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THE UNFAITHFUL GUARDIAN.

CONTINUED.

"WHO can it be?" said Nellie, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking down the avenue. "Why, it's Robert Morris, I do believe," she continued, as the rider appeared through the trees.

The boy caught sight of her eager face and waved his cap in a gay salute. Nellie drew back a little ashamed of her own eagerness, but there was a glow of girlish happiness in her cheeks and eyes which would not be restrained.

"You see I am come," exclaimed the boy, riding up to the steps, and springing off his horse. "Take care of him, John," he said to the servant who approached, "I rode very fast."

He hurried up the steps and grasped Nellie's hands, and gave Mrs. Dexter a respectful greeting.

"Are you glad to see me, Nellie?" he asked.

"Very glad, Robert, I am always glad," she replied, with her truthful simplicity. "I did not expect you, though."

"Of course you didn't, I always come when I am not expected—I do everything in that way—I like surprises."

"And you are very certain of giving us a pleasant one when you come, Robert," Mrs. Dexter said.

"Thank you, ma'am, I am glad you like me to come, for I am never quite happy anywhere else."

"Did you see my guardian?" Nellie asked.

"No, I called at his house, but he was not in. I have only been home a few days."

"We thought you were still South," said Mrs. Dexter; "we had not heard from you."

"Oh, I wanted to astonish you! Why, Nellie, you are growing tall, I do declare, and your hair is longer than ever."

Nellie laughed and went into the house. Robert seated himself by Mrs. Dexter's side, who smiled kindly down at him, for he, in spite of his boyish spirits, was a great favorite with the quiet, placid lady.

He had such a frank, generous face, and it lighted up so pleasantly when he spoke, that Mrs. Dexter felt her heart yearn toward him—poor, motherless youth, so very boyish, although he was fast growing into a young man. But he had one of those fortunate natures which are really fitted for this hard world—good, sterling sense—shrewd, clever talent, which would make him a prominent man—not a particle of genius, and none of the over-sensitiveness which goes with it—but a kind heart overflowing with generous impulses, which was better than all.

He was a singular contrast to the youth described in an earlier portion of this story—night and morning could not have been more unlike. The one was a boy, finding his happiness in the pursuits and pleasures of his age—the other had no childhood, and no spring of life—tortured by wild dreams and mad hopes, of whose brightness his poetic intuition taught him the falsity. Oh, they were a contrast, but Robert Morris, though not a genius, would make by no means an ordinary or a common-place man, and the coarser mould in which his nature had been cast, was much better adapted to this earthly sphere in which we dwell, hemmed in and fettered by bonds which many never feel, than the delicate organization of William Sears.

"Ten is ready," said Nellie, returning to the verandah; "come out into the arbor—you shall both be my guests! Here is your shawl, Mrs. Dexter, I thought you might need it."

"You are always thoughtful," said Mrs. Dexter, smoothing down her fair ringlets; "you may not be a fairy, but you are a dear, good girl, and that's a better thing!"

"Now, Robert, you shall sit by me on the green root sofa, Mrs. Dexter shall have

the rustic chair, and we will be so very comfortable—if my guardian were here—"

"Now, that's not polite," broke in Robert. "do for once be content with seeing me." "Well, so I am; there—take your tea, I have put in the extra lump of sugar to show that we are reconciled."

They jested and made merry as the happy of their age should do, and Mrs. Dexter looked on with smiling satisfaction, no restraint to their mirth or enjoyment.

"Oh, I had quite forgotten!" exclaimed Robert, suddenly. "Wait a moment, Nellie!"

He drew out of his loose sack a small package, and untying it held up a couple of neatly bound volumes.

"New books!" said Nellie; "I wanted something to read."

"Yes, but listen—'Poems, by William Sears!'"

"Give me the book—do! Another volume of poems! isn't it astonishing, Mrs. Dexter?"

"They were published in England," said Robert, "but a friend sent me an early copy. They beat his other books all hollow—oh, he's very famous now—he's written a play that had great success—only fancy it!"

"Just to think I never saw him, and he so intimate with my guardian," said Nellie; "but he hurried off to Europe while I was away."

"Well, we've got his poetry at all events," returned Robert, "it's better than he—such an odd fellow as he was."

Then they opened the book and began to read. Nellie's cheek glowing with enthusiasm, and Robert himself looking excited and moved.

"But it is so sad," Nellie said, almost below her breath; "oh! how unhappy he must be."

