I presume, no difficulty made to that with the authorities."

He spoke with a smile. She smiled too. Difficulty!—with the loads of wealth that would be theirs some time! They might well laugh at the idea.

"Only that—that it is uncertain how long we may require to live in it," she said, with a slight hesitation. "I suppose that—some time—"

"We shall have to leave it for my father's home. True. But that, I trust, may be a lone while off. And then we could re-sell Raven's Priory."

"Yes of course. It is a nice place, William!"

"Charming," he replied with enthusiasm. For of course all things, the proposed residence

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included, wore to him the hue of couleur-de-rose.

"I have never been inside it," she observed.

"No. The Wests are churlish people, keeping no company. Report says that Mrs. West is a hypochondriac. They let me go in this morning, and I went over all the house. It is the nicest place, love—and not too large or too small for us; and the Wests have kept it in good condition. You will be charmed with the drawing-rooms, Mary; and the conservatory is one of the best I ever saw. They want us to take to the plants."

"Are they nice!"

"Beautiful. The Wests are moving to London, to be near good advice for her, and they do not expect to get anything of a conservatory there; at least, that is worth the name. I wonder what your papa will think about this house, Mary! We might tell him of it now. Where is he!"

"He is out," she answered. "Just as he was going up to dress, Thomas Hill sent for him down stairs, and they went out somewhere together. Papa ran up to tell me he would be back as soon as he could, but that I must for once receive the people alone."

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"I wish I might stand by your side to help receive them!" he said impulsively. "Would any of them faint at it! Do you think Mrs. Webb would, if she were here!" he continued with a smile. "Ah, well—a short while, my darling, and I shall have the right to stand by you."

He stole his arm round her waist, and whispered to her a repetition of those love vows that had so often before charmed her ear and thrilled her heart. Her cheek touched his shoulder; the faint perfume of her costly fan, that she swayed unconsciously as it hung from her wrist, was to him like an odour from Paradise. He recounted to her all the features he remembered of the house that neither of them doubted would be their future home; and the minutes passed in, to both, bliss unutterable.

The crashing up of a carriage—of two carriages it seemed—warned them that this sweet pastime was at an end. Sounds of bustle in the hall succeeded to it: the servants were receiving the first guests.

"Oh, William—I forgot—I meant to tell you," she hurriedly whispered. "I had the most ugly dream last night. And you know

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I very rarely do dream. I have not been able to get it out of my mind all day."

"What was it, Mary!"

"I thought we were separated, you and I; separated for ever. We had quarrelled, I think; that point was not clear; but you turned off one way, and I another. It was in the gallery of this house, William, and we had been talking together. You went out at the other end, by the door near the dining-room, and I at this end; and we turned at the last and looked at one another. Oh, the look was dreadful! I shall never forget it: so full of pain and sadness! And we knew, both of us knew, that it was the last farewell look; that we should never again meet in this world."

"Oh, my love! my love!" he murmured, bending his face on hers. "And you could let it trouble you!—knowing it was but a dream! Nothing but the decree of God— death—shall ever separate us, Mary. For weal or for woe, we will go through the life here together."

He kissed away the tears that had gathered in her eyes at the remembrance; and Miss Castlemaine turned hastily into one of the larger rooms, and took up her standing there

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in expectation. For the feet of the gay world were already traversing the gallery.

She welcomed her guests, soon coming in thick and threefold, with the gracious manner and the calm repose of bearing that always characterised her, apologising to all for the absence of her father; telling them that he had been called out unexpectedly on some matter of business, but would soon return. Amid others, came the party from Greylands' Rest, arriving rather late: Mrs. Castlemaine in black velvet, leaning on the arm of her step son; Ethel Reene walking modestly behind, in a simple dress of white net, adorned with white ribbons. There was many a fine young man present, but never a finer or more attractive one than Harry Castlemaine; with the handsome Castlemaine features, the easy, independent bearing, and the ready tongue.

"Is it of any use to ask whether you are at liberty to honour me with your hand for the first dance, Mary Ursula!" he inquired, after leaving Mrs. Castlemaine on a sofa.

"Not the least, Harry," answered Miss Castlemaine, smiling. "I am engaged for that, and for the second as well."

"Of course. Well, it is all as it should be,

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I suppose. Given the presence of Mr. Blake-Gordon, and no one else has so good a right as he to open the ball with you."

"You will find a substitute for me by the asking, Harry. See all those young ladies around; not one but is glancing towards you with the hope that you may seek her."

He laughed rather consciously. He was perfectly well aware of the universal favour accorded by the ladies, young and old, to Harry Castlemaine. But this time, at any rate, he intended to disappoint them all. He turned to Miss Reene.

"Will you take compassion upon a rejected man, Ethel! Mary Ursula won't have me for the first two dances, you hear; so I appeal to you in all humility to heal the smart. Don't reject me."

"Nonsense, Harry!" was the young lady's answer. "You must not ask me for the first dance; it would be like brother and sister dancing together; all the room would resent it in you, and call it bad manners. Choose elsewhere. There's Miss Mountsorrel; she will not say you nay."

"For the dances, no; but she'll not condescend to speak three words to me while they are in process," returned Mr. Harry Castlemaine.

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"If you do not dance them with me, Ethel, I shall sit down until the two first dances are over."

He spoke still in the same laughing, half joking manner; but, nevertheless, there was a ring of decision in the tone of the last words; and Ethel knew he meant what he said. The Castlemaines rarely broke through any decision they might announce, however lightly it was spoken; and Harry possessed somewhat of the same persistent will.

"If you make so great a point of it, I will dance with you," observed Ethel. "But I must again say that you ought to take any one rather than me."

"I have not seen my uncle yet," remarked Miss Castlemaine to Ethel, as Harry strolled away to pay his devoirs to the room generally. "Where can he be lingering!"

"Papa is not here, Mary Ursula."

"Not here! How is that!"

"Really I don't know," replied Ethel. "When Harry came running out to get into the carriage to-night—we had been sitting in it quite five minutes waiting for him; but he had been away all day, and was late in dressing—Miles shut the door. 'Don't do that,' said Harry to him, 'the master's not here.'

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Upon that, Mrs. Castlemaine spoke, and said papa was not coming with us."

"I suppose he will be coming in later," remarked Mary Ursula, as she moved away to meet fresh guests.

The dancing began with a country dance; or, as would have been said then, the ball opened with one. Miss Castlemaine and her lover, Mr. Blake-Gordon, took their places at its head; Harry Castlemaine and Miss Reene were next to them. For in those days, people stood much upon etiquette at these assemblies, and the young ladies of the family took precedence of all others in the opening dance.

The dance chosen was called the Triumph. Harry Castlemaine led Mary Ursula down between the line of admiring spectators; her partner, Mr. Blake-Gordon, followed, and they brought the young lady back in triumph. Such was the commencement of the figure. It was a sight to be remembered in after years; the singular good looks of at least two of the three; Harry, the sole male heir of the Castlemaines, with the tall fine form

and the handsome face; and Mary Ursula, so stately and beautiful. Ethel Reene was standing alone, in her quiet loveliness, looking like a snowdrop, and

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waiting until her turn should come to be in like manner taken down. The faces of all sparkled with animation and happiness, the gala robes of the two young ladies added to the charm of the scene. Many recalled it later; recalled it with a pang: for, of those four, ere a year had gone by, one was not, and another's life had been blighted. No prevision, however, rested on any of them this night of what the dark future held in store; and they revelled in the moment's enjoyment, gay at heart. Heaven is too merciful to let Fate cast its ominous shade on us before the needful time.

The banker came in ere the first dance was over. Moving about from room to room among his guests, glancing with approved smile at the young dancers, seeing that the card-tables were filled, he at length reached the sofa of Mrs. Castlemaine. She happened to be alone on it just then, and he sat down beside her.

"I don't see James anywhere," he remarked. "Where's he hiding himself!"

"He has not come," replied Mrs. Castlemaine.

"No! How's that! James enjoys a ball."

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"Yes, I think he does still, nearly as much as his son Harry."

"Then what has kept him away!"

"I really do not know. I had thought nearly to the last that he meant to come. When I was all but ready myself, finding James had not begun to dress, I sent Harriet to remind him of the lateness of the hour, and she brought word back that her master was not going."

"Did he say why!" asked Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

"No! I knocked at his study door afterwards, and found him seated at his bureau. He seemed busy. All he said to me was, that he should remain at home; neither more nor less. You know, Peter, James rarely troubles himself to give a reason for what he does."

"Well, I am sorry. Sorry that he should miss a pleasant evening, and also because I wanted to speak to him. We may not have many more of these social meetings."

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Castlemaine, assuming that her brother-in-law alluded in an indirect way to his daughter's approaching marriage. "When once you have lost Mary Ursula, there will be nobody to hold festivities for."

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"No," said the banker absently.

"I suppose it will be very soon now."

"What will be soon!"

"The wedding. James thinks it will be after Easter."

"Oh—ay—the wedding," spoke Mr. Peter Castlemaine, with the air of a man who has just caught up some recollection that had slipped from him. "I don't know yet: we shall see: no time has been decided on."

"Close as his brother," thought Mrs. Castlemaine. "No likelihood that he will disclose anything unless he chooses."

"Will James be coming in to Stilborough to-morrow!" asked the banker.

"I'm sure I cannot tell. He goes out and comes in, you know, without any reference to me. I should fancy he would *not* be coming in, unless he has anything to call him. He has not seemed well to-day; he thinks he has caught a cold."

"Ah then, I dare say that's the secret of his staying at home to-night," said Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

"Yes, it may be. I did not think of that. And he has also been very much annoyed to-day: and, you know, Peter, if once James is

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thoroughly put out of temper, it takes some little time to put him in again."

The banker nodded assent.

"What has annoyed him!"

"A very curious thing," replied Mrs. Castlemaine:" you will hardly believe it when I tell you. Some young man—"

Breaking off suddenly, she glanced around to make sure that no one was within hearing. Then drawing nearer to the banker, went on in a lowered voice.

"Some young man presented himself this morning at Greylands' Rest, pretending to want to put in a claim to the estate."

Abstracted though the banker had been throughout the brief interview, these words aroused him to the quick. In one moment he was the calm, shrewd, attentive business man, Peter Castlemaine, his head erect, his keen eyes observant.

"I do not understand you, Mrs. Castlemaine."

"Neither do I understand," she rejoined. "James said just a word or two to me, and I gathered the rest."

"Who was the young man!"

"Flora described him as wearing a coat trimmed with fur; and Miles thought he spoke

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with somewhat of a foreign accent," replied Mrs. Castlemaine, deviating unconsciously from the question, as ladies sometimes do deviate.

"But don't you know who he was! Did he give no account of himself!"

"He calls himself Anthony Castlemaine."

As the name left her lips, a curious kind of change, as though he were startled, passed momentarily over the banker's countenance. But he neither stirred nor spoke.

"When the card was brought in with that name upon it—James happened to be in the red parlour, talking with me about a new governess—I said it must be an old card of your father's that somebody had got hold of. But it turned out not to be that: and indeed it was not like the old cards. What he wants to make out is, that he is the son of Basil Castlemaine."

"Did James see him!"

"Oh dear yes, and their interview lasted more than an hour."

"And he told James he was Basil's son!—this young man."

"I think so. At any rate the young man told Ethel he was. She happened to meet him as he was leaving the house and he introduced

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himself to her as Anthony Castlemaine, Basil's son, and said he had come over to claim his inheritance—Greylands' Rest."

"And where's Basil!" asked the banker, after a pause.

"Dead."

"Dead!"

"So the young man wishes to make appear. My opinion is he must be some impostor."

"An impostor no doubt," assented the banker slowly. "At least—he may be. I only wonder that we have not—under the circumstances—had people here before, claiming to be connected with Basil."

"And I am sure the matter has annoyed James very much," pursued Mrs. Castlemaine. "He betrayed it in his manner, and was not at all like himself all the afternoon. I should make short work of it if the man came again, were I James, and threaten him with the law."

Mr. Peter Castlemaine said no more, and presently rose to join other of his guests. But as he talked to one, laughed with another, listened to a third; his head bent in attention, his eyes looking straight into their eyes, none had an idea that these signs of interest

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were evinced mechanically, and that his mind was far away.

He had enough complexity and trouble of his own just then, as Heaven knew; very much indeed on this particular evening; but this other complexity, that appeared to be arising for his brother James, added to it. To Mrs. Castlemaine's scornfully expressed opinion that the man was an impostor, he had assented just in the same way that he was now talking with his guests—mechanically. For, some instinct, or prevision, call it what you will, lay on the banker's heart, that the man would turn out to be no impostor, but the veritable son of the exile, Basil.

Peter Castlemaine was much attached to his brother James, and for James's own sake he would have regretted that any annoyance or trouble should arise for him; but he had also a selfish motive for regretting it. In his dire strait as to money, for to that it had now come—he had been rapidly making up his mind that evening to appeal to James to let him have some. The appeal might not be successful under the most favourable auspices: he knew that: but with this trouble looming for the master of Greylands, he foresaw that it must and would fail. Greylands' Rest

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might be James's in all legal security; but an impression had lain on the mind of Peter Castlemaine, since his father's death, that if Basil ever returned he would set up a fight for it.

Supper over—the elaborate, heavy, sit-down supper of those days—and the two dances following upon it, most of the guests departed. Mr. Blake-Gordon, seeking about for the

banker to wish him good-night, at length found him standing over the fire in the deserted card-room. Absorbed though he was in his own happiness, the young man could but notice the flood-tide of care on the banker's brow. It cleared off, as though by magic,' when the banker looked up and saw him.

"Is it you, William! I thought you had left."

"I should hardly go, sir, without wishing you good-night. What a delightful evening it has been!"

"Ay, I think you have all enjoyed yourselves."

"Oh very, very much."

"Well, youth is the time for enjoyment," observed the banker. "We can never again find the zest in it, once youth is past."

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"You look tired, sir; otherwise I—I might have ventured to trespass on you for five minutes' conversation, late though it be," pursued Mr. Blake-Gordon, with some hesitation.

"Tired!—not at all. You may take five minutes; and five to that, William."

"It is about our future residence, sir. Raven's Priory is in the market: and I think—and Mary thinks—it will just suit us."

"Ay; I heard more than a week ago that the Wests were leaving."

The words took William Blake-Gordon by surprise. He looked at the banker.

"Did you, sir!—more than a week ago! And, did it not strike you that it would be a very suitable place for us!"

"I cannot say that I thought much about it," was the banker's answer; and he was twirling an ornament on the mantel-piece about with his hand as he spoke: a small, costly vase of old china from Dresden.

"But *don't* you think it would be, sir!"

"I dare say it might be. The gardens and conservatories have been well kept-up; and you and Mary Ursula have both a weakness for rare flowers."

That was perfectly true. And the "weakness"

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showed itself then, for the young man went off into a rapturous description of the wealth of Raven's Priory in respect of floriculture. The ten minutes slipped away to

twenty; and in his own enthusiasm Mr. Blake-Gordon did not notice the absence of it in his hearer.

"But I must not keep you longer, sir," he suddenly said, as his eyes caught the hands of the clock. "Perhaps you will let me see you about it to-morrow. Or allow my father to see you—that will be better."

"Not to-morrow," said Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "I shall be particularly engaged all day. Some other time."

"Whenever you please, sir. Only—we must take care that we are not forestalled in the purchase. Much delay might—"

"We can obtain a promise of the first refusal," interrupted the banker in a somewhat impatient tone. "That will not be difficult."

"True. Good-night, sir. And, thank you for giving us this most charming evening."

"Good-night, William."

But Mr. Blake-Gordon had not yet said his last farewell to his betrothed wife; and lovers never think *that* can be spoken often enough.

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He found her in the music-room, seated before the organ. She was waiting for her father.

"We shall have Raven's Priory, Mary," he whispered, speaking in accordance with his thoughts, in his great hopefulness; and his voice was joyous, and his pale face had a glow on it not often seen there. "Your papa, himself, says how beautiful the gardens and conservatories are."

"Yes," she softly answered. "We shall be sure to have it."

"I may not stay, Mary: I only came back to tell you this. And to wish you good-night once again."

Her hand was within his arm, and they walked together to the end of the music-room. All the lights had been put out, save two. Just within the door, he halted and took his farewell. His arm was around her, his lips were upon hers.

"May all good angels guard you this happy night—my love!—my promised wife!"

He went down the corridor swiftly; she stole her blushing face to the opening of the door, to take a last look at him. At that moment a crash, as of some frail thing broken, was heard in the card-room. Mr. Blake-Gordon

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turned into it; Mary Ursula followed him.

The beautiful Dresden vase lay on the stone flags of the hearth, shivered into many atoms. It was one that Mary Ursula set great store by, for it had been a purchase of her mother's.

"Oh papa! How did it happen!" "My dear, I swept it off unwittingly with my elbow: I am very sorry for it," said Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

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CHAPTER VI.

ANTHONY CASTLEMAINE ON HIS SEARCH.

THE hour of dinner with all business men in Stilborough was half-past one o'clock in the day. Perhaps Mr. Peter Castlemaine was the only man who did not really dine then; but he took his luncheon; which came to the same thing. It was the recognised daily interregnum in the public doings of the town— this half hour between half-past one and two: consequently shops, banks, offices, all were virtually though not actually closed. The bank of Mr. Peter Castlemaine made no exception. On all days, except Thursday, market day, the bank was left to the care of one clerk during this half hour: the rest of the clerks and Mr. Hill would be out at their

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dinner. As a rule, not a single customer came in until two o'clock had struck.

It was the day after the ball. The bank had been busy all the morning, and Mr. Peter Castlemaine had been away the best part of it. He came back at half-past one, just as the clerks were filing out.

"Do you want me, sir!" asked Thomas Hill, standing back with his hat in his hand; and it was the dreadfully worn, perplexed look on his master's face that induced him to ask the question.

"Just for a few minutes," was the reply. "Come into my room."

Once there, the door was closed upon them, and they sat in grievous tribulation. There was no dinner for poor Thomas Hill that day; there was no lunch for his master: the hour's perplexities were all in all.

On the previous evening, some stranger had arrived at Stilborough, had put up at the chief inn there, the Turk's Head; and then, after inquiring the private address of Mr.

Peter Castlemaine's head clerk, had betaken himself to the clerk's lodgings. Thomas Hill was seated at tea when the gentleman was shown in. It proved to be a Mr. Fosbrook from London: and the moment the clerk heard

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the name, Fosbrook, and realized the fact that the owner of it was in actual person before him, he turned as cold as a stone. For, of all the men who could bring most danger on Mr. Peter Castlemaine, and whom the banker had most cause to dread, it was this very one, Fosbrook. That he had come down to seek explanations in person which might no longer be put off, the clerk felt sure of: and the fact of his seeking out *him* instead of his master, proved that he suspected something was more than wrong. He had had a little passing, private acquaintance with Mr. Fosbrook in the years gone by, and perhaps that induced the step.

Thomas Hill did what he could. He dared not afford explanation or information himself, for he knew not what it would be safe to say, what not. He induced Mr. Fosbrook to return to his inn, undertaking to bring his master to wait on him there. To the banker's house he would not take the stranger; for the gaiety, of which it was that night the scene, was not altogether a pleasant thing to show to a creditor. Leaving Mr. Fosbrook at the Turk's Head on his way, he came on to apprise Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

Mr. Peter Castlemaine went at once to the

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inn. He had no resource but to go: he did not dare do otherwise: and this it was that caused his absence during the arrival of the guests. The interview was not a long one; for the banker, pleading the fact of having friends at home, postponed it until the morning.

It was with this gentleman that his morning had been spent; that he had now, half-after one o'clock, just come home from. Come home with the weary look in his face, and the more than weary pain at his heart.

"And what is the result, sir!" asked Thomas Hill as they sat down together.

"The result is, that Fosbrook will wait a few days, Hill; three or four, he says. Perhaps that may be made five or six: I don't know. After that—if he is not satisfied by tangible proofs that things are right and not wrong, so far as he is concerned—there will be no further waiting."

"And the storm must burst!"

"The storm must burst," echoed Peter Castlemaine.

"Oh but, sir, my dear master, what can be done in those few poor days!" cried Thomas Hill in agitation. "Nothing. You must have more time allowed you."

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"I had much ado to get that much, Hill. I had to LIE for it," he added in a lower tone.

"Do you see a chance yourself, sir!"

"Only one. There is a chance; but it is a very remote one. That last venture of mine has turned up trumps: I had the news by the mail this morning: and if I can realize the funds in time, the present danger may be averted."

"And the future trouble also," spoke Thomas Hill, catching eagerly at the straw of hope. "Why, sir, that will bring you in a mine of wealth."

"Yes. The only real want now is time. Time! time! I have said it before perhaps too sanguinely; I can say it in all truth now."

"And, sir—did you not show this to be the case to Mr. Fosbrook!"

"I did. But alas, I had to deny to him my other pressing liabilities—and he questioned sharply. Nevertheless, I shall tide it over, all of it, if I can only secure the time. That account of Merrit's—we may as well go over it together now, Thomas. It will not take long."

They drew their chairs to the table side beside. A thought was running through Thomas

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Hill's mind, and he spoke it as he opened the ledgers.

"With this good news in store, sir, making repayment certain—for if time be given you, you will now have plenty—don't you think Mr. Castlemaine would advance you funds!"

"I don't know," said the banker. "James seems to be growing cautious. He has no notion of my real position—I shrink from telling him—and I am sure he thinks that I am quite rich enough without borrowing money from anybody for fresh speculations. And, in truth, I don't see how he can have much money at command. This new trouble, that may be looming upon him, will make him extra cautious."

"What trouble !" asked Thomas Hill.

"Some man, I hear, has made his appearance at Greylands, calling himself Anthony Castlemaine, and saying that he is a son of my brother Basil," replied the banker confidentially.

"Never!" cried the old man. "But, sir, if he be, how should that bring trouble on Mr. Castlemaine!"

"Because the stranger says he wants to claim Greylands' Rest."

"He must be out of his mind," said Thomas

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Hill. "Greylands' Rest is Mr. Castlemaine's; safe enough too, I presume."

"But a man such as this may give trouble, don't you see."

"No, sir, I don't see it—with all deference to your opinion. Mr. Castlemaine has only to show him it is his, and send him to the right about—"

A knock at the room door interrupted the sentence. The clerk rose to open it, and received a card and a message, which he carried to his master. The banker looked rather startled as he read the name on it: "Anthony Castlemaine."

Somewhere about an hour before this, young Anthony Castlemaine, after a late breakfast à la fourchette, had turned out of the Dolphin Inn to walk to Stilborough. Repulsed by his Uncle James on the previous day, and not exactly seeing what his course should be, he had come to the resolution of laying his case before his other uncle, the banker. Making inquiries of John Bent as to the position of the banker's residence, he left the inn. Halting for a few seconds to gaze across beyond the beach, for he thought the sea the most beautiful object in nature, and believed he should never tire of looking at it,

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he went on up the hill, past the church, and was fairly on his road to Stilborough. It was a lonely road enough, never a dwelling to be seen all the way, save a farm homestead or two lying away amid their buildings; but Anthony Castlemaine walked slowly, taking in all the points and features of his native land, that were so strange to his foreign eye. He stood to read the milestones; he leaned on the fences; he admired the tall fine trees, leafless though they were; he critically surveyed the two or three carts and waggons that passed. The sky was blue, the sun bright, he enjoyed the walk and did not hurry himself:

but nevertheless he at length reached Stilborough, and found out the house of the banker. He rang at the private door.

The servant who opened it saw a young man dressed in a rather uncommon kind of over-coat, faced with fur. The face was that of a stranger; but the servant fancied it was a face he had seen before.

"Is my Uncle Peter at home!"

"*Sir!*" returned the servant, staring at him. For the only nephew the banker possessed, so far as he knew, was the son of the

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Master of Greylands. "What name did you please to ask for, sir!"

"Mr. Peter Castlemaine. This is his residence, I am told."

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Can I see him! Is he at home!"

"He is at home, in his private room, sir; I fancy he is busy. I'll ask if you can see him. What name shall I say, sir!"

"You can take my card in. And please say to your master that if he is busy, I can wait."

The man glanced at the card as he knocked at the door of the private room, and read the name: "Anthony Castlemaine."

"It must be a nephew from over the sea," he shrewdly thought: "he looks foreign. Perhaps a son of that lost Basil."

We have seen that Thomas Hill took in the card and the message to his master. He came back, saying the gentleman was to wait: Mr. Peter Castlemaine would see him in a quarter of an hour. So the servant, beguiled by the family name, thought he should do right to conduct the stranger upstairs to the presence of Miss Castlemaine, and said so, while helping him to take off his overcoat.

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"Shall I say any name, sir!" asked the man, as he laid his hand on the handle of the drawing-room door.

"Mr. Anthony Castlemaine."

Mary Ursula was alone. She sat near the fire doing nothing, and very happy in her idleness, for her thoughts were buried in the pleasures of the past gay night; a smile was

on her face. When the announcement was made, she rose in great surprise to confront the visitor. The servant shut the door, and Anthony came forward.

He did not commit a similar breach of good manners to the one of the previous day; the results of that had shown him that fair stranger cousins may not be indiscriminately saluted with kisses in England. He bowed, and held out his hand with a frank smile. Mary Ursula did not take it: she was utterly puzzled, and stood gazing at him. The likeness in his face to her father's family struck her forcibly. It must be premised that she did not yet know anything about Anthony, or that any such person had made his appearance in England. Anthony waited for her to speak.

"If I understood the name aright—Anthony Castlemaine—you must be, I presume,

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some relative of my late grandfather's, sir !" she said at length.

