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THE UNFAITHFUL GUARDIAN.

CONTINUED.

AND after," broke suddenly from
her contracted lips, "after?"
"After—what do you mean?"
"When I have seen him—when we have
parted—what am I to do then?"
He shrank for an instant beneath the
look in her eyes, but the thirst for ven-
geance which had grown the master passion
in his soul and swallowed up all other sen-
timents, dispelled the brief emotion.

"We shall see—follow me."
William Sears had just awakened from
the tranquil slumber into which he had sunk
a few hours before—the first untroubled
rest that he had known for months.
Catharine was supporting him in her
arms, his head lying upon her shoulder,
and her hair mingling with his darker locks
as she bent over his forehead.

He woke without a start, looking round
for an instant in the belief that he was
dreaming still.

A glow of joy broke over his whole face,
and his feverish eyes softened into a beau-
tiful calm.

"Then I was not dreaming! Catharine,
my Catharine, you are really here."
"Why were you lying in this room
alone, William?—where are your attend-
ants?"

"I don't remember, darling—have you
been here long? Have I been asleep or sick?
—is the night over?"

"It is hardly dark yet, you have slept
for several hours."
"You will not leave me again, Catharine
—never, never?"

"Not till you are well. But where is—
Nellie, your wife, you know?"
"Nellie?—oh, yes, little Nellie! Don't
let her come here—this is no place for
her!"

"Does any one know that you are here,
William?"
"No one—don't tell them, dear—we will
be by ourselves, for you will stay with me,
Catharine—you won't leave me?"

"I have promised—did I ever break my
word with you? But you must lie down
now; you are ill, William, and I must send
for a physician."

"I will not see him—I do not choose to
get well—you will go away if I do."
He struggled up from the pillow where
she had placed his head, reaching forth his
arms with a gesture of entreaty. She bent
over him anew, speaking his name and
striving to quiet him with her voice. There
was a sound without—a quick step—the
door opened, and Mr. James appeared be-
fore them like some evil spirit come to mar
their happiness. Catharine shrank toward
the bed—the sight of that man overpowered
her. William saw who it was—sprang
almost from the couch, exclaiming,

"Take that man away, he shall not come
here—he has tortured me enough, at least
I will die in peace."

"Auff this girl," returned Mr. James,
drawing Nellie into the room, smiling the
while his cold, terrible smile; "this girl,
shall she be driven away also—your wife—
your own lawful wife?"

"Nellie," murmured William, sinking
back, overcome by weakness and the vio-
lence of his emotion, "poor little Nellie!"
"Ay, Nellie!" hissed Mr. James, draw-
ing her forward still, while she looked
from one to another in mute horror that
found no vent in words.

"And you, madam!" continued Mr.
James; "do you recognize this face?—do
you know whom I have brought here?
Come forward, Nellie Lennox—Mrs. Sears,
stand face to face with your sister and the
mistress of your husband!"

"Liar!" exclaimed William, struggling
again to rise, but falling back helpless and
exhausted.

Catharine did not speak—her arms drop-
ped to her side—she looked blasted by
those horrible words.

"Do you hear, Nellie? Your sister, de-
graded, lost—the base companion of that
man."

"Sister—my sister!" moaned the girl,
"I have no sister—take me away, Mr.
James, take me away."

She clung to him as if she would have
forced him from the chamber, shrouding
her face in her hands to shut out the ob-
jects before her gaze.

Catharine did not move; through her
pursed lips came the broken murmur,
"Nellie, little Nellie?"

"Who spoke my name?—whose voice is
that? Mr. James, speak, what does this
mean?"

"It is I, Nellie, your sister, Catharine!"
"Oh, no, no," she shrieked, with a ges-
ture of loathing; "I had a sister, but this
is not she—come away, Mr. James, come!"

"You see, madam!" said the tormentor,
"lost—ruined—disgraced—even this girl
casts you off forever."
"She does not, she will not!" cried
Catharine, roused to utterance by his mock-
ing words. "Nellie, that man has de-
ceived you—leave him, come with me,
Nellie, come!"

"And share her husband's love with
you," returned Mr. James, laughing
again.

"Listen to me, Nellie," for the girl had
retreated step by step as Catharine ap-
proached, flinging out her hands to keep
her aloof. "Nellie, remember your child-
hood, remember my love! William, speak
to her, contradict this slander."