"But a despondent, reckless misery unworthy of a man," said Mrs. Dexter; "he must have suffered though, poor fellow."

"If you want gloom, hear this, said Robert.

Peace, troubled soul—oh! suffer and be still—
Mark in the fading form how fast youth flees—
Look on that heaving grave so lone and chill—
The woe is past—thou dost but drain its lees!"

"Oh! don't read any more," exclaimed Nellie. "I can't bear it, it's so sad! I must ask my guardian what troubles him—I did once, and he said his digestion was bad, that he would eat all sorts of trash, and out of that came the poetry—fancy what a speech!"

"There may be more truth in it than you imagine," returned Robert, while he and Mrs. Dexter laughed heartily at her look of profound horror. "Don't you think poets have to eat?"

"Oh, I don't know! but I am very sure Mr. Sears is unhappy."

"Mr. James says a bilious man always is," said Mrs. Dexter; "and then the two children—for they were little else—laughed again—not that they were unsympathizing or slow to feel—but from very light-heartedness."

"Here is another book, Nellie—a novel, that is dividing popular favor in England with Sears's poems. 'Resignation,' by Catharine Grant."

"What a singular name!—but as sad as possible."

He opened the book and read on until the gathering twilight rendered it impossible to distinguish the words. Then they entered the house, and continued the perusal of that book, which filled Nellie's whole soul with the interest fiction possesses for the young.

CHAPTER VI.

And now we will follow our wanderers across the sea, and leave these young folks to enjoy their books.

Pacing up and down his solitary room, restless and impatient—the old fever burning in his eyes and lightning up the weary face, was William Sears!

Three years before, he had left America, had wandered far, won fame and distinction, but the nameless desire which desolated his boyhood was still unquieted. The dreams of the past had given place to the reality of life, but he found nothing new, nothing which he had not before understood by those mysterious intuitions which are the blessing or the curse of natures like his. The fresh laurels with which they crowned his brow only cast another shadow over his heart. Praise never once dazzled him into forgetfulness of the wearing pain within—and William Sears, famous and the idol of the day, was as utterly alone as the dreaming boy of six years before.

Of all these things was he meditating as he paced his lonely chamber. The moonlight lay without hazy and beautiful, the

soft spring wind blew in at the casement, and the hum of a great city was borne faintly up with a musical murmur like the flow of far off waters. The solitude at last became intolerable—he wanted to hear voices—gay music—and hastily changing his dress, he went out into the thronged streets of that brilliant Parisian world.

"Sears, is it possible? Why, my dear boy I thought you had become a regular case of mysterious disappearance."

William was standing in one of the stalls of the Italian Opera, where he had strayed for want of amusement, and turned with quick gaiety to answer his friend. In a moment his thoughts had fled—the prima donna burst into a flood of song, giving him an excuse for silence, but the melody was equally unheeded. A thrill passed like a magnetic shock through his frame, and by its revelation he knew that some event of importance was at hand; for foolish as it may sound, there are natures so susceptible to those mysterious influences which find a source in some unknown law of our being, that they are thus affected by the approach of those who are to exercise a control over their destiny, whether for good or ill.

Sears glanced across the house—his eyes rested upon a box nearly opposite—he beheld the face which he had twice seen, years before, but which had haunted him like a prophetic vision. Often had it risen in fancy before him, sometimes as palpable as now, and for an instant he could have believed that it was only the work of his excited imagination.

"Do you see that woman in white yonder?" whispered his friend.

Sears was breathless beneath the startled bound which his heart gave. "There, in that box—you must know her—you remember my powers of magnetism—I tell you that she is akin to you! One of your countrywomen—you have read her books—the first was published anonymously—Ingola."

It was the romance William had so loved, with which he had always connected that woman's memory!

"Who is she?" he asked, in a tone which sounded indifferent and cold.

"Mrs. Grant—Catharine too—isn't she like one of Shakespeare's heroines stepped into the real world? She interests me strangely, as she does every one who comes near her. Such eyes! one might think she were constantly awaiting some one who never came, the sound of a voice which would never reach her ear."

"True, true, for it never comes," muttered William, "never!"

"Let me present you, I know her very well—now, that's a lie, for she is ice to everybody! At all events we exchange bows and polite, frozen speeches—I want you to know her."

"Another time," said Sears, hastily; "not now."