He introduced himself fully then; who he was, and all about it. Mary Ursula met his hand cordially. She never doubted him or his identity for a moment. She had the gift of reading countenances; and she took to the pleasant, honest face at once, so like the Castlemaines in features, but with a more open expression.

"I am *sure* you are my cousin," she said in cordial welcome. "I think I should have known you for a Castlemaine had I seen your face in a crowd."

"I see, myself, how like I am to the Castlemaines, especially to my father and grandfather: though unfortunately I have not inherited their height and strength," he added, with a slight laugh. "My mother was small and slight: I take after her."

"And my poor Uncle Basil is dead!"

"Alas, yes! Only but a few weeks ago. These black clothes that I wear are in memorial of him."

"I never saw him," said Miss Castlemaine, gazing at the familiar—for indeed it seemed familiar—face before her, and tracing out its

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features. "But I have heard say my Uncle Basil was just the image of his father."

"And he was," said Anthony. "When I saw the picture of my grandfather yesterday at Greylands' Rest, I thought it was my father's hanging there."

It was a long while since Miss Castlemaine had met with any one she liked so well at a first interview as this young man; and the quarter of an hour passed quickly. At its end,

the servant again appeared, saying his master would see him in his private room. So he took leave of Mary Ursula, and was conducted to it.

But, as it seemed, Mr. Peter Castlemaine did not wait to receive him: for almost immediately he presented himself before his daughter.

"This person has been with *you*, I find, Mary Ursula! Very wrong of Stephen to have brought him up here! I wonder what possessed him to do it!"

"I am glad he did bring him, papa," was her impulsive answer. "You have no idea what a sensible pleasant young man he is. I would almost wish he were more even than a cousin—a brother."

"Why, my dear, you must be dreaming!"

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cried the banker after a pause of astonishment. "Cousin!—brother! It does not do to take strange people on trust in this way. The man may be, and I dare say *is*, an adventurer," he continued testily: "no more related to the Castlemaines than I am related to the King of England."

She laughed. "You may take him upon trust, papa, without doubt or fear. He is a Castlemaine all over, save in the height. The likeness to grandpapa is wonderful; it is so even to you and to Uncle James. But he says he has all needful credential proofs with him."

The banker, who was then looking from the window, stood fingering the bunch of seals that hung from his long and massive watch-chain, his habit sometimes when in deep thought. Self-interest sways us all. The young man was no doubt the individual he purported to be: but if he were going to put in a vexatious claim to Greylands' Rest, and so upset James, the banker might get no loan from him. He turned to his daughter.

"You believe, then, my dear, that he is really what he makes himself out to be—Basil's son!"

"Papa, I think there is no question of it.

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I feel sure there can be none. Rely upon it, the young man is not one who would lay himself out to deceive, or to countenance deception: he is evidently honest and open as the day. I never hardly saw so *true* a face."

"Well I am very sorry," returned the banker. "It may bring a great deal of trouble upon James."

"In what way can it bring him trouble, papa!" questioned Mary Ursula in surprise.

"This young man—as I am informed—has come over to put in a claim to Greylands' Rest' "

"To Greylands' Rest!" she repeated. "But that is my Uncle James's! How can any one else claim it!"

"People may put in a claim to it; there's no law against that; as I fear this young man means to do," replied the banker, taking thought and time over his answer. "He may cost James no end of bother and expense."

"But, papa—I think indeed you must be misinformed. I feel sure this young man is not one who would attempt to claim anything that is not his own."

"But if he supposes it to be his own!"

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"What, Greylands' Rest his! How can that be!"

"My dear child, as yet I know almost nothing. Nothing but a few words that Mrs. Castlemaine said to me last night."

"But why should he take up such a notion, papa!" she asked in surprise.

"From his father, I suppose. I know Basil as much believed Greylands' Rest would descend to him as he believed in his Bible. However, I must go down and see this young man."

As soon as Peter Castlemaine entered his private room, and let his eyes rest on the face of the young man who met him so frankly, he saw the great likeness to the Castlemaines. That it was really his nephew. Basil's son, he had entertained little doubt of from the first; none, since the recent short interview with his daughter. With this conviction on his mind, it never would have occurred to him to deny or cast doubts on the young man's identity, and he accepted it at once. But though he called him "Anthony" or "Anthony Castlemaine"—and now and then by mistake "Basil"—he did not show any mark of gratification or affection, but was distant and cold; and thought it very inconvenient

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and ill-judged of Basil's son to be bringing trouble on James. Taking his place in his handsome chair, turned sideways to the closed desk, he faced the young man seated before him.

A few minutes were naturally spent in questions and answers, chiefly as to Basil's career abroad. Young Anthony gave every information freely—just as he had done to his Uncle James on the previous day. After that, at the first pause, he passed on to the subject of the inheritance.

"Perhaps, Uncle Peter, you will not refuse to give me some information about my grandfather's estate, Greylands' Rest," he began. "My father always assured me it would be mine. He said it would come to him at his father's death, and then to me afterwards—"

"He must have spoken without justifiable warranty," interrupted the banker. "It did not necessarily lapse to Basil, or to any one else. Your grandfather could leave it to whom he would."

"Of course: we never understood otherwise. But my father always said that it would never be left away from him."

"Then I say, that he spoke without sufficient warranty," repeated the banker. "Am

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I to understand that you have come over to this country to put in a claim to Greylands' Rest, on this sole justification!"

"My father, on his dying bed, charged me to come and claim it, Uncle Peter. He had bequeathed it to me in his will. It was only quite at the last that he learnt his father was dead, and he made a fresh will at once, and gave me the charge to come over without delay. When I presented myself to my Uncle James yesterday, he seemed much to resent the fact that I should put in any claim to the estate. He told me I had no right to do so; he said it was his."

"Well!" said the banker; for the young man had paused.

"Uncle Peter, I am not unreasonable. I come home to find my Uncle James in possession of the estate, and quite ready, as I gather, to oppose my claim to it; or, I would better say, to treat me and my claim with contempt. Now I do not forget that my grandfather might have left it to Uncle James; that he had the power to do so—"

"Most undoubtedly he had," again interrupted the banker. "And I can tell you that he never, to the very last, allowed anybody to interfere with his wish and will."

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"Well, I say I am not unreasonable, Uncle Peter. Though I have come over to claim the estate, I should not attempt to lay claim to it in the teeth of facts. I told my Uncle James so. Once let me be convinced that the estate was really and fairly bequeathed to him, and I would not, for the world, wish to disturb him in its possession. I am not a rogue."

"But he is in possession, Anthony; and it appears that you do wish to disturb him," remonstrated Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

"I beg your pardon; I think you have not quite caught my meaning. What I want is, to be assured that Greylands' Rest was left away from my father: that he was passed over for my Uncle James. If Uncle James came into it by will, or by legal deed of any kind, let him just *show* me the deed or the will, and that will suffice."

"You doubt his word, then!"

Young Anthony hesitated, before replying; and then spoke out with ingenuous candour.

"The fact is, Uncle Peter, I deem it *right* to assure myself by proof, of how the matter is; for my father warned me that there might be treachery—"

"Treachery!" came the quick, echoing interposition

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of the banker; his dark eyes flashing fire.

"My father thought it possible," quietly continued the young man; "he feared that, even though Greylands' Rest was legally mine, my claim to it might be opposed. That is one reason why I press for proof; I should press for it if there existed no other. But I find that doubts already were circulating abroad as to how Mr. James Castlemaine came into the estate, and whether it became lawfully his on my grandfather's death."

"Doubts existing abroad! Doubts where!"

"Amid the neighbours, the people of Greylands. I have heard one and another talk of it."

"Oh, indeed!" was the cold rejoinder. "Pray where are you staying!"

"At the Dolphin Inn, Uncle Peter. When I descended at it, and saw the flaming dolphin on the sign-board, splashing up the water, I could not help smiling; for my father had described it to me so accurately, that it seemed like an old acquaintance."

Mr. Peter Castlemaine made no rejoinder, and there ensued a silence. In truth, his own difficulties were so weighty, that they had been pressing on his mind throughout, an#

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undercurrent of trouble, and for the moment he was lost in them.

"Will *you*, Uncle Peter, give me some information of the true state of the case!" resumed the young man. "I came here purposely, intending to ask you. You see, I want to be placed at a certainty, one way or the other. I again repeat, that I am not unreasonable; I only ask to be dealt with fairly and honourably. If Greylands' Rest is not mine, show me that it is not; if it is mine, I ought to have it. Perhaps you will tell me, Uncle Peter, how it was left."

The banker suddenly let drop his seals with which he had been playing during the last appeal, and turned his full attention to the speaker, answering in a more frank tone than he had yet spoken.

"When your father, Basil, went away, he took his full portion of money with him—a third of the money we should conjointly inherit. I received my portion later; James received his. Nothing remained but Greylands' Rest and the annuity—a large one—which your grandfather enjoyed from his wife's family: which annuity had nothing to do with us, for it would go back again at his death. Greylands' Rest could be disposed

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of as he should please. Does it strike you as any strange thing, Anthony, that he should prefer its passing to the son who was always with him, rather than to the son who had abandoned him and his home, and whom he did not even know to be alive."

"Uncle Peter, I have said that I see reasons why my grandfather might make his second son his heir, rather than his eldest. If he did so, I am quite ready and willing to accept the fact, but I must first of all be convinced that it is fact. It is true, is it not, that my grandfather always intended to leave the estate to his eldest son, Basil!"

"That is true," assented the banker readily. "Such no doubt was his intention at one time. But Basil crossed him, and went besides out of sight and out of mind, and James remained with him and was always a dutiful son. It was much more natural that he should bequeath it to James than to Basil."

"Well, will you give me the particulars of the bequest, Uncle Peter! Was the estate devised by will, or by deed of gift!"

"I decline to give you more particulars than I have already given," was the prompt reply of the banker. "The affair is not mine;

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it is my brother James's. You find him in secure possession of the estate; you are told that it is his; and that ought to suffice. It is a very presumptuous proceeding on the part of Basil's son, to come over in this extraordinary manner, without warning of any kind, and attempt to question the existing state of things. That is my opinion, Anthony."

"Is this your final resolve, Uncle Peter!—not to help me!"

"My final, irrevocable resolve. I have enough to do in attending to my own affairs, without interfering with my brother's!"

Anthony Castlemaine took up his hat, and put forth his hand. "I am very sorry, Uncle Peter. It might have saved so much trouble. Perhaps I shall have to go to law."

The banker shook hands with him in a sufficiently friendly spirit: but he did not ask him to remain, or to call again.

"One hint I will give you, Anthony," he said, as the young man turned to the door; and he spoke, apparently, upon impulse. "Were you to expend your best years and your best energies upon this search, you would be no wiser than you are now. The Castlemaines do not brook interference;

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neither are their affairs conducted in that loose manner that can afford a possibility of their being inquired into: and so long as Mr. Castlemaine refuses to allow you ocular proof, rely upon it you will never get to have it. The Castlemaines know how to hold their own."

"I am a Castlemaine too, uncle, and can hold my own with the best of them. Nothing will turn me from my course in this matter, save the proofs I have asked for."

"Good morning, Anthony."

"Good day, Uncle Peter."

Anthony put on his coat in the hall, and went forth into the street. There he halted; looking this way and that way, as though uncertain of his route.

"A few doors on the right hand, on the other side the market-house, John Bent said." he repeated to himself. "Then I must cross the street, and so onwards."

He crossed over, went on past the market-house, and looked attentively at the doors on the other side it. On one of those doors was a brass plate: "Mr. Knivett, attorney-at-law." Anthony Castlemaine rang the bell, asked if the lawyer was at home, and sent in one of his cards.

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He was shown into a small back room. At a table, strewn with papers and pens, sat an elderly man with a bald head, who was evidently regarding the card with the utmost astonishment. He turned his spectacles on Anthony.

"Do I see Mr. Knivett, the avoué!" he asked, substituting for once a French term for an English one, perhaps unconsciously.

"I am Mr. Knivett, sir, attorney-at-law."

In the frank free way that seemed so especially to characterise him, Anthony Castlemaine put out his hand, as to a friend.

"You knew my father well, sir. Will you receive his son for old memories' sake!"

"Your father!" asked Mr. Knivett, questioningly: but nevertheless meeting the hand with his own, and glancing again at the card.

"Basil Castlemaine. He who went away so long ago from Greylands' Rest."

"Bless my heart!" cried Mr. Knivett, snatching off his glasses in his surprise. "Basil Castlemaine! I never thought to hear of him again. Why, it must be—ay— since he left, it must be hard upon five-and-thirty years."

"About that, I suppose, sir."

"And—is he come back!"

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Anthony had again to go over the old story. His father's doings abroad and his father's death, and his father's charge to him to come home and claim his paternal inheritance: he rehearsed it all. Mr. Knivett, who was very considerably past sixty, and had put his spectacles on again, never ceased gazing at the relator, as they sat nearly knee to knee. Not for a moment did any doubt occur to him that the young man was other than he represented himself to be: the face was the face of a Castlemaine, and of a truthful gentleman.

"But I have come to you, not only to show myself to a friend of my poor father's in his youth, but also as a client," proceeded Anthony after a short while. "I have need of a

lawyer's advice, sir; which I am prepared to pay for according to the charges of the English country. Will you advise me!"

"To be sure," replied Mr. Knivett. "What advice is it that you want!"

"First of all, sir—In the days when my father was at home, you were the solicitor to my grandfather, old Anthony Castlemaine. Did you continue to be so until his death!"

"I did."

"Then you can, I hope, give me some

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particulars that I desire to know. To whom was Greylands' Rest bequeathed—and in what manner was it devised!"

Mr. Knivett shook his head. "I cannot give you any information upon the point," he said. "I must refer you to Mr. Castlemaine."

"I have applied to Mr. Castlemaine, and to Mr. Peter Castlemaine also: neither of them will tell me anything. They met me with a point blank refusal to do so."

"Ah—I daresay. The Castlemaines never choose to be questioned."

"Why will not you afford me the information, Mr. Knivett!"

"For two reasons. Firstly, because the probability is, that—pray understand me, young sir; note what I say—the probability is, that I do not possess the information to give you. Secondly, if I did possess it, my relation with the family would preclude my imparting it. I am the attorney to the Castlemaines."

"Their confidential attorney!"

"Some of the business I transact for them is confidential."

"But see here, Mr. Knivett—what am I to do! I come over at the solemn command

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of my father, delivered to me on his deathbed, to put in my claim to the estate. I find my Uncle James in possession of it. He says it is his. Well and good: I do not say it is quite unlikely to be so. But when I say to him, 'Show me the vouchers for it, the deed or the will that you hold it by,' he shuts himself metaphorically up, and says he will not show me anything—that I must be satisfied with his word. Now is that satisfactory!"

"I daresay it does not appear so to you."

"If there was a will made, let them allow me to see the will; if it was bequeathed by a deed of gift, let me read the deed of gift. Can there be anything more fair than what I

ask! If Greylands' Rest is legally my Uncle James's, I should not be so foolish or so unjust as to wish to deprive him of it."

Mr. Knivett sat back in his chair, pressing the tips of his fingers together, and politely listening. But comment made he none.

"To go back home, without prosecuting my claim, is what I shall never do, unless I am convinced that I have no claim to prosecute," continued Anthony. "Well, sir, I shall want a legal gentleman to advise me how to set about the investigation of the affair; and hence I come to you."

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"I have shown you why I cannot advise you," said Mr. Knivett—and his manner was ever so many shades colder than it had been at first. "I am the attorney to Mr. Castlemaine."

"You cannot help me at all, then!"

"Not at all; in this."

It sounded rather hard to the young man, as he rose from his seat to depart. All he wanted was fair play, open dealing; and it seemed that he could not get it.

"My Uncle Peter, with whom I have just been, said a thing that I did not like," he stayed to remark; " it rather startled me. I presume—I should think—that he is a man of strict veracity!"

"Mr. Peter Castlemaine! Undoubtedly."

"Well, sir, what he said was this. That were I to spend my best years and energies in the search after information, I should be no wiser at the end than I am now."

"That I believe to be extremely probable," cordially assented the lawyer.

"But do you see the position in which it would leave me! Years and years!—and I am not to be satisfied one way or the other!"

The attorney froze again. "Ah, yes; true."

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"Well, sir, I will say good day to you, for it seems that I can do no good by staying, and I must not take up your time for nothing. I only wish you had been at liberty to advise me."

Mr. Knivett made some civil rejoinder about wishing that he had been. So they parted, and the young man found himself in the street again. Until now it had been one of the

brightest of days; but during this short interview at the lawyer's, the weather seemed to have changed. The skies, as Anthony Castlemaine looked up, were now dull and threatening. The clouds had lowered. He buttoned his warm coat about him, and began his walk back to Greylands.

"Je crois que nous aurons de la neige," he said, in the familiar language to which he was most accustomed, "et je n'ai pas de parapluie. N'importe; je marcherai vite."

Walk fast! And to Greylands! Could poor Anthony Castlemaine have foreseen the black pall of Fate, already closing upon him like a dreadful shadow, he had turned his steps away from Greylands for ever.

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CHAPTER VII.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

WHITE clouds were passing over the face of the blue sky, casting their light and their shade on the glorious sea. Not for a minute together did the sea present the same surface; its hue, its motions, and its ripples were for ever changing. Now, it would be blue and clear almost as crystal; anon, green and still; next, sparkling like diamonds under the sunlight: and each aspect seemed more beautiful than that which it had displaced.

To Anthony Castlemaine, gazing at it from his bedroom at the Dolphin Inn, no object in nature had ever seemed so beautiful. Not the vineyards of his native land; not the sunny plains of Italy; not the grand, picturesque mountains of Switzerland: all these

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he had been accustomed to from his youth, and they were fair to look upon: but to him they were as nothing, compared with this wide, wondrous, ever-changing sea.

Some days, a very few, had elapsed since his visit to Stilborough, told of in the last chapter. Another week had come in, and this was the Tuesday in it: destined to be a most fatal day for more than one person connected with our story. The snow-storm he had anticipated, in his homeward walk that afternoon, had passed off without falling; the cold itself seemed on the next day to have taken its departure. With that variable caprice that distinguishes our insular climate, the biting frost, the keen east wind, that had almost cut people through, had given place to the warm, cheering weather of a balmy spring.

Anthony Castlemaine had opened the casement window to admit the genial air, the fresh sea-breeze, and stood there in profound thought. On the table lay a letter he had just written. Its seal of black wax was stamped with the Castlemaine crest, and it was addressed to his native place, Gap, Dauphiné. Some shouting arose on the beach, drawing his attention. A fishing-boat was preparing to put out; one of her men had

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not come down, and the two others and the shrill boy were raising their voices to make the laggard hear. He went dashing out of the Dolphin Inn, just under the view of Anthony.

Anthony Castlemaine was in perplexity. He did not see his way any clearer before him than he had seen it when he first came. That Greylands' Rest was legally his he entertained no doubt of; but, to prove it, was another matter. He and Mr. Castlemaine had met one day near the Dolphin; they had talked for a few minutes, but Anthony could make out nothing. Twice since then he had presented himself at Greylands' Rest, and Mr. Castlemaine had been denied to him. It was quite evident he meant to have nothing more to do with Anthony.

The waves of the sea sparkled and rippled; the sun came out from behind a fleecy cloud, and shone with renewed strength; a beautiful vessel in the distance was passing with all her sails set.

"It is very strange behaviour," mused Anthony. "If the estate belongs in truth to my Uncle James, why can he not show me that it does! His *not* showing it almost proves of itself that it is mine. I *must* get

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to see him: I cannot stay in the dark like this."

Taking up the letter, he descended the stairs, went across to the little general shop near the beach, and dropped it into the letterbox. He was quite at home in Greylands now, had made acquaintance with its inhabitants, and was known and recognised as the grandson of old Anthony Castlemaine. In returning, he met one of the Grey Sisters. Lifting his hat, he bowed to her with deep respect: for he regarded the Grey Ladies as a religious order, and in his native land these female communities are held in reverence. Little Sister Phœby—she was very short and stout, and nearly middle-aged, and only

one of the working sisters—bobbed down her grey head in return, giving him a kindly good-morrow.

"And John Bent thinks that Mr. Castlemaine derides these good ladies!" thought Anthony. "It must be fancy. John has fancies. He—Dear me! here's that charming demoiselle again!"

She was advancing swiftly, seemingly wishing to catch Sister Phœby, her pretty figure attired becomingly in a light silk dress and short scarlet cloak with silken tassels; her

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strangely-beautiful eyes were cast on the sea with the same look of loving admiration that Anthony's own sometimes wore when gazing at it. He could have wished that this young lady was his sister, or really his cousin: for Anthony had not seen many faces in his life that he so believed in for truth and goodness and beauty as Ethel Reene's.

They had nearly met before she observed him. He stopped and addressed some words to her in deprecation of his former fault, keeping his hat off while he spoke. Ethel answered him frankly, and held out her hand. Since the previous encounter, she had had time to digest the offence, to understand how it had arisen, and that he had not the least intention of insulting her; she had also been favourably impressed with what she had heard abroad of Anthony Castlemaine.

"Let us forget it," said Ethel, with her sweet smile. "I understand now how it happened; I know you did not intend any offence. Are you going to make a long stay at the Dolphin!"

"That must depend partly on Mr. Castlemaine," replied Anthony. "He will not give me an interview, and for myself I can scarcely see a step before my face. I must ask him

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once more to listen to me; I hope he will. I had some thought of going to him this afternoon."

"He is at home," said Ethel innocently, who only very imperfectly understood the trouble looming between the young man before her and Mr. Castlemaine.

"At home now! Then I will go to him at once," said he, acting on the impulse of the moment: and he again offered his hand to Ethel. "Adieu. I hope you have quite forgiven me, Miss Castlemaine."

"I have quite forgiven you, indeed: but I am not Miss Castlemaine, you know," she said, laughing, as she let her hand rest in his. "You will know my name better soon—Ethel Reene. Good-bye."

"And during her after-life Ethel was wont to look back often on this little meeting, and to feel thankful that it had taken place, and that it was a pleasant one. For she never again saw the ill-fated young man in this world.

Re-crossing the road, and passing the inn corner, Anthony got into the fields on his way to Greylands' Rest. They were pleasanter than the road that sunshiny afternoon. He

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walked along in deep thought, deliberating on what he should say.

Ah, if he could but have seen behind him! A double shadow followed him—as the poet Hood wrote of Miss Kilmansegg going upstairs to her doom. His own natural shadow and another. Nearer and nearer it had been gradually drawing as the days went on; and now on this day it lay ready to close on him—as it would close ere the clock had told many more hours: the dark, dreadful, ominous shadow of death. Of a death done in darkness and secret.

In the last field, side by side with the avenue that led to Greylands' Rest, while Anthony was wondering whether he should be permitted to see his uncle or not, his uncle suddenly stood in front of him, coming through the little gateway that led into the field. The Master of Greylands, erect, well dressed, handsome, would have passed him with a slight nod, but Anthony put himself in his way.

"Uncle James, I beg your pardon; I would not wish to be rude; but will you allow me to speak a few little words to you!"

"I am in a hurry," said Mr. Castlemaine.

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"Will you give me then a short interview at your house this evening! Or to-morrow morning, if that will suit you better." "No," replied Mr. Castlemaine. "Twice I have been to Greylands' Rest, asking to see you, Uncle James; and twice have I been denied. Though the last time I think you were at home, and that you saw me from the window."

"You cannot have anything to say to me that I wish to hear or that would be profitable to yourself," returned the Master of Greylands: "for that reason I was denied to you. Our first interview was not so satisfactory that we need wish for another."

"But it is necessary that we should converse," returned the young man. "I am waiting to have this question settled as to Greylands' Rest."

"What question!" demanded Mr. Castlemaine, with haughty indifference—just as though he had quite forgotten anything had ever arisen in regard to it.

"Greylands' Rest is yours, Uncle James, or it is mine. I must ascertain which of us it belongs to. You decline to tell me—"

"Decline to tell you,'' interrupted Mr. Castlemaine. "Cannot you use your own

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eyes and your judgment, and see that it is mine,"

"I see that you are in possession of it, Uncle James; I see no farther. You decline to show me anything of the facts: my Uncle Peter declines; Knivett, the attorney-at-law, declines."

"Have you applied to Knivett!"

"Yes, last week."

The eyes of Mr. Castlemaine flashed fire. "How dare you do such a thing, sir, as attempt to interfere in my affairs! Tamper with my man of business! By heaven, I have a great mind to give you into custody!"

"Do not let us quarrel, Uncle James; suffer me to say what little I have to say quietly. I did not go to Mr. Knivett otherwise than openly. He said he could tell me nothing; and I recognized the weight of his objection—that he is your attorney. Being so, he of course cannot act for me."

"Perhaps you tried to bribe him to act for you," scoffed Mr. Castlemaine, who was foolishly beginning to lose his temper.

"I would not do any mean or dishonourable thing, Uncle James; I am a Castlemaine, and my father's son. But what I have to say to

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you is this, that matters cannot rest as they are: and I wish you fully to understand what my course will be if you do not give me the satisfaction I require, as to who is the true owner of Greylands' Rest. Only show me that it is yours, and I make my bow of departure from Greylands."

"You are pretty insolent for a young man!" retorted Mr. Castlemaine, looking down on him with scorn. "Do you suppose such an application was ever made to a gentleman

before! You speak of your father, my brother Basil: had some impudent stranger presented himself before him, and demanded to see title-deeds of his, what would his answer have been, think you!"

"Circumstances alter cases, Uncle James. My case is different from the imaginary one that you put. Only satisfy me that the place is yours, and I ask no more. I have a right to know so much."