He heard her voice—it would almost
have roused him from the insensibility of
death.

"Nellie," he said, "little one, come
here—come close, this is Catharine, your
sister."

"And the woman who has thrust her-
self between your heart and that of your
wife," broke in Mr. James.

"You will not believe this, Nellie, you
do not—listen to me—oh, believe your
sister!"

"You are not my sister!" exclaimed
Nellie, rousing herself from that stupor of
horror; "I will never believe it—never!
I am going now—Mr. Sears, I shall never
trouble you again—farewell."

"Come back, Nellie," pleaded William,
"that demon has done this! It is your
sister—pure and good!"

"Nellie looked in Mr. James' face with
her wild eyes.

"Contradict that," she said, with a
choking sob, though she had lost all power
to weep, "tell me that it is false."
"She is your sister, Nellie," he returned,
"come, leave her to her shame."
"My sister! my sister!"

"He separated us, Nellie," moaned
Catharine, "he tore you from me—I be-
lieved you dead and with our angel mother
in heaven."

"Her own wickedness separated you,
Nellie," cried her guardian; "her dying
husband cursed her! erased her name from
his will."

William Sears had struggled in vain for
many moments to rise, but those fiendish
words so maddened him that he sprang
from the bed and grasped the man in his
fevered hold, his long, thin fingers clutch-
ing the throat of his opponent. Mr. James
shook him off, for he was weak as a child,
and Catharine aided him back to the
couch. Mr. James followed, bent over the
pillow and whispered in his ear.

William covered his face with a moan of
anguish, writhing upon the bed like a
wounded bird struggling beneath the fasci-
nation of some deadly serpent.

"Wretch, you are killing him!" shrieked
Catharine, pushing him off. "Go—
leave us—you shall not torture him!"

During that moment which seemed an
eternity, Nellie was crouching close to the
door, watching the scene with her frenzied
eyes, longing to fly, but without strength
to move from the spot.

"Come, Nellie," and Mr. James returned
to her side, aiding her to rise. "You
have seen them both—husband and sister!
Catharine Lennox, there is no escape this
time, your husband's weakness saved you
from disgrace before, but now I will drag
your name through every tribunal in the
land, and make your infamy so public
that you dare not even walk the open
streets!"

"Nellie!" she pleaded, not heeding his
words, and striving to make one last appeal
that should move the creature for whom
she had endured so much; "in our moth-
er's name hear me!"
"I cannot—I dare not! Let me go—let
me go!"
"You shall listen—I am your sister, I
cared for you in your childish years—"

"And since, why did you leave me?—
where have you been?"

Nellie spoke the words brokenly, her
head averted, unable to realize anything
except that this woman was there between
her and the man whom she had married.

"I have been away, I was seeking you!
This man made me believe that you were
dead."

"It is only a falsehood with the rest,"
said Mr. James.

"Say no more!" and Nellie clasped her
hands to her head as if to shut out his
words; "I can bear no more! Go back,
madam, go back to that man for whom you
have destroyed your sister!"

"Nellie, he is sick, dying, perhaps—he
lies there now pale and insensible—have
mercy, have mercy!"

"Oh, my God, protect me, they will
drive me mad!" cried Nellie, yielding for
the first time to a burst of insane weeping.

"Mr. James, let me believe her—do not
curse them!"

"She relents—she does believe!" ex-
claimed Catharine. "Come, Nellie, sister,
leave this bad man, come to me, come!"

Mr. James caught the sobbing girl and
drew her away.

"Will you be deceived even now," he
exclaimed, "after all that you have
seen?"

"Sister, sister!" moaned Catharine, and
Mr. James looked in her face with his ter-
rible sneer.

"The hour is come," he whispered, "I
swore to be revenged—I will keep my
oath!"

He hurried to Nellie, and would have
borne her from the room, but Catharine
followed, clinging to his arm and striving
to thrust him aside, uttering still that
name, "sister, sister!"

"I forgive you," she gasped, "pray to
God for pardon, but I will never see you
again!"

Her head fell upon Mr. James' shoulder,
and he bore her away.

When Nellie recovered, she was in her
guardian's house, but that transient wak-
ing only gave place to the incoherent rav-
ings of a brain fever, from which it seemed
impossible for one so young and frail to re-
cover.