Sears turned again toward the box where he had been gazing. There it was still, that face, in its spiritual quiet, beyond any mere beauty that he had ever beheld. Her eyes were fixed upon the stage, but Sears remarked the expression of which Duval had spoken. She did look like one who had awaited for years the coming of footsteps and the sound of a voice—awaited them in passive wretchedness, with no power to arouse herself from the engrossing desire.

How his heart went back to that lonely evening ride of the long ago, when the sight of that face first sent a glow to his heart like the transitory breaking of sunlight over dark waters. Every painful memory of his past life welled up on the troubled tide—every unquiet aspiration, every restless dream—then he looked again upon that broad forehead, where the bands of hair lay like waving light, and the tumult in his breast was stilled as if by magic power.

Duval turned toward him at the conclusion of the aria, and wondered at the change in his face.

"What has come over you?—you look—"

"How do I look?"

"I can't describe—I am no poet, only a painter! You look as if you had found a new hope."

"Ay, a new hope," murmured William, and the whisper thrilled like music across his heart, "a new hope."

"I say, William, what has happened?—tell me, what is it? Are you only dreaming?—a poetic fancy perhaps?"

"Perhaps," faltered William, and the light faded from his eyes, the glow from his cheek—there had come the thought—if it should prove only a dream, a delusion like the rest.

Strange, but even in that moment Sears

hesitated! The interview of which he had so long dreamed was at hand, yet he trembled—some premonition from the future seemed to moan in his ear. He felt that the whole course of his life was to know a change—that all coming time would be colored by the events which should grow out of that meeting, and therefore it was with a strange feeling of awe, that he accompanied his friend to the box to receive the promised introduction.

"Don't touch that everlasting pen today, mistress, I am sick of the sight of it."

"You ought not to abuse it Janet, we are growing quite rich through its assistance."

"And you are wearing yourself out, mistress; surely we've got money enough now to live here quiet and nice, since you've given over flitting about."

"Ah, Janet, I have nothing now to induce me to wander farther—you know well, that never in this world shall I find that which I sought so long."

"I didn't mean to make you think of that mistress—don't get sad, oh, don't!"

"Do not fear, Janet, the thought that my sister is dead brings me no pain; it was only the knowledge that she was living, and that I could never see her, which maddened me, now I know that one day we shall meet where no human power can part us."

"Ah, you are an angel, mistress, darling! Now let me lay these papers all away, and don't touch them again this morning. See, here is a book—the verses you like to read so much—take this while I go out."

Catharine suffered the kind old woman to remove the sheets of manuscript, and when she was alone sat idly holding the volume the attendant had placed in her hand, but making no effort to read. Something of the old unrest had gone out of that face, there was a patient, melancholy sadness in the lineaments, but the fever and passion of grief had faded, leaving neither gaiety nor happiness, but an un-murmuring submission beautiful to look upon.

Her sister, the little child so watched and cared for, so eagerly sought and wildly mourned, was dead—at least these were the tidings that came after two or three years spent in fruitless search. After that she sank down wholly, prostrated by a terrible illness, which was the result of toil and wearisome journeyings to and fro, whenever there seemed the slightest possibility of obtaining information concerning the dear one. For weeks the angel of death hovered about her couch, and faithful Janet Brown watched upon the other side; human love and tenderness were for once rewarded, and Catharine recovered.

She had labored faithfully, and only as those who tax body and soul, devoting all her earnings to that search for her lost sister. Several works had been given to the world, attracting much attention from their singularity and the genius displayed in their pages, and the popular favor thus gained had furnished her with sufficient means to live at least with comfort and elegance.

But the child was dead—she had nothing to struggle or hope for more! At length, another and not less important aim presented itself—that doubt which rested upon her past—upon the name which she had cast aside, choosing to work one out for herself—could she live to clear it—could the mysterious plot but be unraveled and laid bare! For this she now toiled and bore on; not so much for her own sake, as to leave no stain upon the memory of her dead husband in the minds of those to whom the misery of that time had been revealed.

Was there still another reason now—had life suddenly caught a gush of sunlight which never brightened it before?

A month had passed since her meeting with that passionate-souled poet, whose lays had so long thrilled her heart with their fervid eloquence—a month in which had been concentrated a whole life of rest and happiness to the fiery heart of that youth who had so long sought in vain the likeness of that ideal form which reigned supreme within his bosom.

Was it of these weeks that she dreamed, sitting there in her silence, with those earnest eyes seeming to look far beyond the present scene, to catch a glow from the tranquil beauty whereon she gazed?