"You never shall know it: for your insolence, you shall never know more than you know now. Do your best and worst."

"Then you will leave me no resource but to proceed," returned the young man, who maintained his temper and his courtesy in a notable degree. "I shall employ the best

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lawyer I can call to my aid, and act on his advice."

"Tush!" was the contemptuous answer. "Go and put in a claim to Parson Marston's church—to the Dolphin Inn,—to the beach itself! Claim all, and see how far a lawyer will advance you in it."

"I wish you had met me temperately, Uncle James. I only ask what is fair—to be satisfied. It is the talk of the neighbours now: they say you ought to satisfy me; they think you would do it if it were in your power."

"What!" roared Mr. Castlemaine.

Had Anthony seen the storm he was provoking, he had surely not continued. He did not wish to irritate Mr. Castlemaine: all he wanted was to show him the reasons of his proposed attempted investigation—to prove to him that he was justified in what he meant to do. The truth was, the young man, who was by nature just, honourable, and kindly, who had never in his life attempted to take a mean advantage of friend or enemy, felt half ashamed and deeply grieved to be thus thrown into adverse contact with his newly-found relatives; and he sought to show that he had justifiable excuse for it.

"It is not my fault, uncle, if the people

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thus give their opinion: I did not ask for it, or provoke them to it. What they say has reason in it, as it seems to me. When the popular belief prevailed, that my grandfather would not leave his estate away from his eldest son, Basil, and when it was never known how he did leave it, or to whom, or anything about it, save that his second son

remained in possession, why they talked. That is what I am told. It would be a satisfaction to the public as well as to me, Uncle James, if you will suffer the truth to be known."

It was not often that the Master of Greylands allowed anger to overpower him. In his younger days he had been subject to fits of intemperate passion, but time and self-control had well-nigh stamped the failing out. Perhaps until this moment he had believed it had left him for ever. His passion rose now: his face was scarlet; his clenched hands were kept by force down to his side, lest they should deal a blow at Anthony. *Them*, so far, he controlled, but not his tongue: and he poured forth a torrent of abuse.

"Go back to where you came from, insolent, upstart braggart!" were the words he finished up with. "You are no true son of

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my brother Basil. Ill-doing though he was, he was not a fire-brand, striving to spread malignant dissension amid a peaceable community."

"Uncle James, I shall never go back until I have come to the bottom of this matter," spoke the young man firmly: and it may be that his unruffled temper, his very calmness of bearing, only served to irritate all the more Mr. Castlemaine. "The best man of law that London will afford I shall summon to my aid: he must force you to show the title by which you hold possession of the estate; and we shall then see which has the most right to it, you or I."

The words inflamed Mr. Castlemaine almost to madness. With a fierce oath—and bad language, though common enough then, was what he was rarely, if ever, betrayed to use—he lifted his right hand to strike. Anthony, startled, got away.

"What have I done to merit this treatment, Uncle James!" he remonstrated. "Is it because I am a relative! You would not, for shame, so treat a stranger."

But the Master of Greylands, flinging back a word and look of utter contempt, went striding on his way, leaving his nephew alone.

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Now it happened that this contest was witnessed by the superintendent of the coastguard, Mr. Nettleby, who was walking along the path of the neighbouring field behind the far-off intervening hedge, bare at that season. He could not hear the words

that passed—the whole field was between—but he saw they were angry ones, and that the Master of Greylands was in a foaming passion. Calling in at the Dolphin Inn, he related before one or two people what he had seen: and Anthony, when he returned soon after, gave the history of the interview.

"I'm sure I thought Mr. Castlemaine struck you, sir," resumed the officer.

"No, but he would have liked to strike me," said Anthony. "I stepped back from his hand. It is very foolish of him."

"I think he would like to kill Mr. Anthony, for my part, by the way he treats him," said John Bent. But the words were only spoken in the heat of partisanship, without actual meaning: just as we are all given to hasty assertions on occasion. However, they were destined to be remembered afterwards by Greylands.

Somewhat later, John Bent and his guest were standing at the front door, talking together

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of the general perplexity of things. The sun was setting in the west in beautiful clouds of rose colour and amber, showing the advance of evening. John began to think he had better be laying the cloth for the parlour dinner, unless he wanted his wife about him. And—here she was! her cherry-coloured ribbons right over his shoulder.

At that moment, careering down the road from Greylands' Rest, came Harry Castlemaine on his spirited horse. His over-coat was rolled up and strapped on the saddle, and he looked as though mounted for a journey. On the road he was bent, the Chapel Lane would have been the nearest way; but when on horseback Harry always took the front way from his house, though it might involve a round through the village.

"Going out a pleasuring, Mr. Harry!" cried the landlady, as he reined-in.

"Going out a businessing," corrected the young man, in his free and careless manner, as he nodded and smiled at Anthony—for he did not share in his father's discourteous behaviour to their new relative, though he had not yet made advances to any intimacy.

"A beautiful sunset, is it not!"

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"Quite very beautiful," replied Anthony.

"I am bound for Newerton, Mrs. Bent," resumed Harry. "Can I do anything for you there!"

"Nothing, thank you, sir."

"What, not even choose you some cap ribbons! Newerton ribbons, you know, take the conceit out of those at Stilborough."

"You must always have your joke, Mr. Harry! As if a fine young gentleman like you would trouble himself to choose an old woman's ribbons!"

"See if I don't bring you some! Meanwhile, John, suppose you give me a glass of ale, to speed me on my journey."

The landlord brought the ale, handing it up on a waiter; somewhat to his own discomfort, for the horse was prancing and rearing. Harry Castlemaine drank it; and with a general nod, an intimation that he should return on the morrow, and a wave of the hand to his cousin, he rode away.

Anthony went round the corner of the house to look after him. Not being anything great in horsemanship himself, he admired those who were. He admired also the tall, fine form, the handsome face, and the free, frank bearing of Harry Castlemaine; and a

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hope in that moment arose in his heart that they might become good friends if he remained in England. He stood and watched him up the road until its bending hid him from view. Harry's route lay past the Grey Nunnery, past the coast-guard station higher up, and so onwards. Newerton was a town of some importance at about ten miles distance.

The remaining events of the evening, so far as they concerned Anthony Castlemaine, were destined to assume importance and to be discussed for days and weeks afterwards. He took his dinner at six, John Bent waiting on him as usual; afterwards, he sat alone for an hour or two in deep thought. At least, Mrs. Bent, coming in to take away his coffee-cup, assumed him to be deep in thought as he did not speak to her, an unusual thing. He sat between the table and the fire, his elbow resting on the former and his fingers pressing his right temple. The landlady had never seen him so still, or look so solemn; there was a cloud as of some dread care upon his face—she declared so to the world afterwards. Could it have been that in those, the last few hours of his life on earth, a foreshadowing of the dreadful fate about to overtake him was

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presented in some vague manner to his mind! It might have been so.

About nine o'clock he suddenly asked the landlord to fetch down his inkstand and paper-case, which he had left in his bedroom; and then he wrote a letter, sealed it as he had the one in the afternoon, and put on it the same address. By-and-by, John Bent came in again to look to the fire.

"I have made up my mind to get another interview with Mr. Castlemaine before I apply for legal advice," spoke Anthony.

"Bless me!" exclaimed John Bent, for the words surprised him.

"Yes. I have been thinking it well over from beginning to end; and I see that I ought to give my Uncle James one more opportunity to settle it amicably, before bringing the dispute openly before the world, and causing a scandal. He was in a passion this afternoon, and perhaps did not quite understand me: when he shall have had time to reflect he may be more reasonable."

John Bent shook his head. In his own mind he did not believe that fifty fresh appeals would have any effect on Mr. Castlemaine.

"I say this to myself," went on Anthony: " Whether Greylands' Rest is his by right

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or not, he is in possession of it. Nobody can deny that. And I have tried to put myself in imagination in his place, and I see how cruel a blow it would seem if a stranger came to seek to deprive me of it. I might be as angry as he is."

"Then, sir, do you intend to leave him in possession of it!" returned the landlord.

"No, no; you do not comprehend. I must enforce my claim; if the estate is mine, I will never yield it—to him, or to any one. But it may be his: and I think it is only just to offer him one more opportunity of privately satisfying me, before I take any proceedings. I shall do so. If I cannot see him to-morrow, I will write to him fully."

"The meeting might only lead to another quarrel, Mr. Anthony."

"Well—yes—I have thought of that. And I fear he would injure me if he could," added the young man, in a dreamy manner, and speaking to himself instead of to his landlord. "There: don't put more coal, please: it is too warm."

John Bent went away with his coal-scuttle. He remarked to his wife that their inmate did not seem in his usual good spirits. Mrs. Bent, trimming one of her smart caps at the

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round table by the fire, answered that she knew as much as that without being told; and that he (John) had better see that Molly was properly attending to the company in the public-room.

It was considerably past ten, and the company—as Mrs. Bent called them, which consisted principally of fishermen—were singing a jovial song, when Anthony Castlemaine came out of his parlour, the letter in his hand. Just as he had posted the one written in the afternoon, so he went over to the box now and posted this. After that, he took a turn up and down the beach, listening to the low murmuring of the sea, watching the moonbeams as they played on the water. It was a most beautiful night; the air still and warm, the moon rather remarkably bright. That Greylands' Rest was his own legally now, and would soon be his own practically, he entertained no doubt, and he lost himself in visions of the pleasant life he might lead there. Thus the time slipped unconsciously on, and when he got back to the Dolphin the clock had struck eleven. John Bent's company were taking their departure—for the house closed at the sober hour of eleven—John's man was shutting the shutters, and John himself

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stood outside his door, his hat on his head and a pipe in his mouth.

"A lovely night, sir, isn't it!" he began. "A' most like summer. I've been finishing my pipe outside on the bench here."

"Lovely indeed," replied Anthony. "I could never tire of looking at the sea yonder."

They paced about together before the bench, talking, and presently extended their stroll up the hill. Mr. Nettleby's residence, a fair-sized, pretty cottage, stood back from the road in its garden, just opposite the Grey Nunnery; and Mr. Nettleby, smoking his pipe, was at the outer gate.

When that fatal night was gone and past, and people began to recall its events, they said how chance trifles seemed to have worked together to bring about the ill. Had Anthony Castlemaine not written that letter, the probability was that he would never have gone out at all; on returning from the post and the beach, had the landlord not been outside the inn, he would at once have entered: and finally, had the superintendent of the coastguard not been at his gate, they would not have stayed abroad.

Mr. Nettleby invited them in, hospitably

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offering them a pipe and glass. He had business abroad that night, and therefore had not retired to rest. They consented to enter, "just for a minute."

The minute extended itself to the best part of an hour. Once seated there by the fire, and plunged into a sea of talk, they were in no-hurry to move again. Anthony Castlemaine accepted a pipe, John Bent refilled his. The former took a glass of sugar and water—at which Mr. Nettleby made a wry face; John Bent had a glass of weak Hollands, which lasted him during the visit: he was no drinker.

The conversation turned on various matters. On the claims of Anthony to Greylands' Rest, which had become quite a popular topic; on the social politics of Greylands, and on other subjects. Under a strong injunction of secrecy, Mr. Nettleby imparted certain suspicions that he was entertaining of a small hamlet called Beeton, a mile or two higher up the coast. He believed some extensive smuggling was carried on there, and he purposed paying a visit to the place that very night, to look out for anything there might be to see. Anthony inquired whether he was extensively troubled by smugglers, and the

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superintendent said No; very little indeed, considering that the coast lay so convenient for Holland and other suspicious countries: but he had his doubts.

They all went out together. It was twelve o'clock, or close upon it. Mr. Nettleby's road lay to the left; theirs to the right. However, they turned to accompany him a short distance, seduced to it by the beauty of the night.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," thought John Bent. "The missis can't go on more if I stay out for another hour than she'll go on now."

But they did not walk far: just to the top of the hill, and a short way beyond it. They then wished the officer good-night, and turned back again.

The Friar's Keep looked ghastly enough in the moonlight. Anthony Castlemaine glanced up at its roof, dilapidated in places, at its dark casement windows. "Let us watch a minute," said he, jestingly, "perhaps the Grey Monk will appear."

John Bent smiled. They had passed the entrance to Chapel Lane, and were standing within the thick privet hedge and the grove of trees which overshadowed it. Not that the

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trees crave much shadow at that season, for their branches were bare.

"Tell me again the legend of the Grey Monk," said Anthony. "I partly forget it."

John Bent proceeded to do as he was bid, lowering his voice as befitted the time and subject. But he had scarcely begun the narrative when the sound of approaching footsteps struck on their ears, and his voice involuntarily died away into silence. At the first moment, they thought the superintendent was returning.

But no. The footsteps came from Chapel Lane. They drew more closely within the cover of the hedge, and waited. A gentleman, walking fast and firmly, emerged from the lane, crossed the road, went in at the gate of the chapel ruins, seemed to take a hasty glance out over the sea, and then passed into the Friar's Keep. Very much to the astonishment of John Bent, and somewhat to that of Anthony, they recognized Mr. Castlemaine.

"He was taking a look at the sea by moonlight," whispered Anthony. "I'll go after him. I will. And we'll have it out under the moonbeams. What's he doing now, I wonder, in that Friar's Keep!"

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Before John Bent could stop him—and, as the landlord said later, an impulse prompted him to attempt it—the young man was off like a shot; entered the gate in the wake of his uncle, and disappeared amid the cloisters of the Friar's Keep.

The Master of Greylands must have emerged safely enough from those ghostly cloisters: since he was abroad and well the next day as usual: but the ill-fated Anthony Castlemaine was never again seen in this life.

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CHAPTER VIII.

COMMOTION AT STILBOROUGH.

ON that same fatal Tuesday—and fatal it might well be called, so much of evil did it bring in its train—there was commotion at Stilborough. Disagreeable rumours of some kind had got abroad, touching the solvency of the bank. Whence they arose, who had originated them, and what they precisely meant, nobody knew, nobody could tell: but they were being whispered about from one man to another, and the bank's creditors rose up in astonishment and fear.

"Is it true! It cannot be." "*What is it!*—what's amiss! Not possible for Peter Castlemaine to be shaky. Where did you hear it! I'd trust the bank with my life, let alone my money." "But it's said that some gigantic speculation has failed!" "Nonsense!

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the bank would stand twenty failures: don't believe a syllable of it." "Well, rumour says the bank will stop to-morrow." "Stop tomorrow! What shall we do for our money!" "Don't know. *I* shall get mine out to-day."

The above sentences, and others similar to them, might be heard from different people in the streets of Stilborough. Those who were ultra-cautious went into the bank and asked for their money. At first Thomas Hill paid: he thought the demands were only in the regular course of business: but in a short while he saw what it was—that a run upon the bank was setting in; and he went into Mr. Peter Castlemaine's private room to consult his master. Fortunately the rumours had only gone afloat late in the afternoon, and it was now within a few minutes of the usual time of closing. Not that, earlier or later, it could have made much difference in the calamity; but it saved some annoyance to the bank's inmates.

Had the bank been solvent, it would of course have kept its doors open, irrespective of hours and custom; being insolvent, it closed them to the minute, and the shutters too. Had Mr. Peter Castlemaine been able to meet the demands for money, he would have

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been in the public room, with a clear face, reassuring the applicants: as it was, he bolted himself in his parlour. The clerks drew down the shutters and shut the doors against the public: two or three of the young men, who had to go out with letters or messages, got away through the private entrance. Back went Thomas Hill to his master, knocking at the door when he found it fastened.

"It is only me, sir. All's safe."

Peter Castlemaine opened it. A change, that the faithful old clerk did not like to see, was in his face. Hill's own face was scared and white enough just then, as he well knew; but it could not wear the peculiar, sickly, shrunken look he saw on his master's.

"Where are they, Thomas! Is it really a run!"

"Really and truly, sir. What an unfortunate circumstance! A few days, and you would have tided it over."

"But where are they all!"

"Outside, sir, in the street, kicking and thumping at the doors and windows; a great crowd of them by this time, and growing a bigger one every minute. We managed to get the doors shut as the clock struck, and then put down the shutters."

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Mr. Castlemaine drew his hand across his aching brow. "I think this must have been caused by Fosbrook," he remarked. " 'He may have let an incautious word drop."

"He'd not do it, sir."

"Not intentionally: for his own sake. I knew it boded no good when I found he meant to stay on at the Turk's Head. Alas! Alas!"

"There has not been a regular stoppage," said Thomas Hill. "And if we can manage to get assistance, and open again to-morrow morning—"

"Don't, Hill," interrupted the banker, in a tone of painful wailing. "Don't speak of hope! There's no hope left."

"But, sir, when the remittance, which we expect, comes—"

"Hush! look here."

Mr. Peter Castlemaine pushed an open letter towards his clerk. The old man's hands trembled as he held it; his face grew whiter as he mastered the contents. Hope was indeed gone. The worst had come. An embargo, or lien, had been laid in London upon the expected remittances.

"Did you get this letter this morning, sir!

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Why did you not tell me! It would have been better to have stopped then."

"I got it ten minutes ago, Thomas. It was sent from town by a special messenger in a post-chaise and four; which, of course, the estate will be charged with. He came, by mistake I suppose, to the private door; or perhaps he saw the crowd round the public one: and he gave the letter into my own hands, saying he would take my instructions back to town to-morrow morning, if I had any. All's over."

Too truly did Thomas Hill feel the force of the words. All *was* over. But for this last great misfortune, this lien upon the money that ought to have come, they might have weathered the storm. The few past days had gone on pretty quietly; and every day, passed without exposure, was so much, gained. The Master of Greylands, when applied

to by his brother for a loan, had listened, and placed at the bank's disposal a fairly good sum: not enough, not half enough, for what it was wanted to stop, but still a great help.

"Even now," began Thomas Hill, breaking the depressing silence, "even now, sir, if a meeting were called, and a statement of facts

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properly laid before the creditors, they might consent to allow time."

"Time!" echoed Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "What, with this yelling crowd clamouring at the doors!—and with Fosbrook in the place!—and with a lien on all the forthcoming remittances! And," he added, the shrunken grey look on his countenance becoming more perceptible, as his voice dropped to a whisper—"and with the discovery at hand of the use I made of the Armannon bonds! The last closing hour has come, Thomas, and nothing can save me!"

Thomas Hill took off his spectacles to wipe the mist away. The failure of the bank, and the disgrace attaching to these pecuniary misfortunes, seemed as nothing, compared with the guilty shame that must fall on his master.

"They may prosecute me criminally," breathed Mr. Peter Castlemaine, from between his dry and ashy lips.

"No, no," burst forth Thomas Hill. "They'll never do that, sir. Think how you have been respected! And besides—so far as I can understand the complication—there will be money to pay everybody."

"Every man will be paid in full to the

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uttermost farthing," spoke the banker emphatically. But that's another thing. "I sat up over my books nearly all last night, making my calculations, and I find that there will be funds to meet all claims. Only there's the waiting! Not any over perhaps; but there will be so much as that."

"And to think that this miserable trouble should intervene!" cried Thomas Hill, wringing his hands. "There will be my six thousand pounds to help you, sir, with the expenses, and that."

Peter Castlemaine shook his head to the last sentence, but he made no denial in words. He seemed to have neither words nor spirit left, and sat leaning his brow upon his hand. The once fine fresh colour that was natural to his cheeks had faded away, though its

traces might be seen still. One might have fancied that a thin veil of grey had been flung over the healthy bloom. In all his long experience Thomas Hill had never, to his recollection, seen a man change like this.

"You look ill, sir," he said. "Let me get you something to take."

"I feel ill," was the answer. "I ought to have confronted those people just now in the other room, and should have done so, but that

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I felt physically incapable. While I was reading the letter, brought by the London messenger, a sharp, curious pain seized me here," touching his left side. "For some minutes I could not move."

"Is the heart all right!" hesitated the clerk—as if he were afraid to breathe the question.

"I do not know. During the past twelve months, since these troubles set in, I have had a good deal of fluttering there: pain, too, at times."

"You should consult a doctor, sir. Don't, pray, delay it."

"Ay," sighed the unfortunate man. "I suppose I should. When I get a little out of this fret and turmoil—if I ever do get out of it— I'll see one. Lock the desk for me, will you, Hill! There's nothing to keep it open for: no use to pore over ledgers now."

He held out the key, sitting as he was, and Thomas Hill locked the desk and returned the key to him. Strength and health seemed suddenly to have gone out of Peter Castlemaine.

"I'll go and get you a little warm brandy and water, sir. I'm sure you ought to take it."

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His master did not say Do, or Don't; and the clerk went for it. Getting it mixed by Stephen—who looked frightened out of his senses by the commotion in the street—he carried in the glass of hot liquor, and the banker sipped it. It seemed to do him a little good; he looked less entirely depressed.

"There's one thing I wanted to say, Thomas," he began. "That young man who came here last week—my brother Basil's son, you know."

"I've heard he is at Greylands, sir. Young Anthony, they say."

"Ay. Basil named him after the father. I should have done the same, had a son been born to me. He came here that day, you know, asking me to tell him the particulars of how Greylands' Rest was left; and I fear I was a little short with him. I did not wish to be, I'm sure; but this—this trouble was lying on me heavily. The young fellow spoke

fairly enough; and, I dare say, I appeared cross. He wanted me to interfere between him and James; which was a thing I should not think of doing. I've thought about it since, lying awake at night; and I want you to tell Anthony for me that I meant nothing, should you ever see him."

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"But surely you will be seeing him for yourself, sir!" cried the clerk, thinking this a little strange.

"I don't know that I shall. Should James show him that he has no claim, he may be going off to France again: and as to me, why, how do I know where I shall be, or how things will go with me! You'll tell him, Thomas, that Greylands' Rest, so far as I know, is legally my brother's; if I thought my father had given it to Basil, I should not deem it right in James to hold it. But it's not likely James would, were it not his."

"Did you not know, then, how the estate was left!" asked Thomas Hill, in surprise.

"No; I did not trouble myself about it," was the banker's answer: and all this while, he seemed to be speaking as his faithful clerk had never before heard him speak. Instead of the shrewd, observant, intellectual man of business, whose every sense was keenly awake, he seemed weary and passive as a tired child. "I knew Greylands' Rest would not be mine; that if it was not left to Basil it would be James's. James stayed in possession of it, and I supposed it was his; I took that for granted, and did not question him. I believe surely it is his: that my father left it to him:

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and, Thomas, you tell the young man, this young Anthony, that it is my opinion. I don't think there can be a doubt of it. James ought to show him the vouchers for it: Basil's son has a right to so much. Only, don't say *that*: I do not want, I say, to interfere with James.

"It would be the easiest way of settling the matter, sir, if Mr. Castlemaine would do that."

"Of course, it would. But then, you see, James never chooses to be questioned: he resents any attempt at it; always did. As a boy, I remember, nothing ever offended him like doubting his word."

At that moment there was heard a ring at the house door. The banker looked startled, and then seemed to shrink within himself.

"It is that Fosbrook!" he exclaimed. "I thought he'd be coming. I cannot see him. *You* go, and battle it out with him, Thomas: he won't browbeat *you*. Go! Don't let him come in here for the world."

But it was not Mr. Fosbrook. It was only one of the clerks, returning from his errand. Thomas Hill, seeing the state of nervous depression that his master was in, proposed to proceed at once to the Turk's Head, and hold there an interview with the dreaded creditor: and the banker seized upon it eagerly.

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"Do, do!" he said. "There's no one I dread as I dread him."

As the clerk went out, he saw that many angry people lingered yet around the house and doors. He went among them: he begged them to be still for that evening, to leave matters in quiet until the morning, for that Mr. Peter Castlemaine was very ill and quite unable to see any one. The baffled creditors showered down questions on the unfortunate clerk—who certainly felt the trouble as keenly as did his master. Thomas Hill answered them to the best of his ability: and at length one by one the malcontents took their departure, leaving the street clear and the house quiet.

And, no sooner was this accomplished, than the banker's handsome barouche drove to the door, containing Miss Castlemaine and her chaperone, Mrs. Webb, who had returned to her post the previous day. Opposite to them sat the young lady's lover, William Blake-Gordon. All were in the highest spirits, talking and laughing as though no such thing as care existed in the world, and utterly unconscious of the trouble that had fallen on the house and the commotion that had reigned outside it. They had been to

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look over Raven's Priory, and Mary Ursula was enchanted with it.

"You will stay to dinner, William," she said, as he handed her out of the carriage. "Papa will be vexed if you do not."

He was only too ready to accept an invitation that would give him a few more hours of her sweet companionship. It was close upon the dinner-hour—six. Stephen was holding the hall-door open, with a long, grave face: they passed him, noticing nothing.

"I will not be long, William," she whispered, running up to her chamber.

A few minutes later, and she came forth again, attired for the evening. Her dress was of rich blue silk; her cheeks had more colour in them than usual, the effect of pleasurable

excitement; her bright hair was disposed so as to set off the exceeding beauty of her face. Mr. Blake-Gordon stood in the gallery, looking at a new picture that some friend had recently made a present of to the banker. As she joined him, he drew her arm within his.

"It is a fine painting, Mary."

"And it is hung well for night," she observed, "for the rays of the chandelier just

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fall oil it. By day its place is a little dark. Have you seen papa yet!"

"Not yet. There goes six o'clock."

Mrs. Webb, an elderly lady in black satin and point lace cap, came down stairs and turned into the drawing-room. Though a very dragon of a chaperone when necessary, she knew quite well when to join the lovers and when to leave them alone.