For many moments Catharine remained
standing where they had left her. At length
a low moan from the bed aroused her; she
remembered that her duty lay there, and
closing the door she went back to William's
side. He was just recovering from that
long swoon, and calling feebly upon her
name.

"I am here," she said, "be calm, Wil-
liam, I am here."

"What has happened?—was that man
here?"

"He has just gone—oh, William, he has
taken Nellie with him!"

She sank down by the bed, hiding her
face in the folds of the counterpane, en-
deavoring even in that moment to change
the moan of anguish which broke from her
heart into a prayer for resignation and re-
pose.

William laid his hand softly upon the
golden hair he loved so well, and a few
tears wrung from his weakness coursed
down his cheeks.

"Bear up a little longer for my sake,
Catharine," he said, "you will not fail me
now."

She rose, with the prayer still on her
lips, very pale, but strong and uncom-
plaining.

CHAPTER XI.

William was able to rise from his bed,
but he could neither walk about much nor
undertake the slightest occupation; could
only lie dreamily during the long hours of
those summer days with Catharine seated
by his side, talking to him in her low,
sweet voice, reading to him passages from
the old poets that he loved, or soothing
him with her smiles of consolation, when
some wave from the past would dash its
chill bitterness across his soul.

And in all this I aver there was no touch
of human weakness, no leaning toward hu-
man frailty. William seemed gradually
wasting away—he believed it to be death,
but Catharine thought otherwise, though
she could almost have prayed that such
consummation might be granted.

There was a small room at the back of
the house, which was William's favorite
apartment. Every morning Janet wheeled
his easy-chair near the open windows that
looked out upon a little break in the garden
where the grass formed a natural lawn, with
a single weeping willow awaying its silvery
branches to and fro in the sunlight. There
was a grave, old doctor who visited him
daily, but he troubled him with few reme-
dies and no advice, so for Catharine's sake
William managed to support his visits with
a certain degree of patience.

They spoke little of the past, those two;
William's malady rendered him so excita-
ble that Catharine avoided every subject that
could which cause him the least agitation.

Catharine watched him, forgetful of her-
self, wearing the pleasant smile that he
loved, cheerful and hopeful always.

But the man who had wrought them so
much suffering had not yet completed his
work, and Mr. James never relinquished a
project of vengeance until his thirst had
been satisfied to the utmost.

While Nellie remained ill and insensibil-
e at his house, he had been close upon the
track of his two victims, weaving about
them the meshes of his plots, and prepar-
ing to plant another poisoned arrow in the
hearts which he had so tortured and wrung.

The third week of their sojourn in that
quiet place commenced, and the curiosity
of the village gossips had become strongly
excited concerning the mysterious stran-
gers.

Here they lived, never moving out, and
the two domestics, a cross old Scotch wo-
man, and a man servant equally uncom-
municative, seemed as little inclined to
society as their employers. The religious
people of the little New England village
were solely perplexed, and one or two of
the more prominent members of the church
suggested to the minister that it was his
duty to inquire into the affair, and there
were even some vague hints that it was a
case which might well occupy the attention
of the select men of the town.

The old parson had opposed this—a
rigid, Calvinistic Presbyterian, but with a
heart which beat more kindly under his
worn bosom than he himself dreamed. So
the affair rested, though there were nu-
merous tea drinkings given where the sub-
ject was freely discussed, and the men in
power sorely blamed for their negligence.

One day, there met at the old-fashioned
parsonage house a company of the deacons
of the church, who were also among the
select men, dropping in almost by accident
to visit their pastor. While they sat there
conversing, among other things of the
strangers, concerning whom even the vil-
lage doctor could give no information, for a
physician had been employed from ten
miles away, a letter was brought in and
given to the clergyman. He took it, and
seeing that the writing was unknown to
him, began turning the epistle over in his
hand, the invariable habit of persons to
whom letters are unaccustomed visitants.

At length, when one of the deacons sug-
gested that he might find it more satisfac-
tory to read the contents, he broke the
seal, adjusted his spectacles, and began to
peruse the clearly written page. The fur-
rows on his brow grew deeper, and a stern
indignation gathered over his features.
Some broken exclamation warned the dea-
cons that it contained tidings of import-
ance, but by no means pleasurable ones,
and they waited with impatience while the
old man re-read the epistle, always with in-
creased excitement.