There was a low knock at the door, and unannounced, William Sears entered the chamber. That month had changed him greatly; the worn, tired look about the eyes was gone—the proud, impatient curving of the mouth had softened into a smile, which changed the whole expression of his face into one of even child-like sweetness.

"I did not think to find you at home," he said, in a voice whose softness a casual acquaintance would hardly have recognized "so I came in to wait for you—even to wait here is a great pleasure to me."

Catharine smiled dreamily, and a faint shade of color stole into her cheeks.

"I have been in doors all morning," she said, in her clear, distinct tones; "I meant to have written, but Janet positively forbade that, so I have been reading I believe—"

"Dreaming, you mean!"

"How do you know that?"

"By your eyes, I can see the bewildering fancies playing there still."

"And you—what have you been doing since last evening?"

"Wondering if last month were all a dream, and if I must at length wake again to the suffering which went before."

"Never, I hope," she said, gently; "never again."

"No, at least I shall have the memory of these weeks to look back upon, even fate cannot deprive me of that."

"Fate is often kinder than man, I am not afraid of her—it is only the agency of human beings that I dread."

"Those I defy!"

"Because you have never been placed in a position where one man could take your whole future destiny into his hands and fling it out where he willed, and you powerless to struggle against the misery forced upon you, unable even to point the source from whence it came."

"I cannot understand that—it is one of those mysterious allusions which you make at times but never explain—I will not have you sadden yourself on me this morning! I wonder if you know how much happiness you have given me during these weeks!"

"Have I indeed? You make me very happy when you tell me that I yet possess the power of giving pleasure to any living soul, Mr. Sears."

"You promised not to call me by that cold, formal name—say William!"

He sat down on a low ottoman at her feet, with that winning childishness of manner which he could assume at will, but which had nothing unmanly in it.

"William, she murmured; "it is a pleasant name, I do not wonder you like to hear it."

"It sounds very sweet to me when you repeat it," he replied, not in the tone of one paying a compliment, but raising his eyes to her face full of beautiful revelations, to which no language could have given expression.

"You were to read to me this morning," she said; "have you forgotten your promise?"

"Do I ever forget? It is only a fragment from my new tragedy—I want your advice and assistance."

"I who have never written a line of poetry—the idea of my advising you!"

"You have never written a page which was not teeming with it! I don't consider that language must be divided into a certain number of feet and lines in order to be poetry."

"I am glad you think so—I was afraid it was only another of my heresies which gave me the belief. But come, I must not be cheated out of my reading. Take this easy-chair—poets should have lofty seats."

So he sat and read to her those burning poesies, while her face was as a glass in which he saw mirrored every varying emotion called up by his tones.

He ceased at length and closed the volume, waiting for a moment in a silence which Catharine did not strive to break.

"Shall I complete the tragedy?" he asked, at length; "is it equal to my last one?"

"You feel, you know that it is immeasurably superior—you could not leave it unfinished if you would."

"It is superior," he replied, "because I have caught my inspiration from a higher source—I thought of you as I wrote, and in the intervals of my labor I have sat down in the sunshine of your presence until my whole soul was kindled with it."

"That past seems—I can hardly realize that it was I who thus suffered and struggled! Tell me that I shall never be condemned to return to it—promise me that you will keep me from that terrible agony which was like madness."

"If I have any power to bring you peace it shall never come upon you again," she replied, in a low, steady voice, which was like an inward prayer; "never again."

"Bless you for those words, Catharine! During these weeks I have lived so wholly in their happiness, I had scarcely told you of my past."

"The past," she answered, and her clasped hands began to tremble, "the past!"

"But you know how I have suffered, and you will not condemn me! Speak to me, Catharine, assure me that is indeed the real life—tell me that you love me."

"Your words have awakened me," she said, in a changed tone, and the light went out of her face, leaving it pale and cold; "why did you break the spell with that terrible word? I too have had a past—a past of which you know nothing, but I can be silent no longer."

"There is no gulf so deep," he interrupted, "that my great love cannot bridge it over—no cloud so dark that the sunshine beyond will not disperse it."

He rose from his seat and would have taken her to his heart, scarcely heeding the almost terrified expression of her face.

"Catharine," he murmured, "my Catharine!"

Before she could answer or stir from her shrinking attitude the door opened, and without warning some one entered the chamber; the sound aroused them—each looked toward the door—William started forward in amazement, but Catharine sank back in her seat, pale and rigid as if some ghost of past suffering had suddenly started up before her—there in the door-way, calm and impassive, stood Mr. James! To be continued.