They began pacing the gallery, arm in arm, looking at this picture, criticising that. From paintings, their conversation turned to what just then held a deeper interest for them—the future residence they expected to so soon enter upon, Raven's Priory. This room should be the favourite morning room, and that the favourite evening room; and the beautiful conservatory should have their best care; and there should always be a blazing fire in the hall, not a cold, bare, comfortless grate, as they had seen that day; and the gravel drive should be widened, and some rocks and ferns put on the right hand in that bare space—and so the dreams went on.

The clocks went on also. Mrs. Webb, reminded probably by her appetite, looked out once or twice; the butler and Stephen, aware that the dinner was waiting and the cook angrily

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demanding whether it was to be served today or to-morrow, passed and repassed out of the drawing-room. As to the lovers themselves, they were unconscious of clocks and reminding appetites; for love, as we all know, lives upon air. It was the custom of the house not to serve the dinner until the banker appeared in the drawing-room: on rare occasions business detained him beyond the hour.

So they paced on, those two, in their dream of happiness. And once, at the darkest end of the gallery when there was neither step nor sound near, Mr. Blake-Gordon stole a kiss from that blushing face, so soon, as he fondly hoped, to be all his.

"My dear, is your papa out, do you know!" questioned Mrs. Webb, appearing at the drawing-room door, as they again neared it. "It is half-past six."

"Half-past six!" repeated Mary, in surprise. "So late as that! No, I do not know whether papa is out or in. Perhaps he is busy in his parlour! There's Stephen: he may know. Stephen," she added, quitting the arm of Mr. Blake-Gordon, and advancing towards the man, "is papa below in his parlour!"

"There's no one in the parlour, ma'am, for

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I've been to look," was the answer. "I saw my master go up to his chamber some time ago, but I don't think he can be in it all this while."

"How long ago!"

"Just before you came home, ma'am."

"Oh, of course your master cannot be there still," interposed Mrs. Webb, much interested in the colloquy, for she wanted her dinner frightfully. "He must have come down and gone out, Stephen."

"Very likely, ma'am."

"I am sure that Mr. Castlemaine has not come down stairs since we came in," observed Mr. Blake-Gordon. "If he had, I must have seen him. I have been here all the time."

Mary Ursula laughed. "I will tell you what it is," she said: "papa has dropped asleep on the sofa in his room. Twice lately he has done it when he has had a very tiring day."

She ran lightly up the stairs as she spoke, and knocked at the chamber door. The lamp that hung in the corridor threw its light upon the oaken panels, and upon her gleaming blue dress.

"Papa!"

There was no response, and Mary gently

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turned the handle, intending to open the door about an inch, and call again. That her father was lying on the sofa in a sound sleep, she felt as sure of as though she had seen him. But the door would not open.

"Papa! papa!"

No: he did not awake, though she called very loudly. Hardly knowing what to do, she ran down stairs again.

"Papa must be in a very sound sleep, for I cannot make him hear, and the door is fastened inside," she said, chiefly addressing Stephen, who was nearest to her. "I daresay he has had a fatiguing day."

"Yes, ma'am, it *have* been fatiguing; leastways the latter part of it," replied the man with an emphasis that they failed to catch. "Some rude people have been knocking here, and making a fine uproar."

"Rude people knocking here!" exclaimed Mrs. Webb, taking him up sharply." What do you mean! What did they want!"

"I don't know what they wanted, ma'am: something they couldn't get, I suppose," returned the man, who had no suspicion of the real state of the case, for he believed the house to be simply a mine of wealth that could have no limit, just as children believe in the wondrous riches told of in a fairy tale. "I know I should like to have had the driving of 'em off! Master did well not to see 'em."

"But—did papa not see them!" questioned Mary Ursula, surprised into asking the question by this extraordinary story.

"No, ma'am; and that's what I fancy they made the noise over. My master was not well, either, this afternoon, for Mr. Hill came running out for hot brandy and water for him."

What more would have been said, what doubt created, was stopped by the appearance of Thomas Hill. He had just returned from his mission to the Turk's Head. Apparently it had not been a pleasant mission: for his face was pale with what looked like fear, and he, waiving ceremony, had come straight up the stairs, asking for his master.

"I must see him; I must see him instantly. I beg your pardon, dear Miss Castlemaine, but it is of the last importance."

Had Thomas Hill only waited a moment before speaking, he would have heard that the banker was fastened in his room. They told him now. He gave one scared look around while taking in the words, and then bounded to the stairs.

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"Follow me," he cried, turning his livid face on the men. "We must burst open the door. I know he is ill."

Mr. Blake-Gordon, the butler, and Stephen were up almost as soon as he. Mrs. Webb laid her detaining arm on the young lady.

"You must stay here, my dear: you must. They will do better without you."

"But what can it be, save sleep!" asked Mary Ursula, arresting her steps and not knowing whether there was cause for alarm or not. "When papa is very tired he sleeps heavily. On Sunday night he dropped asleep when I was at the organ, and I could not at first awaken him."

"Of course; I make no doubt he has fallen into a sound sleep; nothing else: but it will not be seemly for you to go up with them, my dear," replied Mrs. Webb, always the very essence of propriety. "Hark! the door has given way."

Sleep! Yes, at first they did think the banker was asleep. He lay on the sofa at full length, his head on the low pillow, his feet hanging down over the other end. A candle, which he must have carried up with him, stood on the drawers, and the wax candles in the dressing-glass had been previously

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lighted by the servants. Altogether there was a good deal of light. They looked at the banker's face by it: and saw—that the sleep was the sleep of death.

A gasping sob burst from Thomas Hill. He fell on his knees, the tears rolling down his face.

"My master! my dear master! oh, my master, my master!"

He saw what it was; perhaps felt somewhat prepared for it by the previous events of the afternoon. The others were for the moment somewhat stunned: but they did not think it could be death.

"Run for a doctor!" cried the butler to Stephen. "He's in a faint. Run for your life!"

The butler himself did not attempt to run; he was too stout. Mr. Blake-Gordon and Stephen, both slender and light of limb, sped away without their hats. The butler raised his master's head.

"Please to ring the bell, sir, for some brandy," he said to Mr. Hill. "The maids must bring up some hot flannels, too."

"Is it possible that you can be deceived!" sobbed the clerk—"that you do not see that it is death! Oh, my poor master!"

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"*Death!* come now, don't talk in that uncomfortable way," retorted the butler; not, however, feeling very comfortable as he said it. "What should bring death to the house in this sudden way! He is warm, too. Do please ring the bell, sir."

The doctors came without delay, two of them; for Mr. Blake-Gordon brought one, and Stephen another. But nothing could be done: it was indeed death: and the medical men thought it had taken place the best part of an hour before. The great banker of Stilborough, Peter Castlemaine, had ceased to exist.

But there was one momentous, dreadful question to be solved—what had caused the death! Had it come by God's hand and will!—or had Peter Castlemaine himself wrought it! The surgeons expressed no opinion at present; they talked in an undertone, but did not let the world share their counsels. Thomas Hill overheard one word, and it nearly sent him frantic.

"How dare you say it, gentlemen! Suicide! Mr. Peter Castlemaine would no more lift his hand against himself than you would lift it. I would stake all the poor bit of life I've got left—which won't be much now—that

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it is his heart that has killed him. This very afternoon he complained of a sharp pain there; a strange fluttering, he called it, and he looked white enough for a ghost. He told me he had felt the same pain and fluttering at times before. There cannot be a *doubt*, gentlemen, that it was his heart."

The doctors nodded, seemingly in assent. One thing appeared to be indisputable—that if the death was natural, no other cause than the heart could be assigned for it. The face of the dead man was calm and unruffled as that of an infant. But the elder of the doctors whispered something about an "odour."

Mary Ursula came into the room when the medical men had gone. No tears were in her eyes; she was as one stunned, paralyzed: unable in her shock of bewilderment to take in the whole truth. She had deemed the room empty: but Thomas Hill turned round from the sofa at her entrance.

"He has had a good deal of trouble lately, my poor dear master, and it has been too much for him, and broken his heart," he whispered, in a piteous tone, the tears running down his cheeks. "God knows I'd have saved him from it if I could, my dear young lady: I'd willingly have died for him."

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"What kind of trouble has it been!" asked Mary Ursula, letting the old man take her hands, and gazing at him with a terrified and imploring countenance.

"Money trouble, money trouble," answered the clerk. "He was not used to it, and it has broken his heart. Oh, my dear, don't grieve more than you can help!—and don't think about the future, for all I have shall be yours."

"You—think—it was heart disease!" questioned Mary, in a dread, imploring whisper. "Do you *really* think it, Mr. Hill!"

"My dear, I am *sure* of it. Quite sure. And I only wonder now he did not die in my arms this afternoon in the back parlour when the pain and fluttering were upon him," added Thomas Hill, half-choked with his emotion. "There was a great clamour with the creditors, and it terrified him more than I thought. The fright must have struck to his heart, and killed him."

She sighed deeply. The same appalled look of terror clung to her face: the reassurance did not seem to bring her the comfort that it ought. For Mary Castlemaine had overheard that one covert word of suspicion

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breathed by the medical men: and she had, and always would have, the awful doubt lying upon her heart.

It was a dreadful night for her, poor bankrupt girl—bankrupt in happiness from that hour. Mrs. Webb persuaded her to go to bed at last; and there she lay, getting through the hours as the unhappy do get through them. But, miserable though it was, it would have been far more so could she have seen, as in a mirror, what had taken place that night at Greylands in the Friar's Keep—the disappearance of Anthony Castlemaine and its cause.

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CHAPTER IX.

A CURIOUS STORY.

A BRIGHT and cheery morning with a soft westerly breeze. The flowing sea sparkled in the sunlight; the little boats danced upon its waves: the birds on the land sung merry songs to one another, cheated into a belief that spring had come in.

There had been commotion in the streets of Stilborough on the previous day, and especially around the banker's door, as we have already seen; but that commotion was open and above board, as compared with the stir that was this morning agitating

Greylands. For, report was running wildly about, that some mysterious and unaccountable disaster had happened to Anthony Castlemaine.

Anthony Castlemaine had disappeared.

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There was no other word, save that, applicable to the event: he had disappeared. And as Greylands had taken a warm fancy to the young man, it rose up in great agitation. Almost with morning light the village was being searched for him and inquiry made. People turned out of their cottages, fishermen left their boats, some of the Grey Sisters even came forth from the Nunnery: all eagerly asking what, and how much, was true.

The originator of the rumour was John Bent. He did not seem to know a great deal more than other people; but nobody, save him, knew anything at all. The Dolphin Inn was besieged; work was at a standstill; Mrs. Bent allowed even her servant, Molly, to stand listening, with her arms akimbo, unreproved.

The story told by John Bent was a curious one. And, it should be intimated, that, but for the fears stirring within the landlord's own breast, the disappearance would not have been thought so much of at this early stage. But John Bent had caught up the fear that some fatal harm had chanced to the young man: in fact, that he had been—murdered! The landlord could not account for this strong impression; he acknowledged that: but it

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was there, and he freely spoke it out. The substance of the tale he told was as follows.

After Anthony Castlemaine had darted across the road and through the gate in the wake of his uncle the Master of Greylands, as previously related, John Bent stood still, watching for a minute or two, but could not see or hear anything of either of them. He then, finding the night air somewhat cold, stamped up and down the path, not losing sight of the opposite gate and waiting for Anthony to come out of it. Close upon this there rang out the report of a pistol. It was accompanied, almost simultaneously, by an awful cry; the cry of a man in agony. John Bent wondered where the pistol came from and what it meant, but he never thought to connect either cry or pistol with Anthony Castlemaine. The time passed: John Bent began to find this waiting wearisome; he thought what a long confab his guest was enjoying with Mr. Castlemaine, and hoped they were settling matters amicably: and he wondered somewhat at their remaining in

that dark, ghostly Keep, instead of choosing the open moonlight. By-and-by, a sailor staggered past—for he had been taking more

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grog than was good for him—towards his home in the village. He was smoking; and John Bent took his own pipe from his pocket, filled it, and lighted it by the sailor's. The pipe consoled John Bent, and the minutes passed somewhat less tediously: but when one o'clock rang out, and there were no signs of the young man, he began to think it very strange. "Surely they'd not stay all this while in that haunted Friar's Keep!—and not a place to sit down on, and nothing but cold pillared cloisters to walk or stand in, and *them* dark!" cried John to himself—and he deliberated what he should do. The prospect of marching into the Friar's Keep in search of his guest was not altogether congenial to his taste, for John Bent did not like the chance of meeting ghosts more than Greylands did: neither did he care to proceed home himself and leave Anthony Castlemaine to follow at leisure. Another quarter of an hour elapsed; and then, finding there was no help for it, and quite tired out, he put on a bold spirit, and crossed over to enter the gate. But the gate was locked.

The gate was locked. And, had John Bent seen the whole row of high, substantial palings suddenly lifted into the air, or thrown

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down to the earth, he would not have stood more transfixed with astonishment.

For that gate had never been known to be locked within his remembrance. There certainly was a lock to it, but it had always lacked a key. The latch was good, and that was all the fastening used, or needed. John Bent stood with open mouth, gasping out his surprise to the air.

"What on earth does this mean!"

He shook the gate. At least, he would have shaken it, had it been less substantially firm: but it scarcely moved under his hand. And then he set on and shouted at the top of his voice, hoping his guest would hear.

"Mr. Anthony Castlemaine! Shall you be much longer, Mr. Anthony Castlemaine!"

The light breeze took his voice over the chapel ruins and carried its echoes out to sea; but there came back no answer of any kind.

"Well, this is a rum go," cried John, looking up, and down, and round about, in his bewilderment. "Surely Mr. Anthony can't have come out and gone home!" he added, the unlikely notion flashing on him; for, when thoroughly puzzled we are all apt to catch at straws of improbability. "He

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couldn't have come out without my seeing him, and me never beyond view of the gate: unless it was in the minute that I was lighting my pipe by Jack Tuff's, when I had my back turned. But yet—how was it Mr. Anthony did not see me!"

Unable to solve these doubts, but still thinking that was how it must have been, the landlord went home with a rapid step. Before he gained it, he had quite made his mind up that it was so; he fully believed his guest was by this time sound asleep in his bed, and called himself a donkey for waiting out all that while. John Bent put his hand on the handle of his door to enter softly, and found it fastened. Fastened just as firmly as the gate had been.

"Where's Ned, I wonder!" he cried aloud, alluding to his man; and he knocked with his hand pretty sharply.

There was no more response to this knock than there had been to the shouts he had been lately sending forth. He knocked again, and shook the door. The moonbeams still played upon the sea; a white sail or two of the night fishing boats gleamed out; he put his back against the door and gazed on the scene while he waited. No good, as he

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knew, to go round to the front entrance; that was sure to be closed. John knocked the third time.

The window above his head was flung open at this juncture, and Mrs. Bent's night-capped head came out.

"Oh, it's you, is it!" she tartly cried. "I thought, for my part, you had taken up your abode in the road for the night."

"Ned's sitting up, I suppose, Dorothy. Why does he not open the door!"

"Ned will not open the door till he has my orders. There! A pretty decent thing, this is, for a respectable householder of your age to come home between one and two in the morning! If you are so fond of prancing up and down the road in the moonlight, filling a

fresh pipe at every trick and turn, why don't you stay there till the house is opened tomorrow!"

"Jack Tuff must have told you that!"

"Yes, Jack Tuff did tell it me," retorted Mrs. Bent. "I stayed at the door looking for you till half-after twelve. And a tidy state *he* was in!" added the good lady in additional wrath. "His nose touching the ground, a'most, every step he took!"

"Just let me come in, Dorothy. I've

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not stayed out all this while for pleasure—as you may be sure."

"You've stayed for aggravation perhaps; to keep people up. Where's Mr. Anthony Castlemaine!"

"He's come home, isn't he!"

"I dare say you know very well whether he is or not!" returned Mrs. Bent from her window.

"But, Dorothy, woman, it is for him I've been waiting. He went into the Friar's Keep, and he's never come out again—unless he came when I did not see him."

"The Friar's Keep!" repeated the landlady, in the most mocking tone she could use. "What excuse will you invent next!"

"It's no excuse: it's true. We saw Mr. Castlemaine go in there, and Mr. Anthony ran over and followed him, saying he'd have out the quarrel under the moonlight. And I stood cooling my heels outside, waiting for him all that while; till at last I began to think he must have come out and passed me unseen. He *has* come home, has he not!"

"He is *not* come home," said Mrs. Bent.

"Well, let the door be opened."

As the story sounded a mysterious one, and Mrs. Bent had her curiosity, and as her

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husband moreover was a staid man, not at all given to this kind of offence in general, she allowed him to come in, herself opening the door. He gave her a summary of the story, she wrapped in a warm shawl while she stood to listen to it and to make her comments. Anthony Castlemaine had not come home; she had seen nothing at all of him; or of anybody else, tipsy Jack Tuff excepted.

A kind of scared feeling, a presentiment of evil, crept over John Bent. For the first time, he began to wonder whether the pistol-shot he had heard had struck the young man, whether the agonised cry was his. He went into Anthony's bedroom, and saw with his own eyes that it was empty. It was not that he questioned his wife's word; but he felt confused and doubtful altogether—as though it were not possible that Anthony could be absent in this unaccountable manner.

"I must go back and look for him, Dorothy woman."

"You'll take the key with you, then," said Mrs. Bent; who, for a wonder, did not oppose the proposition: in fact, she thought it right that he should go. And, back went John Bent to the Friar's Keep.

He did not at all like this solitary walking,

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lovely though the night was; he would rather have been asleep in bed. The Grey Nunnery lay steeped in silence and gloom; not a single light shone from any of its windows; a sure sign that just now there could be no sick inmates there. John Bent reached the gate again, and the first thing he did was to try it.

It yielded instantly. It opened at his touch. And the man stood not much less amazed than he had before been to find it fastened. At that moment the sound of approaching footsteps in the road struck on his ear; he turned swiftly, his heart beating with eager hope: for he thought they might prove to be the steps of Anthony Castlemaine.

But they were those of Mr. Nettleby. The officer was returning from his mission of night supervision, whatever it might especially be. John Bent met him, and told his tale.

"Nonsense!" cried the superintendent, after he had listened. "They would not be likely to stay in those deserted cloisters of the Friar's Keep. Are you sure it was *Mr. Castlemaine*. you saw go in!"

"Quite sure. But I can't think what he could want there."

"You don't think you were dreaming!" asked Mr. Nettleby, who, by this time, evidently

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fancied the tale was altogether more like a dream than a reality, "*I* don't believe the gate has a key, or that it ever had one."

He was examining the gate as he spoke. The lock was there as usual; but of any sign that a key had been in it that night there was none. Crossing the ruins, they stood

looking out over the sea; at the line of glittering moonlight, at the distant boats catching their fish. From that they went into the Friar's Keep. Its moss-eaten Gothic door lay open to the chapel ruins. Pillars of stone supported the floor—the floor which the spirit of the dead-and-gone Grey Friar was supposed to haunt. It was rather a ghostly-looking place altogether; the intersecting pillars and the arches above, and some open arches facing the sea, where a little light streamed through. They could not see the sea from this place, for the outer wall was nearly as high as they were; but not so high as the arches, and the light and the salt fresh smell of the sea came wafting in. There they stood on the stone floor of those cloisters—as people had fallen into the way of calling them—and shouted out the name of Anthony Castlemaine. Neither sight nor sound came back in answer: all was quiet and lonely as the grave; there was

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not the slightest sign that any one had been there.

"If they *did* come in here, as you say," observed Mr. Nettleby, with that same ring of disbelief in his voice, "I'll tell you what it is, Bent. They must have come out again at once, and gone home together to Greylands' Rest."

This view of the case had not presented itself to the mind of John Bent. He revolved it for an instant, and then saw that it was the most feasible solution of the problem. But he did not feel quite satisfied; for it was difficult to fancy Anthony Castlemaine would so go off without telling him. Still he accepted it; and he and the officer quitted the Keep, and turned their steps homeward. In his own mind the superintendent fully believed John Bent had been asleep and dreaming; it was so impossible to fancy any sane man promenading in the chapel ruins or the Keep at night. And the Master of Greylands, of all people!

"Did you get upon the trail of any smugglers at Beeton!" asked John Bent.

"No," said Mr. Nettleby, rather savagely, for he had had his night's work for nothing. "Couldn't see any traces of them. I do suspect

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that Beeton, though. I believe it contains a nest of the lawless wretches!"

He turned in at his own gate as he spoke. The landlord went on, and was speedily at home again. Anthony Castlemaine had not come in.

Before eight o'clock in the morning, John Bent, feeling doubtful and uneasy, went up to Greylands' Rest. He noticed that all the blinds were down, and some of the shutters closed. Miles, the servant man, was outside the back-entrance door, shaking mats.

"I thought none of you could be up yet," began the landlord, "with all the blinds down! I'm sure the house looks as though somebody had died in it."

"And somebody has died, more's the pity; though not in the house," replied Miles, turning his face, full of grave concern, on the speaker. "A messenger was here soon after six this morning to fetch the master to Stilborough. Mr. Peter Castlemaine died suddenly last night."

The landlord was shocked. He could hardly believe it. "Mr. Peter Castlemaine dead!" he exclaimed. "It can't be true, Mile's."

"It's too true," returned Miles.

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"But he was so strong and healthy! He had not a trace of illness about him!"

"Ay. But they say it was the heart."

"Well, it's sad news any way, and I'm sorry for him," said John Bent. "Is young Mr. Castlemaine here!"

"Not just now. He'll be home some time this afternoon. He went off to Newerton yesterday on business."

"I don't mean him—Mr. Harry. I mean Mr. Anthony Castlemaine."

"What should bring that young man here!" loftily retorted Miles, who made a point of sharing in all the prejudices of his master.

John Bent told his tale. It was listened to with disbelieving and resentful ears.

"My master in at that there blessed scared place, the Friar's Keep, at twelve o'clock at night! Well, I wonder what next you'll say, Mr. Bent!"

"But I saw him go in," returned John Bent.

"It couldn't have been him. It's not likely. What should he want there! When us servants went to bed at ten, the master was in the red parlour. As to that other young man you speak of, that he has not been anigh the house *I* can answer for."

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John Bent felt as if he were in the midst of a fog, through which no light could be seen.

"You say Mr. Castlemaine is at Stilborough, Miles!"

"He went off there soon after six o'clock. And wasn't he cut up when he heard the news about his brother!" added Miles. "His lips and face had no more red in them than *that*—pointing to a snow-drop under the wall. " He looked just like a man who has got a shock."

It was of no use for John Bent to linger. Anthony Castlemaine was not to be heard of at Greylands' Rest. He took his departure; and, in the absence of any other clue to follow, went making inquiries in the village. Before long, not a single inhabitant, from one end of it to the other, but had heard and was making comments on his tale.

The Dolphin Inn was a crowded place that day, and its landlord the centre of attraction. People were in and out incessantly, listening to the singular history. Numbers flocked to the Friar's Keep, and to every other spot in Greylands likely or unlikely for a man to be hidden in, dead or living; but there was no trace anywhere of the presence of Anthony Castlemaine. Setting aside the disappearance,

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the tale itself excited wonder; and that part of it relating to the entrance into the chapel ruins of Mr. Castlemaine, and the subsequent sound of a shot and cry, and of the locked gate, was received by some with incredulity. Opinions were hazarded that the landlord's eyes might have deceived him; his ears and his fingers played him false; that Mr. Castlemaine must have been altogether a myth; the supposed locked gate been only his awkwardness, and the shot and cry nothing but the scream of a sea bird. In this one latter point, however, John Bent's account was established by other testimony, coming, singular to say, from the Grey Ladies. It appeared that Sister Mildred was very ill that night, and two of the others sat up with her, Sisters Mona and Ann. The room of the Superioress faced the sea, and was the last room at the end next the chapel ruins. As the Sisters sat there, watching in the stillness of the night, they were suddenly startled by the sound of a shot, and by a scream as from some one wounded. So, in regard to the truth of this part of John Bent's account, there could no longer be a doubt.

In the afternoon Mr. Castlemaine returned from Stilborough. The commotion Greylands

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was in rendered it impossible for him to remain long ignorant of what had taken place, and of the manner in which his name was mixed up with it. Being a man of quick perception, of penetrating judgment, he could not fail to see that some suspicion must

attach to himself in the public mind; that the alleged story, taken in conjunction with previous facts: the pretensions of his nephew to Greylands' Rest, and their hostile meeting in the fields earlier in the day: must inevitably excite doubt and comment. Proud, haughty, and self-contained though the Master of Greylands was, this matter was of too grave a nature, and might bring too many unpleasant consequences in its train, for him to ignore it. He deemed it well to throw himself forthwith into the battle; and he went out to the Dolphin. On his way he encountered Commodore Teague. The latter had been at sea since early morning in his cutter—as he was apt to call that sailing boat of his—and had but now, on landing, had his ears assailed with the story. A few exchanged sentences between Mr. Castlemaine and the Commodore, and they parted; Mr. Castlemaine proceeding to the inn.

"What *is* this absurd story!" he demanded

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of John Bent, lifting his hat as he entered the best kitchen to the knot of people assembled there. "I cannot make head or tail of it."

For the fiftieth time at least, the landlord recounted the history. It was listened to with breathless interest, even by those who had done nothing but listen to it for many previous hours.

"And do you expect sensible people to believe this, John Bent!" were the first answering words of the Master of Greylands.

"It's true, whether they believe it or not," said John. "It was yourself, sir, was it not, that we saw pass through the gate into the chapel ruins!"

"*I!*" scornfully repeated Mr. Castlemaine. "What do you suppose should take me to such a place, as that, at midnight! If all your points are as correct as that, Mr. Bent, your story will not hold much water."

"I said it was not likely to be Mr. Castlemaine," spoke up the superintendent of the coast-guard. "I told Mr. Bent so at the time."