"My friends," he said, at length, "our
brethren were right—these strangers are
children of iniquity. Two fugitives have
hidden themselves in our village, the man
leaving a fond wife to pine and die, while
he yields himself to the caresses of this
Dellah."

When the matter was fully explained,
and the letter read in council, it was deter-
mined that they should act upon the mo-

ment. They left the house, that little
band of stern men in whose veins the puri-
tan blood and puritan prejudices flowed
uncontaminated, and walked in solemn
procession toward the cottage.

They reached the gate of the cottage,
opened it and passed in, each wearing a
sort of horrified sanctity, which would have
been singularly imposing to the common
herd of parishioners had they witnessed it.
Yet they did this thing in the honesty of
their hearts, acting up to the precepts of the
sect in which they had been reared, even
as their fathers before them.

The hall door was open, and Janet
Brown was sweeping away the rose-leaves
which had blown over the porch. She
paused in her occupation, and recognizing
the minister, dropped a low courtesy with
the true reverence of a Scotch Presbyterian.

"I wish, my good woman," said the
clergyman, in his hardest voice, while his
companions waited a little in the rear, one
old deacon absorbed in silent prayer, "I
wish to speak with the man who resides
here."

"He is very sick, sir, and cannot be
fished with seeing any one."

"Then the other person—"

"Do you mean the lady?" interrupted
Janet, somewhat forgetting her respect in
the indignation she felt at hearing her mis-
tress styled a person. "Then you can't
see her either, sir."

"Let me pass, woman," said the min-
ister, setting his stick firmly down; "I
have come here in the exercise of my duty,
and I must speak with the person who is
within."

"Indeed then, there's no person that
you'll need to meddle with," returned
Janet, in a louder voice, "and parson
though ye be, I'll just say good morning
to you and them that's in your company."

She would have closed the door in his
face, but he held it back with his stout
cane, while the little band of deacons fairly
groaned in pious horror.

"I tell you that I will enter; this is a
house of iniquity, and I come to warn all
herein of the wrath, human and divine,
which is at hand."

"Good Lord!" cried Janet, dropping her
broom, "the man is daft, clean daft—a
raugaral Bedlamite."

"Peace, woman, and let us pass; we
must speak with the female; our village
shall no longer harbor the depraved and
sinful."

At this moment a door at the farther end
of the passage opened and Catharine ap-
peared, roused by the unusual sound of
voices. In spite of their indignation, there
was something about her which moved the
clergyman and his followers.

"What is the matter, Janet?" she said,
"did these gentlemen wish anything?"

"It's the parson," whispered Janet,
"and ye'll never see a March hare that's
madder; as for them that's with him
they're only worse."

"I am the clergyman," said Mr. Gray,
with all his former severity, "and I come
to you, with these friends, upon a painful
errand, but one from which we do not
shrink."

"Excuse me, sir," Catharine said, cour-
teously, "I think there is some mistake."
"None, madam, none, do not attempt to
deceive me—but this letter will say all."

He thrust into her hand the letter which
he had that morning received. Catharine
recognized the writing, shuddering slightly
but very calm.

"Will you walk this way?" she said,
moving toward a parlor at the front,
"there is a sick man near here, and I
would not have him disturbed."

The minister and his companions follow-
ed her, impressed by the simple majesty
of her words and manner. Janet Brown
looked after them with her scarce spent
wrath still shining in her eyes, picked up
her broom, and with some Scotch ejacula-
tion retreated to her own dominions.

Catharine stood and read the letter,
while those frowning men gathered about
her, silenced by the calm dignity of her de-
meanor. Its contents caused her no sur-
prise, and as for the pain, it was so slight
in comparison with that which had lain
at her heart for years, that she scarcely heed-
ed it. As she had supposed, it was another
stab of her implacable enemy. Mr.
James had traced their movements, and
written to the clergyman a tale well calcu-
lated to rouse his puritan blood. It called
upon him as a father of the church to de-
nounce and drive forth the guilty pair who
had taken refuge in his village, after de-
serting a dying wife and bringing lasting
disgrace upon all connected with their
name.

When Catharine had finished the letter,
she returned it to the minister, saying only:
"And you believed this thing?"
To be continued.