"I put it to you all, generally, whether it was likely," pursued Mr. Castlemaine, glancing defiantly about him.

"All I can say is this," said John Bent: "that if it was not Mr. Castlemaine, my eyes

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must have strangely deceived me, and young Mr. Anthony's must have deceived him. Why the night was as light as day!"

"Eyes do deceive sometimes," remarked Mr. Castlemaine. "I know that mine have on occasion deceived me at night, good though their sight is. And of all deceptive lights, the moon's light is the worst."

"Sir, if it was not you it must have been your wraith," said John Bent, evidently not inclined to give in. "You passed close by us sideways, coming out of the Chapel Lane, and crossed the road in front of us. Had you just turned your head sharp to the right, you must have seen us under the hedge."

"Was it the Grey Friar, think you!" asked Mr. Castlemaine. And John Bent did not like the bantering tone, or the suppressed laugh that went around.

"That some one crossed from the Chapel Lane may be true: for I do not see how you could purely imagine it," conceded Mr. Castlemaine, after a pause. "But it was not I. Neither can I understand or conceive what anybody should want in the chapel ruins at that time of night. We are most of us rather given to shun the place."

"True, true," murmured the room.

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"And the locked gate," proceeded Mr. Castlemaine, "how do you account for that! Where did the key come from to lock it! According to what you say, John Bent, it would appear that Mr. Anthony Castlemaine must have locked it; since you maintain that no one went in or came out subsequent to himself. If he locked it, he must have unlocked it. At least, that is the inference naturally to be drawn."

"I say that the gate never was locked," put in Superintendent Nettleby. "The latch might have caught at the minute, and caused Mr. Bent to fancy it was locked."

"You may as well tell me I don't know when a place is open and when it's shut," retorted John Bent.

"And the pistol again!—or gun!" remonstrated Mr. Castlemaine. "It does not stand to reason that people should be firing off guns and pistols at midnight. I fancy that must be altogether a mistake—"

"The Grey Ladies can speak to that much, sir," interrupted Mrs. Bent. "As Sister Ann, here, can tell you."

Mr. Castlemaine turned on his heel and brought his eyes to bear on Sister Ann. She was sitting in the corner near the clock, her

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basket as usual in her hand. For she had come out to do errands, and been seduced by curiosity into the Dolphin, to take her share in the gossip.

"Yes, sir, we heard the pistol, or gun, whichever it was, and the human cry that came with it," she said to Mr. Castlemaine. "Sister Mona and I were watching in Sister Mildred's room—for the fever was very bad upon her last night and she was restless and wandering, poor lady! It was all quite still. I was knitting and Sister Mona was reading; you might have heard a pin drop indoors or out; when there burst upon our ears a loud shot, followed by a human cry. A thrilling scream, it was, making me and Sister Mona start up in terror."

"It was like a death-scream," said John Bent. "And I cannot," he added, looking at Mr. Castlemaine, "get it out of my head, that it was his scream—young Mr. Anthony's."

"From what direction did it come!" asked Mr. Castlemaine of the landlord.

"I can't tell, sir. I was walking about on the opposite side of the road, and at first I thought it came from seaward; but it sounded very near."

"It sounded to us as though it came from

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the chapel ruins, or from the strip of beach below it," said Sister Ann. "We did not hear anything more."

"And I did not think at the time to connect that shot and scream with Mr. Anthony Castlemaine," pursued John Bent. "It never came anigh my mind to do it, never. I do now."

"Well, it is altogether a most extraordinary and unaccountable affair," remarked Mr. Castlemaine. "Strange to say, I was abroad last night myself and near the spot, but not as late as you describe this to have been. Between ten and eleven I went down the lane as far as the Hutt Teague was, I had heard, purposing to go out in his boat for a few hours to-day; and I, not having been very well lately, thought I should like to go with him, and went down to say so. I stayed and had a pipe with him, and I think it must have been half-past eleven when I left."

"And did you go straight home from the Hutt, sir!" asked John Bent, eagerly.

"I went straight home from the Hutt's door to my door," emphatically replied Mr. Castlemaine.

"And did not go anigh the other end of the lane at all!—nor the Friar's Keep!"

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"Certainly not. I tell you I went straight home. I went direct from Teague's house to mine."

That Mr. Castlemaine was candid in stating this matter spontaneously, when he might have concealed it, his hearers mentally saw, and it told in his favour. But it did not lessen the perplexity, or the mist that the affair was shrouded in. He turned to depart.

"I shall at once institute a thorough search; and, if necessary, summon the law to my aid," said he. "Not that I fear any real harm has befallen my nephew Anthony; but it will be satisfactory to ascertain where he is. I fancy he must have gone off somewhere, perhaps on some sudden and uncontemplated impulse. It may be, that he is given to take these impromptu flights; as was his father before him, my brother Basil."

Mr. Castlemaine passed out as he spoke, with a bend of the head to the company. He was looking pale and ill; they could but notice it throughout the entire interview; and his face had a worn, sad cast of sorrow on it, never before seen there.

"He has brought that look back from Stilborough," remarked John Bent. "There are bad fears, it's whispered, about his brother's

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death: we have not got the particulars yet. But as to Mr. Anthony's having walked off in any promiscuous manner, it's the silliest thought that ever was spoken."

Commodore Teague in his blue sailor's costume came looming in, his hands in his pockets. He had made haste down from the Hutt (having been obliged to go there on landing to carry his gun and sundry other articles from his boat, and to light his fires) to hear the details of the mysterious story: or, as he chose to express it, the wrongs and the rights on't.

So John Bent once more recounted the particulars, assisted by the tongues of all the company—for they did not stand in awe of this listener as they did of Mr. Castlemaine. The Commodore listened with incredulity: not to say ridicule.

"Look here, John Bent, you may tell that tale to the marines. I can explain away some of it myself. Bless my heart! to think you folk should be running your head again all them

marvels when there's none to run 'em against. That gun that went off was mine," concluded the Commodore; who liked to put on a free-and-easy grammar when in familiar intercourse with Greyland's, though he could

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be a gentleman when with such people as the Castlemaines. "Your gun!"

"It was. And as to Mr. Castlemaine, you no more saw him go into the Friar's Keep than you saw me go. Last night, I was smoking my pipe and cleaning my gun—for I meant to shoot a few birds out at sea to-day—when who should come knocking at the Hutt door but Mr. Castlemaine. He'd been feeling out of sorts, he said, and thought a sail would do him good, and would like to go with me to-day—for it seems the whole parish had heard I was going. With all my heart, I answered; I'd be proud of his company. He sat down and took a pipe; smoking's contagious you know: and we talked about this and that. When he left I saw him to the door, and watched him turn up the lane towards his house. It don't stand to reason he'd come down again."

"He told us all this himself, Commodore." "Did he!—what, Mr. Castlemaine! Well, it's true. After he was gone, I got to my gun again, which I had laid aside when he entered. It struck twelve before I finished it. After that, I loaded it, took it to the door, and fired

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it off into the air. That was the shot you heard, landlord."

"And the cry!"

"Never was any cry to hear. 'Twas fancy. I made none, and I know I heard none."

"What time was it when your gun went off!"

"Past twelve; I don't rightly know how much. I went to bed and to sleep without looking at the clock. This morning word was brought me that Mr. Castlemaine had been fetched to Stilborough; and I took out Ben Little in the boat instead."

But this explanation did not go for so much as it might have done. The Commodore was in the habit of telling the most incredible sea yarns; and faith, in that respect, was wanting in him. Moreover, the strong impression on John Bent's mind was, that it was a pistol-shot he had heard, not a gun. Above all, there remained the one broad fact of the disappearance: Anthony Castlemaine had been alive and well and amidst them the previous night, and to-day he was not. Altogether the commotion, the dread, and the

sense of some mysterious evil increased: and lying upon many a heart, more or less, was a

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suspicion of the part played in it by Mr. Castlemaine.

Dusk was approaching when a horseman rode past the Dolphin: Mr. Harry Castlemaine on his return from Newerton. Seeing what looked like an unusual bustle round the inn doors, he pulled up. Molly ran out.

"What's agate!" asked Mr. Harry. "You seem to have got all the world and his wife here."

"It's feared as it's murder, sir," returned simple Molly.

"*Murder!*"

"Well sir, Mr. Anthony Castlemaine went into the Friar's Keep last night, and have never come out again. It's thought he was shot there. A dreadful cry was heard."

"Shot! Who shot him!"

" 'Tain't known, sir. Some says it was Mr. Castlemaine that was in there along of him."

Harry Castlemaine drew up his haughty head; a dark frown knitted his brow. But that she was a woman, ignorant and stupid, and evidently unconscious of all the words might imply, he might have struck her as she stood.

"And there's dreadful news in from Stilborough,

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Mr. Harry, sir," resumed the girl. "Mr. Peter Castlemaine was found dead in his chamber last night."

"What!" shouted Harry, thinking she must be playing upon him with all these horrors.

"It's true, sir. The Master of Greylands have not long got back from seeing him. He died quite sudden, poor gentleman, shut up in his room, and not a soul anigh him to watch his last breath."

It was almost too much. His uncle dead, his cousin disappeared, his father suspected he knew not yet of what. Never a more cruel moment, than that, had dawned for Harry Castlemaine.

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CHAPTER X.

JUST AS SHE HAD SEEN IT IN HER DREAM.

EVILS do not always come alone. It sometimes happens that before one astounding ill is barely glanced at, another has fallen. This was the case at Stilborough.

The town awoke one morning to find that the bank had stopped payment, and that the banker was dead. Never before in the memory of man had the like consternation been known. It can be better imagined than written. At once the worst was anticipated. No one had ever been so confided in as was Mr. Peter Castlemaine. His capacity for business, his honour and integrity, his immense wealth, had passed into a proverb. People not only trusted him, but forced upon him that trust. Many and many a man had placed in his hands all they possessed: the

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savings perhaps of half a lifetime; and now they saw themselves ruined and undone.

Never had the like excitement been known in the quiet town; never so much talking and gesticulating; metaphorically speaking, so much sighing and sobbing. And indeed it is to be doubted if this last was all metaphor. Thomas Hill had never been so sought after; so questioned and worried; so raved at and abused as now. All he could implore of them was to have a little patience until accounts could be gone into. Things might not, he represented, turn out as badly as people supposed. Nobody listened to him; and he felt that if all days were to be as this day, he should soon follow his master to the grave. Indeed, it seemed to him now, in the shock of this dreadful blow—his master's ruin and his master's untimely end—that his own existence henceforth would be little better than a death in life.

In the very midst of the commotion, there was brought to Stilborough news of that other calamity—the mysterious disappearance of young Anthony Castlemaine. He had been seen to enter the Friar's Keep the previous night, and had never come out again. The name of the Master of Greylands appeared

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to be mixed up in the affair; but in what manner was not yet understood. Verily misfortunes seemed to be falling heavily just now upon the Castlemaines.

This last event, however, after exciting due comment and wonder, was lost sight of in the other evil: for the first nearly concerned the interests of Stilborough, and the latter did not concern them at all. Their ruin, their ruin! That was the all-absorbing topic in the minds of the bewildered citizens.

An inquiry into the death of Peter Castlemaine ended in a decision that he had died from heart disease. This was arrived at chiefly by the testimony and the urgent representation of Thomas Hill. One of the medical men was supposed to hold a contrary opinion; and the dreadful doubt, previously spoken of, would always lie on Miss Castlemaine's mind; but the other was the accepted view. He was buried in the neighbouring churchyard, St. Mark's: Parson Marston, who had so often and so recently sat at his dinner-table, performing the service.

Gradually the first excitement diminished. Brains and tempers calmed down. For, added to that natural depression that succeeds to undue emotion, there arose a report that

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things would be well, after all, and everybody paid to the full.

In fact, it was so. The money that had been so long waited for—the speculation that had at last turned up trumps—was pouring in its returns. And there arose another source of means to be added to it.

One morning the great Nnyndyll Mine Company, that had been looked upon as being as good as dead, took a turn for the better; received, so to say, a new lease of life. A fresh vein of surprising richness and unbounded extent had been struck: the smallest shareholder might immediately reckon that his fortune was an accomplished fact: and those lucky enough to be largely interested might cease speculation for ever, and pass the time in building themselves castles and palaces—with more solid foundations than the air will furnish—to live in. The shares went up in the market like rockets: everyone was securing them as eagerly as we should pick up diamonds if we got the chance. In a very short time, the shares held by the house of Mr. Peter Castlemaine might have been resold for fifteen times the original amount paid for them.

"Is this true, Hill!'' asked Mr. Castlemaine,

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who had come bounding over on horseback from Greylands' Rest at the first rumour of the news, and found the old clerk at his post as usual, before the private desk that had been his master's. "Can it be true!" repeated Mr. Castlemaine.

He was changed since his brother's death. That death, or something else, had told upon him strangely. He and Peter had been fond of each other. James had been proud of his brother's position in the county; his influence and good name. The shock had come

upon him unexpectedly, as upon every one else: and, in a manner, affected him far more. Then, his interests were largely bound up with those of his brother; and though if he lost all he had lent him he would still be a rich man, yet the thought was not to be indulged with indifference or contemplated pleasantly. But to do him justice, these considerations sank into insignificance before the solemn fact of his brother's death, and the mystery and uncertainty enshrouding it.

"Is it true, Hill!" he reiterated before the clerk had time to speak. "Or is it all as a miserable delusion of Satan!"

"It is true enough, sir," answered Thomas Hill. "The shares have gone suddenly up

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like nothing I ever knew. Alas, that it should be so!"

"*Alas!*" echoed Mr. Castlemaine. "What mean you, Hill! Has trouble turned your brain!"

"I was thinking of my poor dear master," said the old man. "It was this very mine that helped to kill him. You see now, Mr. Castlemaine, how good his speculations were, how sound his judgment! Had he lived to see this turn of affairs, all would have been well."

"Too late to speak of that," said Mr. Castlemaine, with a deep sigh. "He is dead; and we must now give our attention to the living. This slice of luck will enable you to pay all demands. The shares must be realized at once."

"Enable us to pay every one, as I believe," assented Thomas Hill. "And otherwise we should not."

"What a strange chance it seems to be!" musingly observed Mr. Castlemaine. "A chance that rarely occurs in life. Well, as I say, it must be seized upon."

"And without delay, sir. The shares that have gone up so unexpectedly, may fall as suddenly. I'll write to-day."

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Mr. Castlemaine rose to depart. The clerk, who was settling to his papers, again looked off to ask a question.

"Have any tidings turned up, sir, of poor Mr. Anthony!"

"Not that I have heard of. Good-day, Hill."

The expected money was realized; other expected money was realized; and in an incredibly short space of time, for poor Thomas Hill worked with a will, the affairs of the bank were in a way of settlement, every creditor to be fully satisfied, and the late unfortunate banker's name to be saved. Anything that had been underhanded in his dealing, Thomas Hill and Mr. Castlemaine had contrived to keep from the public.

But one creditor, whose name did not appear on the books, and who had put in no demand to be satisfied, was passed over in silence. Mary Ursula's fortune had been hopelessly sacrificed; and it was already known that little, if anything, would be left for her. She knew how and why her fortune had gone: Mr. Hill had explained it all to her; it had helped to save her father's honour and good name; and had it been ten times the amount, she would freely have given

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it for such a purpose, and been thankful that she had it to give.

Seeing what it had done, she did not, as far as she herself was concerned, look upon it with one moment's regret. True she was now poor; very poor compared with the past: she would have at most but about a hundred and fifty pounds a year, but she was in too much trouble to think much of money now. One heavy weight had been lifted—the sickening dread that the creditors would lose part or all. On that one point she was now at rest. But there were other things. There was the underlying current of fear that her father had not died of heart disease; there was the mysterious perplexity attending the disappearance of her cousin Anthony; and there was her own engagement to Mr. Blake-Gordon.

Her position was now so different from what it had been when he proposed to her, and the severity, the pride, the arrogance of Sir Richard so indisputable, that she feared the worst. Moreover, she knew, from the present conduct of both father and son, that she had cause to fear it.

Twice, and twice only, had William Blake-Gordon come to her since her father's death: and he might so easily have come to her

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every day in her desolation! Each time he had been kind and loving as ever; not a suspicion, not a hint of separation had appeared in look or tone; but in his manner there

had been something never seen before: a reticence; a keeping back, as it were, of words that ought to come out: and instinct told her that all was not as it used to be.

"How does your father take the news!—What does he say to it, and to my loss of fortune!—Is he still willing to receive me!" she had asked on each occasion; and as often he had contrived to put aside the questions without satisfactory answer.

Days went on; her position, as to lack of fortune, was known abroad; and the suspense she endured was making her ill. One morning at the breakfast table, as she finished reading some letters that had been delivered for her, Mrs. Webb, who had scanned the letters outside from the opposite side of the table, put a question that she often did put.

"Is any one of them from Mr. Blake-Gordon, my dear!"

"No," replied Mary. And no one but herself knew what it cost her to have to say it; or how trying to her was the usual silence that followed the answer.

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"I will end the suspense," she said to herself, shutting herself in her own sitting-room when the meal was over. "It is Sir Richard, I know; not William: but at least they shall not find me willing to enter the family on bare sufferance. I will give them the opportunity of retiring from the engagement—if that be what they wish for."

Drawing her desk towards her, she paused with the pen in her hand, deliberating how to write. Whether in a cold formal strain, or affectionately and confidentially as of yore: and she decided on the latter.

"MY DEAREST WILLIAM,

"My circumstances have so changed since the early days of our engagement, that I feel I am now, in writing to you, adopting the only course left open to me, both in fairness to you and for the sake of my own future happiness and peace of mind.

"When you proposed to me and I accepted you, I was in a very different position from that of to-day. Then I was supposed to be—nay, I supposed myself—a very rich woman. I was the daughter of a man beloved, honoured, and respected; a member of a house which, if not equal to your own in

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the past annals of the country, might at least mix with it on equality and hold its own amongst gentlemen. All this is now changed. My dear father is no more, my large fortune is gone, and I am left with next to nothing.

"That you asked me to become your wife for myself alone, I feel sure of. I am certain that no thought of riches influenced you in your choice: that you would take me now as willingly as in the old days. But instinct—or presentiment—tells me that others will step in to interfere between us, and to enjoin a separation. Should this be the case—should your father's consent, once given, now be withdrawn—then all must be at an end between us, and I will restore you your liberty. Without the full approval of Sir Richard, you cannot attempt to marry me; neither should I without it consent to become your wife.

"If, on the other hand, that approval is still held out to us both as freely as of yore, I have only to add what you know so well—that I am yours, now as ever.

"MARY URSULA CASTLEMAINE."

The letter written, she hesitated no longer about the necessity or wisdom of the step.

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Sealing it, she despatched it by a trusty messenger to Sir Richard's house just beyond the town.

The news of the failure of the bank and death of its master, had reached Sir Richard Blake-Gordon when he was at a dinner-party. It fell upon him with startling effect. For a moment he felt half paralyzed: and then the blood once more took its free course through his veins as he remembered that his son's marriage was yet a thing of the future.

"Never," he said to himself, with energy. "Never, as long as I live. I may have a battle with William; but I could always twist him round my fingers. In that respect he is his poor mother all over. No such weakness about me. Failed for millions! Good Heavens, what an escape! We shall be quite justified in breaking with the daughter; and she and William have both sense enough to see it."

He was not of those who put off disagreeable things until they will be put off no longer. That very night, meeting his son when he got home, he began, after expressing regret for the banker's sudden death.

"A sad affair about the bank! Who would have expected it!"

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"Who, indeed!" returned William Blake-Gordon. "Every one thought the bank as safe as the Bank of England. Safer, if anything."

"It only shows how subject, more or less, all private concerns are to fluctuations—changes—failures—and what not," continued Sir Richard.

"Whatever this may be—failure or not—it will at least be open and straightforward," said William. "Mr. Peter Castlemaine was the soul of honour. The embarrassments must have arisen from other quarters, and Thomas Hill says the trouble and anxiety have killed him."

"Poor man! People are expecting it to be an awful failure. Not five shillings in the pound for the creditors, and all the Castlemaine family ruined. This must terminate your engagement."

The sudden mandate fell on the young man's ears with a shock. He thought at the first moment his father must be jesting.

"It must terminate my engagement!" he retorted, catching sight of the dark stern countenance. "What, give up Mary Castlemaine! Never, father! Never will I do it so long as I shall live."

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"Yes, you will," said Sir Richard, quietly. "I cannot allow you to sacrifice your prospects in life."

"To give up her would be to sacrifice all the prospects I care for."

"Tush, William!"

"Think what it is you would advise, sir!" spoke the son with ill-suppressed emotion. "Putting aside my own feelings, think of the dishonour to my name! I should be shunned by all good and true men; I should shun myself. Why, I would not live through such dishonour."

Sir Richard took a pinch of snuff.

"These misfortunes only render it the more urgent for me to carry out the engagement, sir. Is it possible that you do not see it! Mary Castlemaine's happiness is, I believe, bound up in me; and mine, I freely avow it, is in hers. Surely, father, you would not part us!"

"Listen, William," spoke Sir Richard, in the calm, stern tones he could assume at will, more telling, more penetrating than the loudest passion. "Should Miss Castlemaine become portionless—as I believe it will turn out she has become—you cannot marry her. Or; if you do, it would be with my curse. I

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would not advise you, for your own sake, to invoke that. You can look elsewhere for a wife: there are numbers of young women as eligible as ever was Miss Castlemaine."

Long they talked together, far on into the night, the stern tones on the one hand becoming persuasive ones; the opposition sinking into silence. When they separated, Sir Richard felt that he had three parts gained his point.

"It is all right," said he mentally, as he stalked up to bed with his candle. "William was always ultra dutiful."

Sir Richard interdicted his son's visits to Miss Castlemaine; and the one or two scant calls the young man made on her, were made in disobedience. But this state of things could not last. William Blake-Gordon, with his yielding nature, had ever possessed a rather exaggerated idea of the duty a son owes his father: moreover, he knew instinctively that Mary would never consent to marry in opposition to Sir Richard, even though he brought himself to do it.

It soon became known abroad that Miss Castlemaine's fortune had certainly been sacrificed. Sir Richard was cold and distant to his son, the young man miserable.

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One day the baronet returned to the charge; intending his mandate to be final. They were in the library. William's attitude was one of utter dejection as he leaned against the side of the window, looking forth on the spring sunshine: sunshine that brought no gladness for him. He saw too clearly what the end would be: that his own weakness, or his sense of filial duty, call it which you may, must give way before the stronger will, the commanding nature.

"Your conduct is now simply cruel to Miss Castlemaine," Sir Richard was saying. "You are keeping her all this time in suspense. Or, perhaps—worse still—allowing her to cherish the hope that her altered circumstances will not cause the engagement to terminate."

"I can't help it," replied William. "The engagement has no business to terminate. It was sacredly entered into: and, without adequate reason, it ought to be as sacredly kept."

"You are a living representation of folly," cried Sir Richard. "Adequate reason! There's reason enough for breaking off fifty engagements. Can you not see the matter in its proper light!"

"That is what I do see," replied William, sadly. "I see that the engagement ought to

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be maintained. For my own part, I never can go to Mary and tell her that I am to give her up."

"Coward!" said Sir Richard, with a great frown. "Then I must."

"I fear you are right," returned William: "a coward I am, little better. It is a cowardly thing to break off this alliance—the world will call it by a very different name. Father," he added, appealingly, "is my happiness nothing to you! Can you sacrifice us both to your pride and vainglory."

"You will see it very differently some day," returned Sir Richard. "When you have lived in the world as long as I have, you will laugh at yourself for these ridiculously romantic ideas. Instead of marring your happiness, I am making it. Substantially, too."

"I think, sir," said Mr. Blake-Gordon, not liking the tone, "that you might leave me to be the judge of what is best for my own happiness."

"There you are mistaken, my dear William. You have but a young head on your shoulders: you see things de tort et de travers, as the French have it. The engagement with Peter Castlemaine's daughter would never have received my sanction but for her great

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wealth. We are poor, and it is essential that you should marry a large fortune if you marry at all. That wealth of hers has now melted, and consequently the contract is at an end. This is the common-sense view of the circumstances which the world will take. Done, it must be, William. Shall I see the young lady for you! or will you be a man and see her for yourself !"

But before Mr. Blake-Gordon had time to reply, a note was brought in. It was the one written by Miss Castlemaine; and it could not have arrived more seasonably for Sir

Richard's views. The young man opened it; read it to the end; and passed it to his father in silence.

"A very sensible girl, upon my word," exclaimed Sir Richard, when he had mastered the contents by the aid of a double eye-glass. "She sees things in their right light. Castlemaine was, after all, an extremely honourable man, and put proper notions into her. This greatly facilitates matters, William. Our path is now quite smoothed out for us. I will myself write to her. You can do the same, if you are so disposed. Had this only come before, what arguments it might have saved!"

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Upon which the baronet sat down, and indited the following epistle:

"MY DEAR YOUNG LADY,

"Your note—which my son has handed to me—has given me in one sense a degree of pleasure; for I perceive in it traces of good sense and judgment, such as women do not always possess.

"You are right in supposing that under the present aspect of affairs a marriage between yourself and Mr. Blake-Gordon would be unadvisable." (She had supposed nothing of the sort, but it suited him to assume it.) "And therefore I concur with you in your opinion that the engagement should terminate.

"Deeply though I regret this personally, I have yet felt it my duty to insist upon it to my son: not only for his sake, but for your own. The very small means I am able to spare to him render it impossible for him to take a portionless wife, and I could never sanction a step that would drag him down to poverty and embarrassment. I was about to write to you, or to see you, to tell you this, for William shrank from the task, and your note has agreeably simplified what had to be done. We cordially, though reluctantly, agree

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to what you have had the good feeling to propose.

"At all times I shall be delighted to hear of your welfare and happiness; and, believe me, my dear Miss Castlemaine, you have not a more sincere well-wisher than your devoted friend and servant,

"RICHARD BLAKE-GORDON."

With much inward satisfaction the baronet folded the letter. He was wise enough not to show it to his son; who, honourable in thought and feeling as he was weak in nature,

might have been prompted to tear it into shreds, and declare that come good, come ill, he would stand true to his plighted word.

"There!" said Sir Richard, with a grunt of relief, as he affixed his seal, "I have accomplished that task for you, William. As I said before, write to her yourself if you will, but be quick about it. In half-an-hour I shall send back my answer."

"Give me that time to myself," said William, rising to leave the room. "If I have anything to say I will write it."

At the end of the half-hour he had written the following words; and the note was despatched with his father's.

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"MY DARLING,

"I suppose we must separate; but all happiness for me is over in this world. You, will, however, accord me a final interview; a moment for explanation; I cannot part without that. I will be with you this afternoon at four o'clock.

"In spite of all,

"I am for ever yours—and yours only,

"WILLIAM."

Unlike his father's letter, there was no hypocrisy in this, no stupid form of words. When he wrote that all happiness for him was over, he meant it; and he wrote truly. Perhaps he deserved no less: but, if he merited blame, judgment might accord him some pity with it.

When Mary received the letters, she felt certain of their contents before a word was seen. Sir Richard would not himself have written but to break off the engagement. He had not even called upon her in all these long, weary days of desolation and misery: and there could be but one motive for this unkind neglect. His note would now explain it.

But when she came to read its contents: its hollow hypocrisy, its plausible, specious

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argument, its profession of friendship and devotion; the pang of the death-blow gave place to the highest anger and indignation.

At that moment of bitterness the letter sounded to her desperately hollow and cruel, worse perhaps than it even was. The pain was more than her wounded spirit—so tried in

the past few weeks—could bear; and with a brief but violent storm of sobs, with which no tears came, she tore the letter in two and threw it into the fire.

"At least he might have done it differently," she said to herself in her anguish. "He might have written in a manner that would have made me feel it less."

It was one of her first lessons in the world's harshness, in the selfish nature of man. Happy for her if in her altered circumstances she had not many such to learn!

Presently, when she had grown a little calm, she opened the other note, almost wondering whether it would be a repetition of the cool falsity of Sir Richard's. Ah no, no!

"I will see him," she said, when she read the few words. "But the interview shall be brief. Of what use to prolong the agony!" So when William Blake-Gordon, true to his

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appointment, reached the bank at four o'clock, he was admitted.

How different an aspect the house presented from the bustle and the sociality of the days gone by! A stillness, as of a dead city, reigned. Rooms that had re-echoed with merry voices and light footsteps above, with the ring of gold and the tones of busy men below, were now silent and deserted. No change of any kind had yet been made in the household arrangements, but that was soon to come. The servants would be discharged, the costly furniture was already marked for the hammer; Mrs. Webb must leave, and—what was to be the course of Miss Castlemaine! She had not even asked herself the question, while the engagement with Mr. Blake-Gordon remained officially unbroken.

The butler opened the door to him and ushered him into the drawing-room. Mary came forward to greet him with her pale, sad face—a face that startled her lover. He clasped her to him, and she burst into sobs and tears. There are moments of anguish when pride gives way.

"Oh, my darling!" he cried, scarcely less agitated than herself, "you are feeling this cruel decision almost unto death! Why did

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you write that letter!—why did you not remain firm!—and thereby tacitly insist on our engagement being fulfilled!"

Never had his weakness of nature been more betrayed than then. "Why did not she insist!"—as if conscious that he was powerless to do it! She felt it keenly: she felt that in this, at least, a gulf lay between them.

"What I have done is for the best," she said, gently disengaging herself, and suppressing the signs of her emotion, as she motioned him to a seat. "In my altered circumstances I felt—at least I feared—that no happiness could await our marriage. Your father, in the first place, would never have given his consent."

"There are times when duty to a father should give place to duty to one's self," he returned, forgetting how singularly this argument was contradicted by his own conduct. "All my happiness in life is over."

"As you wrote to me," she said. "But by-and-by, when you shall have forgotten all this, William, and time has brought things round, you will meet with some one who will be able to make you happy: perhaps as much so as I should have done: and you will look back on these days as a dream."

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"Mary!"

"And it will be better so."

"And you!" he asked, with a stifled groan of remorse.

"I!" she returned, with a smile, half sad, half derisive. "I am nobody now. You have a place to fill in the world; I shall soon be heard of no more."

"But where are you going to live, Mary! You have nothing left out of the wreck."

"I have a little. Enough for my future wants. At present I shall go on a visit to Greylands' Rest. My uncle urges it, and he is the nearest representative of my father. Depend upon it, I shall meet with some occupation in life that will make me contented if not happy."

"Until you marry," he said. "Marry some man more noble than I; more worthy of you."

For a moment she looked steadily at him, and then her face flushed hot with pain. But she would not contradict it. She began to think that she had never quite understood the nature of Mr. Blake-Gordon.

"In the future, you and I will probably not meet often, William; if at all," she resumed. "But you will carry with you my best wishes, and I shall always rejoice to hear of your happiness

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and prosperity. The past we must, both of us, try to forget."

"I shall never forget it," was the impulsive answer.

"Do you remember my dream!" she sadly asked. "The one I told you of that ball night. How strangely it is being fulfilled! And, do you know, I think that beautiful Dresden vase, that papa broke, must have been an omen of the evil in store for the house."

He stood up now, feeling how miserable it all was, feeling his own littleness. For a short while longer they talked together: but Mary wished the interview over.

When it came to the actual parting she nearly broke down. It was very hard and bitter. Her life had not so long ago promised to be so bright! Now all was at an end. As to marriage—never for her: of that kind of happiness the future contained none. Calmness, patience in suffering, resignation, and in time even contentment, she might find in some path of duty; but beyond that, nothing.

They stood close together, her hands held in his, their hearts aching with pain and yearning, each to each, with that sad yearning that is born of utter hopelessness. A parting

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like this seems to be more cruel than the parting of death.

"Come what may, Mary, I shall love you, and you alone, to the end. You tell me I shall marry: it may be so; I know not: but if so, my wife, whomsoever she may be, will never have my love; never, never. We do not love twice in a lifetime. And, if those who have loved on earth are permitted to meet in Heaven, you and I, my best and dearest, shall assuredly find together in Eternity the happiness denied us here."

She was but mortal, after all; and the words sent a strange thrill of pleasure through her heart. Ah, no! he would never love another as he had loved her; she knew it: and it might be—it might be—that they should recognise each other in the bliss of a never-ending Hereafter!

And so they parted, each casting upon the other a long, last, lingering look, just as Mary had already imagined in her foreboding dream.

That evening, as Miss Castlemaine was sitting alone, musing on the past, the present, and the future, nursing her misery and her desolation, the door opened and Thomas Hill was shown in. She had seen more of him

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than of any one else, save Mrs. Webb, since the ruin.

"Miss Mary," said he, when they had shaken hands, "I've come to ask you whether the report can be true!"

"What report!" inquired Mary: but a suspicion of what he must mean rushed over her, ere the words had well passed her lips.

"Perhaps it is hardly a report," said the clerk, correcting himself; "for I doubt if any one else knows of it. I met Sir Richard to-day, my dear young lady," he continued, advancing and taking her hands, his tone full of indignant commiseration; "and in answer to some remark I made about your marriage, he said the marriage was not to take place; it was at an end. I did not believe him."

"It is quite true," replied Mary, with difficulty controlling her voice. "I am glad that it is at an end."

"Glad!" he repeated, looking into her face with his kindly old eyes.

"Yes. It is much better so. Sir Richard, in the altered state of my fortunes, would never think me a sufficiently good match for his son."

"But the honour, Miss Mary! Or rather the *dis*honour of their breaking it off! And

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your happiness! Is that not to be thought of!"

"All things that are wrong will right themselves," she replied with a quiet smile. "At least, Sir Richard thinks so."

"And Mr. Blake-Gordon! Is he willing to submit to the separation quietly! Pardon me, Miss Mary. If your father were alive, I should know my place too well to say a word on the subject: but—but I seem to have been drawn very close to you since that time of desolation, and my heart resents all slight on you as *he* would have resented it. I could not rest until I knew the truth."

"Say no more about it," breathed Mary. "Let the topic lie between us as one that had never had existence. It will be for my happiness."

"But can nothing be done!" persisted Thomas Hill. "Should not your uncle go and expostulate with them and expose their villainy—for I can call it by no other name!''

"Not for worlds," she said, hastily. "It is *I* who have broken the engagement, Mr. Hill; not they. I wrote this morning and restored Mr. Blake-Gordon his freedom: this

afternoon I bade him farewell for ever. It is all over and done with: never mention it again to me."

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"And you!—what are your plans for the future!—And, oh, forgive me for being anxious, my dear young lady! I had you on my knee often as a little one, and in my heart you have been as dear to me and seemed to grow up as my own daughter. Where shall you live!"

"I cannot yet tell where. I am poor, you know," she added, with one of her sweet, sad smiles. "For the present I am going on a visit to my Uncle James."

"Greylands' Rest would be your most suitable home now," spoke Thomas Hill slowly and dubiously. "But—I don't know that you would like it. Mrs. Castlemaine—"

He stopped, hardly liking to say what was in his mind—that Mrs. Castlemaine was not the most desirable of women to live with. Mary understood him.

"Only on a visit," she said. "While there, I shall have leisure to think of the future. My hundred and fifty pounds a year—and that much you all say will be secured to me—"

"And the whole of what I possess, Miss Mary."

"My hundred and fifty pounds a year will seem as a sufficient income to me, once I

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have brought my mind down from its heights," she continued, with another faint smile, as though unmindful of the interruption. "Trust me, my dear old friend, the future shall not be as gloomy as, by the expression of your face, you seem to anticipate. I am not weak enough to throw away my life in repining, and in wishing for what Heaven sees fit to deny me."

"Heaven!" he repeated, in an accent of reproof.

"Let us say circumstances, then. But in the very worst fate, it may be, that Heaven's hand may be working—over-ruling all for our eventual good. My future life can be a useful one; and I, if not happy, at least contented."

But that night, in the solitude of her chamber, she opened a small box, containing nothing but a few faded white rose-leaves. It was the first trembling offering William Blake-Gordon had given her, long before he dared to tell of his love. Before they were again put away out of sight, tears, bitter as any shed in her whole life, had fallen upon them.

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CHAPTER XI.

INSIDE THE NUNNERY.

THE time had gone on at Greylands; and its great theme of excitement, the disappearance of Anthony Castlemaine, was an event of the past. Not an iota of evidence had arisen to tell how he disappeared: but an uneasy suspicion of Mr. Castlemaine lurked in corners. John Bent had been the chief instigator in this. As truly as he believed the sun shone in the heavens, so did he believe that Anthony Castlemaine had been put out of the way by his uncle; sent out of the world, in fact, that the young man might not imperil his possession of Greylands' Rest. He did not say to the public, in so many words, Mr. Castlemaine has killed his nephew; that might not have been prudent; but the bent of his conviction

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could not be mistaken; and when alone with his wife he scrupled not to talk freely. All Greylands did not share in the opinion. The superstitious villagers attributed the disappearance to be due in some unconjectural manner to the dreaded spirit of the Grey Monk, haunting the Friar's Keep. Their fears of the place were augmented tenfold. Not one would go at night within sight of it, save on the greatest compulsion; and Commodore Teague (a brave, fearless man, as was proved by his living so near the grim building alone) had whispered that the Grey Friar was abroad again with his lamp, for he had twice seen him glide past the casements. What with one fear and another, Greylands was not altogether in a state of calmness.

Mary Ursula had come to Greylands' Rest. The once happy home at Stilborough was given up, the furniture sold: and the affairs of the bank were virtually settled. A sufficient sum had been saved from the wreck to bring her in about a hundred and fifty pounds per annum; that income was secured to her for life and would be at her disposal at death. All claims were being paid to the uttermost shilling; liberal presents were given to the

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clerks and servants thrown suddenly out of employment; and not a reproach, or shadow of it, could be cast on the house of Castlemaine.

Before Mary had been a week at Greylands' Rest, she was mentally forming her plans for leaving it. Mr. Castlemaine would fain have kept her there always: he was fond and proud of her; he thought there was no other woman like her in the world. Not so Mrs. Castlemaine. She resented her husband's love and reverence for his niece; and she, little-minded, full of spite, was actually jealous of her. She had always felt a jealousy of the banker's daughter, living in her luxurious home at Stilborough, keeping the high society that Mrs. Castlemaine did not keep; she had a shrewd idea that she herself, with her little tempers, and her petty frivolities, was sometimes compared unfavourably with Mary Ursula by her husband, wife though she was; and she had far rather some disagreeable animal had taken up its abode at Greylands' Rest for good, than this grand, noble, beautiful girl. Now and again even in those first few days, she contrived to betray this feeling: and it may be that this served to hasten Mary's plans. Flora, too, was a

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perpetual source of annoyance to everybody but her mother; and the young lady was as rude to Miss Castlemaine as to other people.

Since her parting with Mr. Blake-Gordon, an idea had dawned upon and been growing in Mary Ursula's mind. It was, that she should join the Sisterhood of the Grey Ladies. The more she dwelt upon it, the greater grew her conviction that it would be just the life now suited to her. Unlike Mr. Castlemaine, she had always held the Sisters in reverence and respect. They were self-denying; they led a useful life before Heaven; they were of no account in the world: what better career could she propose, or wish, for herself, now that near and dear social ties were denied her! And she formed her resolution: though she almost dreaded to impart it to her uncle.

Mr. Castlemaine stood one morning at the window of his study, looking out on the whitened landscape, for snow covered the ground. The genial weather that came in so early had given place to winter again: not often is spring so changeable as they had it that year. The sad, worn look that might be seen lately on the Master of Greylands' face,

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though rarely when in company, sat on it now. He pushed his dark hair from his brow with a hasty hand, as some thought, worse than the rest, disturbed him, and a heavy groan escaped his lips. Drowning it with a cough, for at that moment somebody

knocked at the study door, he held his breath but did not answer. The knock came again, and he did not know the knock: certainly it was not Miles's.

He strode to open the door with a frown. It was an understood thing in the house that this room was sacred to its master. There stood Mary, in her deep mourning.

"I have ventured to come to you here. Uncle James," she said, "as I wish to speak with you alone. Can you spare me some minutes!"

"Any number to you, Mary. And remember, my dear, that *you* are always welcome here."

He gave her a chair, shut down his bureau and locked it, and took a seat himself. For a moment she paused, and then began in some hesitation.

"Uncle James, I have been forming my plans."

"Plans!" he echoed.

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"And I have come to tell them to you before I tell any one else."

"Well!" said Mr. Castlemaine, wondering what was coming.

"I should like—I must have some occupation in life, you know!"

"Occupation! Well!"

"And I have not been long in making up my mind what it shall be. I shall join the Sisterhood."

"Join the what!"

"The Sisters at the Grey Nunnery, uncle."

Mr. Castlemaine pushed back his chair in angry astonishment when the sense of the words fully reached him. "The Sisters at the Grey Nunnery!" he indignantly cried. "Join those Grey women who lead such an idle, gossiping, meddling life, that I have no patience when I think of them! Never shall you do that, Mary Ursula."

"It seems to me that you have always mistaken them, uncle," she said; "have done them wrong in your heart. They are noble women, and they are leading a noble life—"

"A petty, obscure life," he interrupted.

"It is obscure; but in its usefulness and self-sacrifice it must be noble. What would Greylands be without their care!"

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"A great deal better than with it."

"They help the poor, they tend the sick, they teach the young ones; they try to make the fishermen think a little of God. Who would do it if they were not here, uncle! Do you know, I have thought so much of it in the past few days that I long to join them."

"This is utter folly!" cried Mr. Castlemaine; and he had never felt so inclined to be angry with his niece. "To join this meddling Sisterhood would be to sacrifice all your future prospects in life."

"I have no prospects left to sacrifice," returned Mary. "You know that, Uncle James."

"No prospects! Nonsense! Because that dishonourable rascal, William Blake-Gordon, has chosen to forfeit his engagement, and make himself a by-word in the mouths of men, are you to renounce the world! Many a better gentleman than he, my dear, will be seeking you before a few months have gone by."

"I shall never marry," was her firm answer. "Never, never. Whether I joined the Sisters or not; whether I retired from the world, or mixed to my dying day in all

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its pomps and gaieties; still I should never marry. So you see, Uncle James, I have now to make my future, and to create for myself an object in life."

"Well, we'll leave the question of marrying. Meanwhile your present home must be with me, Mary Ursula. I cannot spare you. I should like you to make up your mind to stay in it always, unless other and nearer ties shall call you forth."

"You are very kind, Uncle James; you always have been kind. But I—I must be independent," she added, with a smile and a slight flush. "Forgive the seeming ingratitude, uncle dear."

"Very independent, you would be, if you joined those living-by-rule women!"

"In one sense I should be thoroughly independent, uncle. My income will be most welcome to them, for they are, as you know, very poor—"

"*Your* income!" he interrupted, half scoffingly. "I wish—I *wish*, Mary—you would allow me to augment it!"

"And I shall be close to Greylands' Rest,'' she continued, with a slight shake of the head, for this proposal to settle money upon her had become quite a vexatious question.

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"I shall be able to come here to see you often."

"Mary Ursula, I will hear no more of this," he cried, quite passionately. "You shall never do it with my consent."

She rose and laid her pleading hands upon his. "Uncle, pardon me, but my mind is made up. I have not decided hastily, or without due consideration. By day and by night I have dwelt upon it—I—I have prayed over it, uncle—and I plainly see it is the best thing for me. I would sooner spend my days there than anywhere, because I shall be near you."

"And I want you to be near me. But not in a nunnery."

"It is not a nunnery now, you know, Uncle James, though the building happens still to bear the name. If I take up my abode there, I take no vows, remember. I do not renounce the world. Should any necessity arise—though I think it will not— for me to resume my place in society, I am at full liberty to put off my grey gown and bonnet and do so."

"What do you think your father would have said to this, Mary Ursula!"

"Were my father alive, Uncle James, the

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question never could have arisen; my place would have been with him. But I think—if he could see me now under all these altered circumstances—I think he would say to me Go."

There was no turning her. James Castlemaine saw it: and when she quitted the room he felt that the step, unless some special hindrance intervened, would be carried out.

"The result of being clever enough to have opinions of one's own!" muttered Mr. Castlemaine, in reference to the, to him, most unwelcome project.

Turning to the window again, he stood there, looking out. Looking out, but seeing nothing. The Friar's Keep opposite, rising dark and grim from contrast with the intervening white landscape; the sparkling blue sea beyond, glittering in the frosty sunshine: he saw none of it. The snow must be blinding his sight, or some deep trouble his perceptive senses. Mr. Castlemaine had other motives than the world knew of for wishing to keep his niece out of the Grey Nunnery; but he did not see how it was to be done.

Mary Ursula had passed into her own chamber: the best room in the house, and luxuriously furnished. It was generally kept

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for distinguished guests: and Mrs. Castlemaine had thought a plainer one might have served the young lady, their relative; but, as she muttered resentfully to the empty air, if Mr. Castlemaine could load the banker's daughter with gold and precious stones, he'd go out of his way to do it.

Drawing her chair to the fire, Mary sat down and thought out her plan. And, the longer she dwelt upon it, the more did she feel convinced that she was right in its adoption. A few short weeks before, and had any one told her she would enter the Nunnery and become one of the Grey Sisters, she had started back in aversion. But ideas change with circumstances. Then she had a happy home of splendour, an indulgent father, riches that seemed unbounded at command, the smiles of the gay world, and a lover to whom she was shortly to be united. Now she had none of these: all had been wrested from her at one fell swoop. To the outward world she had seemed to take her misfortunes calmly: but none knew how they had wrung her very soul. It had seemed to her that her heart was broken: it seemed to her as though some retired and quiet place to rest in were absolutely needful while she recovered, if she

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ever did recover, the effects of these calamities. But she did not want to sit down under her grief and nourish it: she had prayed earnestly, and did still pray, that it would please Heaven to enable her to find consolation in her future life, and that it might be one of usefulness to others, as it could not be one of happiness to herself. But a latent prevision sometimes made itself heard, that happiness would eventually come; that in persevering in her laid-out path, she should find it.

"The sooner I enter upon it, the better," she said, rising from her chair and shaking out the crape folds of her black silk dress. "And there's nothing to wait for, now that I have broken it to my uncle."

Glancing at her own face as she passed a mirror, she halted to look at the change that trouble had made in it. Others might not notice it, but to herself it was very perceptible. The beautiful features were thinner than of yore, the cheeks bore a fainter rose-colour; her stately form had lost somewhat of its roundness. Ah, it was not her own sorrow that had mostly told upon Mary Castlemaine; it was the sudden death of her father, and the agonizing doubt attending on it.

"If I could but know that it was God's

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will that he should die!" she exclaimed, raising her hands in an attitude of supplication. "And there's that other dreadful trouble— that awful doubt—about poor Anthony!"

Descending the stairs, she opened the door of the red parlour, and entered on a scene of turbulence. Miss Flora was in one of her most spiteful and provoking humours. She was trying to kick Ethel, who held her at arms' length. Her pretty face was inflamed, her pretty hair hung wild—and Flora's face and hair were both as pretty as they could well be.

"Flora!" said Miss Castlemaine, advancing to the rescue. "Flora, for shame! Unless I had seen you in this passion, I had not believed it."

"I *will* kick her, then! It's through her I did not go with mamma in the carriage to Stilborough."

"It was mamma who would not take you," said Ethel. "She said she had some private business there, and did not want you with her."

"She would have taken me: you know she would; but for your telling her I had not done my French exercise, you ugly, spiteful thing."

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"Mamma asked me whether you had done it, and I said no."

"And you ought to have said yes! You ill-natured, wicked, interfering dromedary!"

"Be still, Flora," interposed Miss Castlemaine. "Unless you are, I will call your papa. How can you so forget yourself!"

"Y*ou* have no business to interfere, Mary Ursula! The house is not yours; you are only staying in it."

"True," said Miss Castlemaine, calmly. "And I shall not be very much longer in it, Flora. I am going away soon."

"I shall be glad of that," retorted the rude child; "and I'm sure mamma will be. She says it is a shame that you should be let take up the best bedroom."

"Oh, Flora!" interposed Ethel.

"And she says—"

What further revelations the damsel might be contemplating, in regard to her mother, were summarily cut short. Harry Castlemaine had entered in time to hear what she was saying, and he quietly lifted her from the room. Outside he treated her to what she

dreaded, though it was not often she got it from him—a severe shaking—and she ran away howling.

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"She is being ruined," said Harry. "Mrs. Castlemaine never corrects her, or allows her to be corrected. I wish my father would take it seriously in hand! She ought to be at school."

Peace restored, Mary told them what she had just been telling Mr. Castlemaine. She was about to become a Grey Sister. Harry laughed: he did not believe a syllable of it; Ethel, more clear-sighted, burst into tears.

"Don't, don't leave us!" she whispered, clinging to Mary in her astonishment and distress. "You see what my life is here! I am without love, without sympathy. I have only my books and my music and my drawings and the sea! but for them my heart would starve. Oh, Mary; it has been so different since you came: I have had you to love."

Mary Ursula put her arm round Ethel. She herself, standing in so much need of love, had felt the tender affection of this fresh young girl, already entwining itself around her heart, as the grateful tree feels the tendrils of the clinging vine.

"You will be what I shall most regret in leaving Greylands' Rest, Ethel. But, my dear, we can meet constantly. You can see

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me at the Nunnery when you will; and I shall come here sometimes."

"Look here, Mary Ursula," said Harry, all his lightness checked. "Sooner than you should go to that old Nunnery, I'll burn it down."

"No, you will not, Harry."

"I will. The crazy old building won't be much loss to the place, and the ruins would be picturesque."

He was so speaking only to cover his real concern. The project was no less displeasing to him than to his father.

"You do not mean this, Mary Ursula!" But the grave look of her earnest face effectually answered him.

"It is I who shall miss you," bewailed Ethel. "Oh, can nothing be done!"

"Nothing," said Mary, smiling. "Our paths, Ethel, will probably lie far apart in life. You will marry, and social ties will form about you. I —" she broke off suddenly.

"I intend to marry Ethel myself," said Harry, kicking back a large live coal that flew far out into the hearth.

"Be quiet, Harry," said Ethel, a shade of annoyance in her tone.

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"Why, you know it's true," he returned, without looking at her.

"True! When we are like brother and sister!"

Miss Castlemaine glanced from one to the other. She did not know how to take this. That Harry liked Ethel and was in the habit of paying her attention, told nothing; for he did the same by many other young ladies.

"It was only last week I asked her to fix the day," said Harry.

"And I told you to go and talk nonsense elsewhere; not to me," retorted Ethel, her tone betraying her real vexation.

"If you won't have me, Ethel, you'll drive me to desperation. I might go off and marry one of the Grey Sisters in revenge. It should be Sister Ann. She is a charming picture; one to take a young man's heart by storm."

Mary Ursula looked keenly at him. In all this there was a semblance of something not real. It struck her that he was *wanting to make it appear* he wished for Ethel, when in fact he did not.

"Harry," she cried, speaking upon impulse, "you have not, I hope, been falling in love with anybody undesirable!"

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"But I have," said Harry, his face flushing. "Don't I tell you who it is!—Sister Ann. Mark you though, cousin mine, *you* shall never be allowed to make one of those Grey Sisters."

"You are very random, you know, Harry," said Miss Castlemaine, slowly. "You talk to young ladies without meaning anything—but they may not detect that. Take care you do not go too far some day, and find yourself in a mesh."

Harry Castlemaine turned his bright face on his cousin. "I never talk seriously but to one person, Mary Ursula. And that's Ethel."

"Harry," cried the young girl, with flashing eyes, "you are not fair to me."

"And now have you any commands for the Commodore!" went on Harry lightly, and taking no notice of Ethel's rebuke. "I am going to the Hutt."

They said they had none; and he left the room. Mary turned to Ethel.

"My dear—if you have no objection to confide in me—*is* there anything between you and Harry!"

"Nothing, Mary," was the answer, and Ethel blushed the soft blush of girlish modesty

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as she said it. "Last year he teased me very much, making me often angry; but latterly he has been better. The idea of my marrying him!—when we have grown up together like brother and sister! It would seem hardly proper. I like Harry very much indeed as a brother; but as to marrying him, why, I'd rather never be married at all. —Here's the carriage coming back! Mamma must have forgotten something."

Mrs. Castlemaine's carriage was seen winding round the drive. They heard her get out at the door and hold a colloquy with Flora. She came to the red parlour looking angry.

"Where's Harry!" she demanded, in the sharp, unkindly tones that so often grated on the ear of those offending her, as she threw her eyes round the room.

"Harry is not here, mamma," replied Ethel.

"I understood he was here," suspiciously spoke Mrs. Castlemaine.

"He went out a minute or two ago," said Ethel. "I think he is gone to Commodore Teague's."

"He is like an eel," was the pettish rejoinder. "You never know when you have him.

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As to that vulgar, gossiping old Teague, that they make so much of and are always running after, I can't think what they see in him."

"Perhaps it is his gossip that they like," suggested Ethel.

"Well, I want Harry. He has been beating Flora."

"I don't think he beat her, mamma."

"Oh, you great story-teller!" exclaimed Flora, putting in her head. "He shook me till all my bones rattled."

Mrs. Castlemaine shut the door with a click. And the next that they saw, was Miss Flora dressed in her best and going off with her mamma in the carriage.

"With this injudicious treatment the child has hardly a chance to become better," murmured Mary Ursula. "Ethel, have you a mind for a walk!"

"Yes: with you."

They dressed themselves and started for the village, walking lightly over the crisp snow, under the clear blue sky. Miss Castlemaine was bound for the Grey Nunnery; Ethel, protesting she would do no act or part towards helping her to enter it, went off to see some of the fishermen's wives on the cliff.

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Passing through the outer gate, Mary Ursula rang at the bell, and was admitted by Sister Phœby. A narrow passage took her into the hall. Opening from it on the left hand was a moderate-sized room, plain and comfortable. It was called the reception parlour, but was the one usually sat in by the Grey Ladies: in fact, they had no other sitting-room that could be called furnished. Dinner was taken in a bare bleak room, looking to the sea; it was used also as the school-room, and contained chiefly a large table and some forms. Miss Castlemaine was shown into the reception parlour. Two of the ladies were in it: Sister Margaret writing, Sister Betsey making lint.

An indication of Miss Castlemaine's wish to join the Sisters had already reached the Nunnery, and they knew not how to make enough of her. It had caused quite a commotion of delight. To number a Castlemaine amidst them, especially one so much esteemed, so high and grand and good as the banker's daughter, was an honour hardly to be believed in; the small fortune she would bring seemed like riches in itself, and they coveted the companionship of the sweet and gentle lady for their own sakes. Her joining them would

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swell the number of the community to thirteen; but no reason existed against that.

Sister Margaret put down her pen, Sister Betsey her linen, as their visitor entered. They gave her the one arm-chair by the fire—Sister Mildred's own place—and Mary put back her crape veil as she sat down. Calm, quiet, good, looked the ladies in their simple grey gowns, their hair smoothly braided under the white cap of worked muslin; and Mary Ursula seemed to feel a foretaste of peace in the time when the like dress, the like serene life, would be hers. The Superior Sisters came flocking in on hearing she was there; all

were present save Sister Mildred: Margaret, Charlotte, Betsey, Grizzel, and Mona. The working Sisters were Phœby, Ann, Rachel, Caroline, Lettice, and Ruth.

The ladies hastened to tell Miss Castlemaine of a hope, or rather project, they had been entertaining—namely, that when she joined the community, she should become its head. Sister Mildred, incapacitated by her long illness, had long wished to resign control; and would have done so before, but that Sister Margaret, on whom it ought to descend, declined to take it. Miss Castlemaine

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sat in doubt: the proposal came upon her by surprise.

"I do all the writing that has to be done, and keep the accounts; and you see that's all I'm good for," said Sister Margaret to Miss Castlemaine, in a tone of confidence. "If I were put in Sister Mildred's place, and had to order this and decide that, I should be lost. Why, if they came and asked me whether the dinner for the day should consist of fresh herrings, or pork and pease-pudding, I should never know which to say."

"Sister Mildred may regain her health," observed Miss Castlemaine.

"But she'll never regain her hearing," put in Sister Grizzel, a little quick, fresh-coloured, talkative woman. "And that tells very much against her as Superioress. In fact, her continuing as such is like a farce."

"Besides, she herself wants to give it up," said Sister Charlotte. "Oh, Miss Castlemaine, if you would but accept it in her place! You would make us happy."

Mary Ursula said she must take time for consideration. She was invited to go up to Sister Mildred, who would be sure to think it a slight if she did not. So she was conducted

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upstairs by the ladies, Charlotte and Mona, and found herself in a long, dark, narrow corridor which had doors on either side—the nuns' cells of old. The Head Sister's room was at the extreme end—a neat, little chamber, whose casement looked on to the sea, with a small bed in a corner. Sister Mildred was dressed and sat by the fire. She was a fair-complexioned, pleasant-looking, talkative woman, slightly deformed, and past fifty, but still very light and active. Of her own accord, she introduced the subject of resigning her post to Miss Castlemaine, and pressed her urgently to take it.

"The holding it has become a trouble to me, my dear," she said. "Instead of lying here at peace with nothing to think of—and some days I can't get up at all—I am being referred to perpetually. Sister Margaret refuses to take it; she says she's of more good for writing and account keeping. As to Sister Charlotte, she is always amid the little ones in the school; she likes teaching—and so there it is. Your taking it, my dear, would solve a difficulty; and we could hardly let one, bearing the honoured name of Castlemaine, be among us, and not be placed at our head."

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"You may get better; you may regain your health," said Mary.

"And, please God, I shall," cheerfully returned Sister Mildred, when she could be made to comprehend the remark. "Mr. Parker tells me so. But I shall be none the more competent for my post. My deafness has become so much worse since health failed that that of itself unfits me for it. The Sisters will tell you so. Why, my dear, you don't know the mistakes it leads to. I hear just the opposite of what's really said, and give orders accordingly. Sister Margaret wrote a letter and transacted some business all wrong through this, and it has caused ever so much trouble to set it to rights. It is mortifying to her and to me."

"To all of us," put in Sister Charlotte.

"Why, my dear Miss Castlemaine, just look at my facility for misapprehension! Only the other day," continued the Superioress, who dearly loved a gossip when she could get it, "Sister Ann came running up here in a flurry, her eyes sparkling, saying Parson Marston was below. 'What, below then!' I asked. 'Yes,' she said, 'below then,' and ran off again. I wondered what could have brought the parson here, for we don't see him at the

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Nunnery from year's end to year's end, but was grateful to him for thinking of us, and felt that I ought to get down, if possible, to receive and thank him. So I turned out of bed and scuffled into my petticoats, slipping on my best gown and a new cap, and down stairs I went. Would you believe it, my dear young lady, that it was not Parson Marston at all, but a fine sucking pig!"

Mary could not avoid a laugh.

"A beautiful sucking-pig, that lasted us two days when cooked. It came, a present, from Farmer Watson, good, grateful man, whose little boy Sister Mona went to nurse through a fever. I had mistaken what she said, you see, and got up for nothing. But that's the way it is with me; and the sooner I am superseded by somebody who can hear, the better."

"I have said lately that you ought to change your room," cried Sister Margaret to her. "In this one you are sometimes exposed to a sharp breeze."

"Cheese!" returned the deaf lady, mistaking the word. "Bread and cheese! By all means order it into the parlour if Miss Castlemaine would like some. Dear me, I am very remiss!"

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"No, no," returned Sister Margaret, laughing at the mistake, and speaking in her ear, "I only suggested it might be better for your deafness if you exchanged this room for a warmer one: one on the other side."

"Is that all! Then why did you mention cheese! No, no; I am not going to change my room. I like this one, this aspect; the sea is as good to me as a friend. And what does Miss Castlemaine say!"

Mary stood at the casement window. The grand, expansive sea lay below and around. She could see nothing else. An Indiaman was sailing majestically in the distance; on the sails of one of the fishing boats, dotting the surface nearer, some frosted snow had gathered and was sparkling in the sunshine. There she stood, reflecting.

"For the sake of constantly enjoying this scene of wondrous beauty, it would be almost worth while to come, let alone other inducements!" she exclaimed mentally in her enthusiasm. "As to acceding to their wish of taking the lead, I believe it is what I should like, what I am fitted for."

And when she quitted Sister Mildred's room she left her promise of acceptation within it.

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Meanwhile an unpleasant adventure had just happened to Ethel. Her visits to the wives of the fishermen on the cliff concluded, and seeing no sign yet of Mary Ursula's leaving the Nunnery, she thought she would make a call on Mrs. Bent, and wait there: which, in

truth, she was rather fond of doing. But to-day she arrived at an inopportune moment. Mr. and Mrs. Bent were enjoying a dispute.

It appeared that a letter had been delivered at the inn that morning, addressed to Anthony Castlemaine: the third letter that had come for him since his disappearance. The two first bore the postmark of Gap, this one the London postmark, and all were addressed in the same handwriting. Mrs. Bent had urged her husband to hand over the others to the Master of Greylands: she was now urging the like as to this one. John Bent, though in most matters under his wife's finger and thumb, had wholly refused to listen to her in this: he should keep the letters in his own safe custody, he said, until the writer, or some one of Mr. Anthony's connexions from over the water, appeared to claim them. Mrs. Bent was unable to stir his decision: since the fatal night connected with the Friar's Keep, she could but notice that John had

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altered. He was more silent than of yore; yielded to her less, and maintained his own will better: which was, of course, not an agreeable change to Mrs. Bent.

They were in their ordinary room, facing the sea. The door stood open as usual, but a screen of two folds now intervened between the fire-place and the draught. John sat in his carved elbow-chair; Mrs. Bent stood by, folding clothes at the table; which was drawn near the fire from its place under the window.

"I tell you, then, John Bent, you might be taken up and prosecuted for it," she said, sprinkling the linen so vigorously that some splashes went on his face. "Keeping other people's letters!"

"The letters are directed here, to my house, Dorothy woman; and I shall keep them till some proper person turns up to receive them," was John's answer, delivered without irritation as he wiped his face with his pocket-handkerchief.

"The proper person is Mr. Castlemaine. Just take your elbow away: you'll be upsetting the basin. He is the young man's uncle."

"Now look here, wife. You've said that before, and once for all I tell you I'll not do

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it. Mr. Castlemaine is the last person in the world I'd hand the letters to. What would he do with them!—Put 'em in the fire, I dare be bound. If, as I believe; I believe it to my very heart; Mr. Castlemaine took his nephew's life that night in the Friar's Keep—"

"Hist!" said Mrs. Bent, the rosy colour on her face fading as a sound caught her ear; "hist, man!"

And, for once, more alarmed than angry, she looked behind the screen, and found herself face to face with Ethel Reene.

"Mercy be good to us!" she exclaimed, seeing by the young lady's white face that they had been overheard. And, scarcely knowing what she did, she dragged the horror-stricken girl round to the hearth, before John.

"Now you've done it!" she cried, turning upon him. "You'd better pack up and be off to jail: for if Miss Ethel tells the Master of Greylands what she has heard, he'll put you there."

"No, he won't," said John, full of contrition for the mischief he had done, but nevertheless determined not to eat his words, and believing the suspicion must have reached the young lady sooner or later.

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"You cannot think this of papa!" said Ethel, sinking into a chair.

"Well, Miss Ethel, it is a great mystery, as you must know," said the landlord, who had risen. "I think the Master of Greylands could solve it if he liked."

"But—but, Mr. Bent, what you said is most dreadful!"

"I'm heartily sorry you chanced to overhear it, Miss Ethel. There's no cause to wink at me like that, wife. The words are said, and I cannot unsay them."

"But—do—you—believe it!" gasped Ethel.

"Yes, he does believe it," burst forth Mrs. Bent, losing sight of prudence in her anger against her husband. "If he does not get into some awful trouble one of these days through his tongue, his name's not John Bent.—And there's Miss Castlemaine of Stilborough crossing over the road!"

Not less overcome by terror and dismay than Mrs. Bent had been by anger, Ethel rushed out of the house and burst into a storm of hysterical sobs. Mary Ursula, wondering much and full of concern, drew her arm within her own and went over to the little solitary bench that stood by the sea.

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"Now, my dear, tell me what this means," she said, as they sat down.

But Ethel hesitated: it was not a thing to be told to Miss Castlemaine. She stammered an incoherent word or two between her sobs, and at the best was indistinct.

"I understand, Ethel. Be calm. John Bent has been making a terrible charge against my Uncle James."

Ethel clung to her. She admitted that it was so: telling how she had unintentionally overheard the private conversation between the landlord and his wife. She said it had frightened and confused her, though she did not believe it.

"Neither do I believe it," returned Miss Castlemaine calmly. "I heard this some time ago—I mean the suspicion that is rife in Greylands—but I am sorry that you should have been startled with it. That my uncle is incapable of anything of the kind—and only to have to say as much of refutation seems a cruel insult on him—I am perfectly sure of; and I am content to wait the elucidation that no doubt time will bring."

"But how wicked of John Bent!" cried Ethel.

"Ethel, dear, I have gone through so much

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misery of late that it has subdued me, and I think I have learnt the great precept not to judge another," said Mary Ursula sadly. "I do not blame John Bent. I respect him. That a strange mystery does encompass the doings of that February night—so fatal for me as well as for poor Anthony—I cannot ignore: and I speak not now of the disappearance only. There's reason in what John Bent says—that Mr. Castlemaine is not open about it, that it might be fancied he knows more than he will say. It is so. Perhaps he will not speak because it might implicate some one—not himself, Ethel; never himself; I do not fear that."

"No, no," murmured Ethel.

"It is Mr. Castlemaine's pride, I think, that prevents his speaking. He must have heard these rumours, and naturally resents them—"

"Do you think Anthony is really dead!" interrupted Ethel.

"I have never had any hope from the first that he is not. Now and then my imagination runs away with me and suggests he may be here, he may be there, he may have done this or done that—but of real hope, that he is alive, I have none. Next to the death of my

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dear father, it has been the greatest weight I have had to bear. I saw him but once, Ethel, but I seemed to take to him as to a brother. I am sure he was honourable and generous, a good man and a gentleman."

"You know what they are foolish enough to say here!" breathed Ethel. "That the ghost of the Grey Friar, angry at his precincts being invaded—"

"Hush!" reproved Miss Castlemaine.

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CHAPTER XII.

MADAME GUISE.

IT was the afternoon of this same day. The stage-coach, delayed by the snow, was very late when it was heard approaching. Its four well-fed horses drew up at the Dolphin Inn, to set down Mr. Nettleby. The superintendent of the coast-guard, who had been on some business a mile or two inland, had availed himself of the coach for returning. John Bent and his wife came running to the door. The guard, hoping, perhaps, for sixpence or a shilling gratuity, descended from his seat, and was extending a hand to help the officer down from the roof, when he found himself called to by a lady inside, who had been reconnoitring the inn, and the flaming dolphin on its sign-board.

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"What place is this, guard!"

"Greylands, ma'am."

"That seems a good hotel."

"It is a nice comfortable inn, ma'am."

"I will get out here. Please see to my luggage."

The guard was surprised. He thought the lady must have made a mistake.

"This is not Stilborough, ma'am. You are booked to Stilborough."

"But I will not go on to Stilborough: I will descend here instead. See my poor child"—showing the hot face of a little girl who lay half asleep upon her knee. "She has, I fear, the fever coming on, and she is so fatigued. This must be a healthy place; it has the sea, I perceive; and I think she shall rest here for a day or two before going on."

The landlord and his wife had heard this colloquy, for the lady spoke at the open window. They advanced, and the guard threw wide the door.

"Will you carry my little one!" said the lady to Mrs. Bent. "I fear she is going to be ill, and I do not care to take her on farther. Can I be accommodated with a good apartment here!"

"The best rooms we have, ma'am, are at

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your service; and you will find them excellent, though I say it myself," returned Mrs. Bent, receiving the child into her arms.

"Marie fatiguée," plaintively called out the little thing, who seemed about three years old. "Marie ne peut marcher."

The lady reassured her in the same language, and alighted. She was a tall, lady-like young woman of apparently some six-and-twenty years, with soft, fair hair, and a pleasing face that wore signs of care, or weariness; or perhaps both. Mrs. Bent carried the child into the parlour; John followed, with a large hand-reticule made of plaited black-and-white straw, and the guard put two trunks in the passage, a large one and a small one.

"I am en voyage," said the lady, addressing Mrs. Bent—and it may be remarked that, though speaking English with fluency, and with very little foreign accent, she now and then substituted a French word, or a whole sentence, as though the latter were more familiar to her in everyday life—and of which John Bent and his wife did not understand a syllable. "But we have voyaged far, and the sea-crossing was frightfully rough, and I fear I have brought my little one on

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too quickly: so it may be well to halt here for a short time, and keep her quiet. I hope your hotel is not crowded with company!"

"There's nobody at all staying in it just now, ma'am," said Mrs. Bent. "We don't have many indoor visitors at the winter season."

"And this snow is not good," said the stranger; "I mean not good for voyagers. I might have put off my journey had I thought it would come. When I left my home, the warm spring sun was shining, the trees were budding."

"We have had fine warm weather here, too," said Mrs. Bent; "it changed again a week ago to winter: not but what we had the sun out bright to-day. This dear little thing seems delicate, ma'am."

"Not generally. But she is fatigued, you see, and has a touch of fever. We must make her some tisane."

"We'll soon get her right again," said Mrs. Bent, gently; for with children, of whom she was very fond, she lost all her sharpness. "Poor little lamb! And so you've come from over the water, ma'am!—and the sea was rough!—and did this little one suffer!"

"Oh, pray do not talk of that terrible sea!

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I thought I must have died. To look at, nothing more beautiful; but to be on it—ah, Ciel!"

She shuddered and shrugged her shoulders with the recollection. There was something peculiarly soft and winning in the quiet tones of her voice; something attractive altogether in her features and their sad expression.

"I never was on the sea, thank goodness," said Mrs. Bent; "I have heard it's very bad. We get plenty of it as far as the looks go: and that's enough for us, ma'am. Many an invitation I've had in my life to go off sailing in people's boats—but no, not for me. One knows one's safe on land."

She had sat down, the child on her lap, and was taking off its blue woollen hood and warm woollen pelisse of fleecy grey cloth. The frock underneath was of fine black French merino. The lady wore the same kind of black dress under her cloak: it was evident that both were in mourning. Happening to look up from the semi-sleeping child, Mrs. Bent caught the traveller's eyes fixed attentively upon her, as if studying her face.

"How do you call this village, I was about to ask. Grey —"

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"Greylands, ma'am. Stilborough is about three miles off. Are you going there!"

"Not to stay," said the lady, hastily. "I am come to England to see a relative, but my progress is not in any hurry. I must think first of my child: and this air seems good."

"None so good for miles and miles," returned Mrs. Bent. "A week of it will make this little lady quite another child. Pretty thing! What beautiful eyes!"

The child had woke up again in her restlessness; she was gazing up at her strange nurse with wide-open, dark-brown eyes. They were not her mother's eyes, for those were blue. The hot little face was becoming paler.

"I must make her some tisane," repeated the lady; "or show you how to make it. You have herbs, I presume. We had better get her to bed. Nothing will do her so much good as rest and sleep. Will Marie go to bed!" she said, addressing the little girl.

"Oui," replied the child, who appeared to understand English, but would not speak it. "Marie sommeil," she added in her childish patois. "Marie soif. Maman, donne Marie à boire."

"Will you take her, ma'am, for a few moments!"

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said Mrs. Bent, placing her in the mother's arms. "I will see after your room and make it ready."

The landlady left the parlour. The child, feverish and weary, soon began to cry. Her mother hushed her; and presently, not waiting for the reappearance of the landlady, carried her upstairs.

Which was the chamber! she wondered, on reaching the landing: but the half-open door of one, and some stir within, guided her thoughts to it, as the right. Mrs. Bent was bustling about it; and the landlord, who appeared to have been taking up the trunks, stood just inside the door. Some kind of dispute seemed to be going on, for Mrs. Bent's tones were shrill. The lady halted, not liking to intrude, and sat down on a short bench against the wall; the child, dozing again, was heavy for her.

"As if there was not another room in the house, but you must make ready this one!" John was saying in a voice of vexed remonstrance. "I told you, Dorothy, I'd never have this chamber used again until we had not space left elsewhere. What are you going to do with the things!"

"Now don't you fret yourself to fiddle-strings,"

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retorted Mrs. Bent. "I am putting all the things into this linen-basket; his clothes and his little desk and all, even the square of scented soap he used, for he brought it with him in his portmanteau. They shall go into the small chest in our bedroom, and be locked up. And you may put a seal upon the top of it for safety."

"But I did not wish to have the things disturbed at all," urged John. "The lady might have had another room."

"The tap-room is your concern, the care of the chambers is mine, and I choose her to have this one," said independent Mrs. Bent. "As to keeping the best chamber out of use just because these things have remained in it unclaimed, is about as daft a notion as ever I heard of. If you don't take care, John, you'll go crazy over Anthony Castlemaine.

The mother outside, waiting, and hushing her child to her, had not been paying much attention: but at the last words she started, and gazed at the door. Her lips parted; her face turned white.

"Peace, wife," said the landlord. "What I say is right."

"Yes, crazy," persisted Mrs. Bent, who rarely dropped an argument of her own accord.

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"Look at what happened with Miss Ethel Reene to-day! I'm sure you are not in your senses on the subject, John Bent, or you'd never be so imprudent. You may believe Mr. Anthony was murdered by his uncle, but it does not do to turn yourself into a town-crier, and proclaim it."

Oh, more deadly white than before did these words turn the poor lady who was listening. Her face was as the face of one stricken with terror; her breath came in gasps; she clutched at her child, lest her trembling hands should let it fall. John Bent and his wife came forth, bearing between them the piled-up clothes-basket, a small mahogany desk on its top. She let her face drop upon her child's and kept it there, as though she too had fallen asleep.

"Dear me, there's the lady!" whispered John.

"And it's unbeknown what *she* has overheard," muttered Mrs. Bent. "I beg your pardon, ma'am; you'll be cold sitting there. Had you dropped asleep!"

The lady lifted her white face: fortunately the passage was in twilight: she passed a pocket-handkerchief over her brow as she spoke.

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"My little child got so restless that I came up. Is the room ready!"

Letting fall her handle of the basket and leaving her husband to convey it into their chamber as he best could, Mrs. Bent took the child from the speaker's arms and preceded her into the room. A spacious, comfortable chamber, with a fine view over the sea, and a good fire burning up in the grate.

"We were as quick as we could be," said Mrs. Bent, in apology for having kept her guest waiting; "but I had to empty the chamber first of some articles that were in it. I might have given you another room at once, ma'am, for we always keep them in readiness, you see; but this is the largest and has the pleasantest look-out; and I thought if the little girl was to be ill, you'd like it best."

"Articles belonging to a former traveller!" asked the lady, who was kneeling then before her trunk to get out her child's night things.

"Yes, ma'am. A gentleman we had here a few short weeks ago."

"And he has left!"

"Oh yes," replied Mrs. Bent, gently combing back the child's soft brown hair, before she passed the sponge of warm water over her face.

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"But why did he not take his things with him!"

"Well, ma'am, he—he left unexpectedly; and so they remained here."

Now, in making this somewhat evasive answer, Mrs. Bent had no particular wish to deceive. But, what with the work she had before her, and what with the fretful child on her knee, it was not exactly the moment for entering on gossip. The disappearance of Anthony Castlemaine was too public and popular a theme in the neighbourhood for any idea of concealment to be connected with it. The lady, however, thought she meant to evade the subject, and said no more. Indeed, the child claimed all their attention.

"Marie soif," said the little one, as they put her into bed. "Maman, Marie soif."

"Thirsty, always thirsty!" repeated the mother in English. "I don't much like it; it bespeaks fever."

"I'll get some milk and water," said Mrs. Bent.

"No, no, not milk," interposed the lady. "Oui, ma chérie! A spoonful or two of sugar and water while maman makes the tisane. Madame has herbs, no doubt," she added, turning to the landlady. "I could

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make it soon myself at this good fire if I had a little casserole: a—what you call it!—saucepan."

Mrs. Bent promised the herbs, for she had a store-room full of different kinds, and the saucepan. A little sugared water was given to the child, who lay quiet after drinking it,

and closed her eyes. Moving noiselessly about the room, the lady happened to go near the window, and her eye caught the moving sea in the distance, on which some bright light yet lingered. Opening the casement window for a moment, she put her head out, and gazed around.

"The sea is very nice to see, but I don't like to think of being on it," she said as she shut the window. "What is that great building over yonder to the left!"

"It's the Grey Nunnery, ma'am."

"The Grey Nunnery! What, have you a nunnery here in this little place! I had no idea."

"It's not a real nunnery," said Mrs. Bent, as she proceeded to explain what it was, in the intervals of folding the child's clothes, and how good the ladies were who inhabited it. "We heard a bit of news about it this afternoon," she added, her propensity for

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talking creeping out. "Sister Ann ran over here to borrow a baking-dish—for their own came in two in the oven with all the baked apples in it—and she said she believed Miss Castlemaine was going to join them as the Lady Superior."

"Miss—who!" cried the stranger quickly.

"Miss Castlemaine. Perhaps, ma'am, you may have heard of the Castlemaines of Greylands' Rest. It is close by."

"I do not know them," said the traveller. "Is, then, a Miss Castlemaine, of Greylands' Rest, the Lady Superior of the Nunnery!"

"Miss Castlemaine of Stilborough, ma'am. There is no Miss Castlemaine of Greylands' Rest; save a tiresome little chit of twelve. She has not joined them yet; it is only in contemplation. Sister Ann was all cock-a-hoop about it: but I told her the young lady was too beautiful to hide her head under a muslin cap in a nunnery."

"It is a grand old building," said the traveller, "and must stand out well and nobly on the edge of the cliff. And what a length! I cannot see the other end."

"The other end is nearly in ruins—part of it, at least. The chapel quite so. That lies between the Nunnery and the Friar's Keep."

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"The Friar's Keep!" repeated the lady. "You have odd names here. But I like this village. It is quiet: nobody seems to pass."

"There's hardly anybody in it to pass, for that matter," cried Mrs. Bent, with disparagement. "Just the fishermen and the Grey Sisters. But here I am, talking when I ought to be doing! What would you like to have prepared for dinner, ma'am!"

"I could not eat—I feel feverish, too," was the answer given, in an accent that had a ring of piteous wail. "I will take but some tea and a tartine when I have made the tisane."

Mrs. Bent opened her eyes. "Tea and a tart, did you say, ma'am!"

"I said—I mean bread and butter," explained the stranger, translating her French word.

"And—what name—if I may ask, ma'am!" continued Mrs. Bent, as a final question.

"I am Madame Guise."

"Tea's best, after all, upon a day's travelling," were the landlady's final words as she descended the stairs. There she told her husband that the lady had rather a curious name, sounding like Madam Geese.

The small saucepan and the herbs were

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taken up immediately by Molly, who said she was to stay and help make the stuff, if the lady required her. The lady seemed to be glad of her help, and showed her how to pick the dried leaves from the thicker stalks.

"Do you have travellers staying here often!" asked Madame Guise, standing by Molly after she had asked her her name, and doing her own portion of the work.

"A'most never in winter time," replied Molly—a round-eyed, red-cheeked, strong-looking damsel, attired in a blue linsey skirt and a cotton handkerchief crossed on her neck. "We had a gentleman for a week or two just at the turn o' January. He had this here same bedroom."

"They were his things, doubtless, that your mistress said she was removing to make space for me."

"In course they were," replied Molly. "Master said he'd not have this room used—that the coats and things should stay in it: but missis likes to take her own way. This here stalk, mum—is he too big to go in!"

"That is: we must have only the little ones. What was the gentleman's name, Mollee!"

"He was young Mr. Castlemaine: a foreign

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gentleman, so to say; nephew to the one at Greylands' Rest. He came over here to put in his claim to the money and lands."

"And where did he go!—where is he now!" questioned Madame Guise, with an eagerness that might have betrayed her painful interest, had the servant's suspicions been on the alert.

"It's what my master would just give his head to know," was the answer. "He went into the Friar's Keep one moonlight night, and never come out on't again."

"Never came out of it again!" echoed Madame Guise. "What do you mean!—How was that!"

Bit by bit, Molly revealed the whole story, together with sundry items of the superstition attaching to the Friar's Keep. Very much gratified, was she, at the opportunity of doing it. The tale was encompassed by so many marvels, both of reality and imagination, by so much mystery, by so wide a field of wonder altogether, that others in Greylands, as well as Molly, thought it a red-letter day when they could find strange ears to impart it to.

Madame Guise sat down in a chair, her hands clasped before her, and forgetting the

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herbs. Molly saw how pale she looked; and felt prouder than any peacock at her own powers of narration.

"But what became of him, Mollee!" questioned the poor lady.

"Well, mum, that lies in doubt, you see. Some say he was spirited away by the Grey Monk."

Madame Guise shook her head. "That could not be," she said slowly, and somewhat in hesitation. "I don't like revenants myself—but that could not be."

"And others think," added Molly, dropping her voice, "that he was done away with by his uncle, Mr. Castlemaine. Master do, for one."

"Done away with! How!"

"Murdered," said the girl, plunging the herbs into the saucepan of water.

A shudder took Madame Guise from head to foot. Molly looked round at her: she was like one seized with ague.

"I am cold and fatigued with my long journey," she murmured, seeking to afford some plausible excuse to the round-eyed girl. "And it always startles one to hear talk of murder."

"So it do, mum," acquiesced Molly. "I

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dun'no which is worst to hear tell on; that, or ghosts."

"But—this Friar's Keep that you talk of, Mollee—it may be that he fell from it by accident into the sea."

"Couldn't," shortly corrected Molly. "There ain't no way to fall—no opening. They be biling up beautiful, mum."

"And—was he never—never seen again since that night!" pursued Madame Guise, casting mechanically a glance on the steaming saucepan.

"Never seen nor heard on," protested Molly emphatically. "His clothes and his portmantel and all his other things have stayed on here; but he has never come back to claim 'em."

Madame Guise put her hands on her pallid face, as if to hide the terror there. Molly, her work done, and about to depart, was sweeping the bits of stalks and herbs from the table into her clean check apron.

"Does the voisinage know all this!" asked Madame Guise, looking up. "Is it talked of openly! May I speak of it to monsieur and madame en bas—to the host and hostess, I would say!"

"Why bless you, mum, yes! There have

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been nothing else talked of in the place since. Nobody hardly comes in here but what begins upon it."

Molly left with the last words. Madame Guise sat on, she knew not how long, her face buried in her hands, and the tisane was boiled too much. The little girl, soothed perhaps by the murmur of voices, had fallen fast asleep. By-and-by Mrs. Bent came up, to know when her guest would be ready for tea.

"I am ready now," was the lady's answer, after attending to the tisane. "And I wish that you and your husband, madame, would allow me to take the meal with you this one

evening," added Madame Guise, with a slight shiver, as they descended the dark staircase. "I feel lonely and fatigued, and in want of companionship."

Mrs. Bent was gratified, rather than otherwise, at the request. They descended; and she caused the tea-tray, already laid in their room, to be carried into the parlour. The same parlour, as the room above was the same bedroom, that had been occupied by the ill-fated Anthony Castlemame.

"I hope you are a little less tired than you were when you arrived, madam," said John

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Bent, bowing, as he with deprecation took his seat at last, and stirred his tea.

"Thank you, I have been forgetting my fatigue in listening to the story of one Mr. Anthony Castlemaine's disappearance," replied Madame Guise, striving to speak with indifference. "The account is curious, and has interested me. Mollee thought you would give me the particulars."

"Oh, he'll do that, madam," put in Mrs. Bent sharply. "There's nothing he likes better than talking of t*hat*. Tell it, John."

John did as he was bid. But his account was in substance the same as Molly's. He could tell neither more nor less: some few additional small details perhaps, some trifling particulars; but of real information he could give none. The poor lady, hungering after a word of enlightenment that might tend to lessen her dread and horror, listened for it in vain.

"But what explanation can be given of it!" she urged, biting her dry lips to hide their trembling. "People cannot disappear without cause. Are you sure it was Mr. Castlemaine you saw go in at the gate, and thence into the Friar's Keep!"

"I am as sure of it, ma'am, as I am that

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this is a tea-cup before me. Mr. Castlemaine denies it, though."

"And you suspect—you suspect that he murdered him! That is a frightful word; I cannot bear to say it. Meurtre!" she repeated in her own tongue, with a passing shiver." Quelle chose affreuse! You suspect Mr. Castlemaine, sir, I say!"

John Bent shook his head. The encounter with Ethel had taught him caution. "I don't know, ma'am," he answered; "I can't say. That the young man was killed in some way, I have no doubt of—and I think Mr. Castlemaine must know something about it."

"Are there any places in this—what you call it!—Friar's Keep!—that he could be concealed in! Any dungeons!"

"He's not there, ma'am. The place is open enough for anybody to go in that likes. Mr. Castlemaine had a man over from Stilborough to help him search, and they went all about it together. I and Superintendent Nettleby also went over it one day, and some others with us. There wasn't a trace to be seen of young Mr. Anthony; nothing to show that he had been there."

"So it resolves itself into this much," said

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Madame Guise—"that you saw this Mr. Anthony Castlemaine go into the dark place, on that February night; and, so far as can be ascertained, he never came out again."

"Just that," said John Bent. "I'd give this right hand of mine"—lifting it—"to know what his fate has been. Something tells me that it will be brought to light."

Madame Guise went up to her room, and sat down there with her heavy burthen of terror and sorrow, wondering what would be the next scene in this strange mystery, and what she herself could best do towards unravelling it. Mrs. Bent, coming in by-and-by, found her weeping hysterically. Marie woke up at the moment, and they gave her some of the tisane.

"It is the reaction of the cold and long journey, ma'am," pronounced Mrs. Bent, in regard to the tears she had seen. "And perhaps the talking about this unaccountable business has startled you. You will be better after a night's rest."

"Yes, the coach was very cold. I will say good-night to you and go to bed."

As Mrs. Bent retired, the lady sank on her knees by the side of her child, and buried her face in the white counterpane. There she

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prayed; prayed earnestly; for help from Above, for strength to bear.

"The good God grant that the enlightenment may be less terrible than are these my fears," she implored, with lifted hands and streaming eyes.

Back came Mrs. Bent, a wine-glass in one hand, and a hot water bottle for the bed in the other. The glass contained some of her famous cordial—in her opinion a remedy for half the ills under the sun. Madame Guise was then quietly seated by the fire, gazing into it with a far-away look, her hands folded on her lap. She drank the glass of cordial

with thanks: though it seemed of no moment what she drank or what she did not drink just then. And little Marie, her cheeks flushed, her rosy lips open sufficiently to show her pretty white teeth, had dropped off to sleep, again.

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CHAPTER XIII.

A STORM OF WIND.

THE wind was rising. Coming in gusts from across the sea, it swept round the Dolphin Inn with a force that seemed to shake the old walls and stir the window-panes—for the corner that made the site of the inn was always an exposed one. Madame Guise, undressing slowly by the expiring fire in her chamber, shivered as she listened to it.

The wind did not howl in this fashion around her own sheltered home in the sunny Dauphiné. There was no grand sea there for it to whirl and play over, and come off with a shrieking moan. Not often there did they get cold weather like this; or white snow covering the plains; or ice in the water-jugs. And never yet before in her uneventful life,

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had it fallen to her lot to travel all across France from South to North with a little child to take care of, and then to encounter the many hours' passage in a stifling ship on a rough and raging sea: and after a night's rest in London to come off again in the cold English stage-coach for how many miles she knew not. All this might have served to take the colour from her face and to give the shiverings to her frame—for land travelling in those days was not the easy pastime it is made now.

But there was worse behind it. Not the cold, not the want of rest, was it, that was so trying to her, but the frightful whispers of a supposed tragedy that had (so to say) greeted her arrival at the Dolphin. But a few hours yet within its walls, and she had been told that him of whom she had come in secret search, her husband, had disappeared out of life.

For this poor young lady, Charlotte Guise, was in truth the wife of Anthony Castlemaine. His wife if he were still living; his widow if he were dead. That he was dead, hearing all she had heard, no doubt could exist in her mind; no hope of the contrary, not the faintest shadow of it, could enter her heart. She

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had come all this long journey in search of her husband, fearing some vague treachery; she had arrived to find that treachery of the deepest dye had only too probably put him out of sight for ever.

When the father, Basil Castlemaine, was on his death-bed, she had heard the charge he gave to Anthony, to come over to England and put in the claim to his rightful inheritance; she had heard the warning of possible treachery that had accompanied it.

Basil died. And when Anthony, in obedience to his father's last injunctions, was making ready for the journey to England, his wife recalled the warning to him. He laughed at her. He answered jokingly: saying that if he never returned to Gap, she might come off to see the reason, and whether he was still in the land of the living. Ah, how many a word spoken in jest would, if we might read the future, bear a solemn meaning! That was one.

Anthony Castlemaine departed on his mission to England, leaving his wife and little child in their home at Gap. The first letter Charlotte received from her husband told her of his arrival at Greylands, and that he had put up at the Dolphin Inn. It intimated that

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he might not find his course a very smooth one, and that his Uncle James was in possession of Greylands' Rest. Some days further on she received a second letter from him; and following closely upon it, by the next post in fact, a third. Both these letters bore the same date. The first of them stated that he was not advancing at all; that all kinds of impediments were being placed in his way by his uncles; they appeared resolved to keep him out of the estate, refusing even to show him how it was left; and it ended with an expressed conviction that his Uncle James was usurping it. The last letter told her that since posting the other letter earlier in the day, he had seen his Uncle James; that the interview, which had taken place in a meadow, was an unpleasant one, his uncle even having tried to strike him: that he (Anthony) really did not know what to be at, but had resolved to try for one more conference with his uncle before proceeding to take legal measures, and that he should certainly write to her again in the course of a day or two to tell her whether matters progressed or whether they did not. In this last letter there ran a vein of sadness, very perceptible to the wife. She thought her husband must have been in very bad

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spirits when he wrote it: and she anxiously looked for the further news promised.

It never came. No subsequent letter ever reached her. After waiting some days, she wrote to her husband at the Dolphin Inn, but she got no answer. She wrote again, and with the like result. Then, feeling strangely uneasy, not knowing how to get tidings of him, or to whom to apply, she began to think that she would have to put in practice the suggestion he had but spoken in jest, and go over to England to look after him. A short period of vacillation—for it looked like a frightfully formidable step to the untravelled young lady—and she resolved upon it. Arranging the affairs of her petit ménage, as she expressed it, she started off with her child; and in due time reached London. There she stayed one night, after sending off a note to Greylands, directed to her husband at the Dolphin Inn, to tell of her intended arrival on the following day; and in the morning she took her seat in the Stilborough coach. These three letters, the two from Gap and the one from London, were those that led to the dispute between Mr. and Mrs. Bent, which Ethel Reene had disturbed. The landlord had them safely locked up in his private archives.

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Forewarned, forearmed, is an old saying. Anthony Castlemaine's wife had been warned, and she strove to be armed. She would not present herself openly and in her own name at Greylands. If the Castlemaine family were dealing hardly with her husband, it would be more prudent for her to go to work warily and appear there at first as a stranger. The worst she had feared was, that Mr. James Castlemaine might be holding her husband somewhere at bay; perhaps even had put him in a prison—she did not understand the English laws—and she must seek him out and release him. So she called herself Guise as soon as she landed in England. Her name had been Guise before her marriage, and she assumed it now. Not much of an assumption: in accordance with the French customs of her native place, she retained her maiden name as an affix to her husband's and her cards were printed, Madame Castlemaine-Guise. Had her assertion of the name wanted confirmation, there it was on the small trunk; which had GUISE studded on it in brass nails, for it had belonged to her father. Her intention had been to proceed to Stilborough, put up there, and come over to Greylands the following day. But when she

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found the coach passed through Greylands—which she had not known, and she first recognised the place by the sign of the famous dolphin, about which Anthony had written to her in his first letter—she resolved to alight there, the little girl's symptoms of feverish illness affording a pretext for it. And so, here she was, at the often-heard-of Dolphin Inn, inhabiting the very chamber that her ill-fated husband had occupied, and with the dread story she had listened to beating its terrors in her brain.

A gust of wind shook the white dimity curtain, drawn before the casement, and she turned to it with a shiver. What did this angry storm of wind mean! Why should it have arisen suddenly without apparent warning! Charlotte Guise was rather superstitious, and asked herself the question. When she got out of the coach at the inn door, the air and sea were calm. Could the angry disturbance have come to show her that the very elements were rising at the wrong, dealt out to her husband! Some such an idea took hold of her.

"Every second minute I ask whether it can be true," she murmured in her native language; "or whether I have but dropped asleep

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in my own house, and am dreaming it all. It is not like reality. It is not like any story I ever heard before. Anthony comes over here, all those hundreds of weary miles, over that miserable sea, and finds himself amid his family; his family whom he had never seen. 'Greylands' Rest is mine, I think,' he says to them; 'will you give it to me!' And they deny that it is his. 'Then,' says he, 'what you say may be so; but you should just show me the deeds—the proofs that it is not mine.' And they decline to show them; and his uncle, James Castlemaine, at an interview in the field, seeks to strike him. Anthony comes home to the hotel here, and writes that last letter to me, and puts it in the post late at night. Then he and the landlord go walking out together in the moonlight, and by-and-by they see Mr. James Castlemaine go into a lonely place of cloisters called the Friar's Keep, and he, my poor husband, runs in after him; and he never comes out of it again. The host, waiting for him outside, hears a shot and an awful cry, but he does not connect it with the cloisters; and so he promenades about till he's weary, thinking the uncle and nephew are talking together, and—and Anthony never at all comes out again! Yes,

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it is very plain: it is too plain to me: that shot took my dear husband's life. James Castlemaine, fearing he would make good his claim to the estate and turn him out of it, has murdered him."

The wind shrieked, as if it were singing a solemn requiem; the small panes of the casement seemed to crack, and the white curtain fluttered. Charlotte Guise hid her shrinking face for a moment, and then turned it on the shaking curtain, her white lips parting with some scarcely breathed words.

"If the spirits of the dead are permitted to hover in the air, as some people believe, perhaps *his* spirit is here now, at this very window! Seeking to hold commune with mine; calling upon me to avenge him. Oh, Anthony, yes! I will never rest until I have found out the mystery of your fate. I will devote my days to doing it!"

As if to encourage the singular fancy, that the whispered story and the surroundings of the hour had called up in her over-strung nerves and brain, a gust wilder than any that had gone before swept past the house at the moment with a rushing moan. The casement shook; its fastenings seemed to strain: and the poor young lady, in some irrepressible

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freak of courage, born of desperation, drew aside the curtain and looked forth.

No, no; nothing was there but the wind. The white snow lay on the ground and covered the cliff that skirted the beach on the right. The night was light, disclosing the foam of the waves as they rose and fell; clouds were sweeping madly across the face of the sky.

The little girl stirred in bed and threw out her arms. Her mother let fall the window curtain and softly approached her. The hot face wore its fever-crimson; the large brown eyes, so like her father's, opened; the red lips parted with a cry.

"Maman! Marie soif; Marie veut boire."

"Oh, is she fatherless!" mentally cried the poor mother, as she took up the glass of tisane. "Oui, ma petite! ma chérie! Bois done, Marie; bois!"

The child seized the glass with her hot and trembling little hands, and drank from it. She seemed very thirsty. Before her mother had replaced it within the fender and come back to her, her pretty face was on the pillow again, her eyes were closing.

Madame Guise—as we must continue to call her—went to bed: but not to sleep. The

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wind raged, the child by her side was restless, her own mind was in a chaos of horror and trouble. The words of the Prophet Isaiah in Holy Writ might indeed have been applied to her: The whole head was sick and the whole heart faint.

Towards morning she dropped into a disturbed sleep, during which a dream visited her. And the dream was certainly a singular one. She thought she was alone in a strange, dark garden: gloomy trees clustered about her, ugly looking mountains rose above. She seemed to be searching for something; to be obliged to search, but she did not know for what; a great dread, or terror, lay upon her, and but for being impelled she would not have dared to put one foot before the other in the dark path. Suddenly, as she was pushing through the impeding trees, her husband stood before her. She put out her hand to greet him; he did not respond to it, but remained where he had halted, a few paces off, gazing at her fixedly. It was not the husband who had parted from her in the sunny South; a happy man full of glad anticipations, with a bright fresh face and joyous words on his lips: but her husband with a sad, stern countenance, pale, cold, and still.

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Her heart seemed to sink within her, and before she could ask him what was amiss she saw that he was holding his waistcoat aside with his left hand, to display a shot in the region of the heart. A most dreadful sensation of terror, far more dreadful than any she could ever know in this life, seized upon her at the sight; she screamed aloud and awoke. Awoke with the drops of moisture on her face, and trembling in every limb.

Now, as will be clear to every practical mind, this dream, remarkable though it was, must have been only the result of her own imaginative thoughts, of the tale she had heard, of the fears and doubts she had been indulging before going to sleep. But she, poor distressed, lonely lady, looked upon it as a revelation. From that moment she never doubted that her husband had been shot as described; shot in the heart and killed: and that the hand that did it was Mr. Castlemaine's.

"I knew his spirit might be hovering about me," she murmured, trying to still her trembling, as she sat up in bed. "He has been permitted to appear to me to show me the truth—to enjoin on me the task of bringing the deed to light. By Heaven's help I will

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do it. I will never quit this spot, this Greylands, until I have accomplished it. Yes, Anthony!—can you hear me, my husband! —I vow to devote myself to the discovery; I

will bring this dark wickedness into the broad glare of noonday. Country, kindred, home, friends!—I will forget them all, Anthony, in my search for you.

"Where have they hidden him!" she resumed after a little pause. "Had Mr. Castlemaine an accomplice!—or did he act alone. Oh, alone; of a certainty, alone," she continued, answering her own question. "He would not have dared it had others been present; and the landlord below says Mr. Castlemaine was by himself when he went into the cloisters. Did he fling him into the sea after he was dead!—or did he conceal him somewhere in that place—that Keep! Perhaps he buried him in it! if so, his body is lying in unconsecrated ground, and it will never rest.—Marie, then, my little one, what is it! Are you better this morning!"

The child was awaking with a moan. She had been baptised and registered in her native place as Mary Ursula. Her grandfather, Basil, never called her anything else; her father would sometimes shorten it to "Marie

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Ursule:" but her mother, not so well accustomed to the English tongue as they were, generally used but the one name, Marie. She looked up and put out her little hands to her mother: her eyes were heavy, her cheeks flushed and feverish.

That the child was worse than she had been the previous night, there could be little question of, and Madame Guise felt some alarm. When breakfast was over—of which meal the child refused to partake, but still complained of thirst—she inquired whether there was a doctor in the place. She asked for him as she would have asked in her own land. Is there a médecin here! and Mrs. Bent interpreted it as medicine, comprehended that medicine was requested, and rejoiced accordingly. Mrs. Bent privately put down the non-improvement to the tisane. Had a good wholesome powder been administered over night, the child, she believed, would have been all right this morning.

The doctor, Mr. Parker, came in answer to the summons: a grey-haired, pleasant-speaking man. He had formerly been in large practice at Stilborough; but after a dangerous illness which attacked him there and lasted more than a year, he took the advice of his

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friends and retired from the fatigues of his profession. His means were sufficient to live without it. Removing to Greylands for change of air, and for the benefit of the salt-sea-

breezes, he grew to like the quietude of the place, and determined to make it his home for good. Learning that a small, pretty villa was for sale, he purchased it. It lay back from the coach road beyond the Dolphin Inn, nearly opposite the avenue that led to Greylands' Rest. The house belonged to Mr. Blackett of the Grange—the Grange being the chief residence at a small hamlet about two miles off; and Mr. Castlemaine had always intended to purchase it should it be in the market, but Mr. Blackett had hitherto refused to sell. His deciding to do so at length was quite a sudden whim; Mr. Parker heard of it, and secured the little property—which was anything but agreeable at the time to the Master of Greylands.

There Mr. Parker had since resided, and had become strong and healthy again. He had so far resumed his calling as to attend when a doctor was wanted in Greylands, for there was none nearer than Stilborough. At first Mr. Parker took to respond for humanity's sake when appealed to, and he continued

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it from love of his profession. Not for one visit in ten did he get paid, nor did he want to; the fishermen were poor, and he was large-hearted.

After examining the little lady traveller, he pronounced her to be suffering from a slight attack of inflammation of the chest, induced, no doubt, by the cold to which she had been exposed when travelling. Madame Guise informed him that they had journeyed from Paris (it was no untruth, for they had passed through the French capital and stayed a night in it), and the weather had become very sharp as they neared the coast—which coast it had taken them two days and a night in the diligence to reach; and the sea voyage had been fearfully hard, and had tried the little one. Yes, yes, the doctor answered, the inclement cold had attacked the little girl, and she must stay in bed and be taken care of. Madame Guise took occasion to observe that she had been going farther on, but on perceiving her child's symptoms of illness had halted at this small village, called Greylands, which looked open and healthy—but the wind had got up at night. Got up very much and very suddenly, assented the doctor, got up to a gale; and it was all the better for the little

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one that she had not gone on. He thought he might have to put a small blister on in the afternoon, but he should see. A blister!—what was that! returned madame, not familiar with the English word. Oh, she remembered, she added a moment after—a vésicatoire.

"Yes, yes, I see it all: Heaven is helping me," mentally spoke poor Charlotte Guise, as she took up her post by Marie after the doctor's departure, and revolved matters in her mind. "This illness has been sent on purpose: a token to me that I have done right to come to Greylands, and that I am to stay in it. And by the good help of Heaven I will stay, until I shall have tracked home the fate of my husband to Mr. Castlemaine."

END OF VOL. I.