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THE UNFAITHFUL GUARDIAN.

CONTINUED.
SHE looked full in his face with her
clear, truthful eyes, whence a great
sorrow broke, and their language went to
the old man's soul as no protestations in
words could have done.

"Madam," he said, in a changed voice,
"you are strangers here, your mode of life
has appeared singular from the first—we
didn't know what to think."

"We did not come here to argue," broke
in the selectman, seeing that the minister
was about to soften, "your arts are all
wasted on us; we come in the name of the
law to warn you out of this place as a criminal."

"Peace, brother," whispered the pastor,
"you are too violent."

Catharine looked at the speaker in silence,
but he shrank from the truth in her
eyes and the grandeur of her face. After
a moment she glanced suddenly toward the
clergyman.

"Sir," she said, "have you a daughter?"

The old man turned away his face, pointing
to the weed upon his hat; scarcely
three months had passed since he buried
the darling of his heart, the fairest girl
that the whole village could boast. The
deacons themselves were softened by the
sight of their pastor's emotion, and Catharine
saw that they were almost ready to re-
linquish their hard purpose.

"By that daughter's memory," she said,
"I ask you to deal kindly with one greatly
injured, but innocent as she. Tell me now
what you require?"

"We should not have spoken to a woman,"
said the deacon, more kindly,
"where is the young man?"

"Did I not say that he was ill?—tell me
your errand."

They looked at one another, and she
looked calmly at them, but no one seemed
inclined to break the silence.

"You wish us to quit your village," she
said, "is that it?"

"It would be better," returned the pastor,
hesitatingly, "better for all, if you
would do so."

She made no answer, but moved toward
the door at the end of the apartment, and
motioned them to follow. They obeyed
her gesture, and looked into the shadowy
room beyond. The curtains were flung
down over the casements, and on a low
couch in the gloom lay the wasted form of
a sleeping man. His face looked mourn-
fully youthful in that heavy slumber, the
features so thin and sunken in the uncer-
tain light that the gazers started back,
almost believing themselves in the pres-
ence of death.

Catharine closed the door, and turned
again toward her visitors.

"Will you drive that man forth from his
last shelter?" she said. "The Saviour
whom you worship was less hard upon sin-
ners than you! Even though he were the
moral leper you deem him, could you not
allow him to die in peace?—he asks only
that—not even a grave after."

Without a word those men passed slowly
out of the chamber with downcast eyes,
where the tears would come in spite of
their firmness. When they reached the
outer door, the old minister turned to Cath-
arine.

"Forgive us," he said, "for verily we
knew not what we did!"

"Oh! sir," she said, not bitterly, but
with a quiet mournfulness, "oh! sir, so
many unasked pardons have gone from my
soul that I could not hesitate here! You
are old men, but your span of life is not so
near run as his whom they are hunting to
his grave. Surely here we might be left in
peace—there is no sin on his soul or mine,
and yet we are without proof against their
accusations."

"Any help," suggested the hard old
deacon, "watchers, anything that our
womenfolks can do?"

"Thanks," she replied, "if I need them
I shall not forget your goodness; farewell."

They bowed with solemn aspect, and
Catharine stood watching them disappear
down the walk. Painful as that scene had
been, it left almost a feeling of pleasure—
they were not wholly outcasts! For once
that man's schemes had failed, or turned,
to the advantage of those whom he sought
to ruin. She re-entered the little parlor
and sat down, waiting until William
should wake and require her presence.

Upon the table by her lay two books
which she took up, looking at them with a
sorrowful bitterness—it was her own last
work and a volume of William's poems.
They had won fame those two—what an
added woe it seemed at such a season!

She wondered if the clouds which en-
veloped her would ever clear up; years had
passed since she ceased to struggle, be-
lieving that all attempts to penetrate that
dreadful mystery would be in vain. The
sight of William's sleeping face had
brought the countenance of her dead hus-
band so vividly before her—must she go
into eternity without the power of solving
that secret! She checked the thought,
almost smiling at her own folly—there all
would be made clear—she could leave it
still to time and God.

She went into her own apartment, opened
a casket where those letters had lain for
years, and taking them out returned to the
parlor. How often she had studied that
handwriting, and sought a clue to the
fatal packet! She was folding them up to
restore them to their place, when again a
sound from without aroused her. She
went to the door and saw in the hall a
young man, travel-stained and weary, who
seemed to have unceremoniously entered
at the open door. He walked toward her,
saying quickly,

"You are Catharine Lennox, I suppose,
I wish to see William Sears."

"He is very ill and sees no one."

"I tell you what it is, madam," exclaimed
the determined-looking youth, "I have
made this journey for an express purpose,
and I am not to be defeated in my under-
taking. That man has destroyed the
peace of the dearest girl that ever breathed
and by heaven he shall answer for it."

"This is more of William James' work,"
said Catharine, calmly; "you will scarcely
wreak your vengeance upon a man so near
death, I think."

"James, yes, I believe that he is a black-
hearted scoundrel! Look here madam, I
have no idea that you are half so bad as
they have said, for it don't seem to me that
Nellie's sister could be—will you sit down
and talk honestly with me, and both try to
get at the bottom of this thing?"

"May I ask your name?"

"I am Robert Morris, a grand-son of old
Judge Morris—you used to know him."

"Yes, yes; I have seen you too when
you were a child; it seems very strange to
meet you here now. Yes, I will talk hon-
estly with you! Tell me first of my sister!"

Robert's face lost its determined look,
his eyes grew misty and his voice tremu-
lous with feeling as he answered,

"Poor Nellie! She is better now; I
thought she would die once—if she had,"
and the fire flashed into his eyes again, and
his voice grew hard, "by heaven, I would
have killed William Sears and torn James'
heart out of his body."

"Has she spoken of me—of Catharine?"

"Only once—she could not bear it."

"Did she curse me?—did she think ill
of me?"

"Oh, madam, what could she think!
But she never cursed you, she wept and
prayed for you!"

"And you too believe me a bad, false
woman?"

"I did before I looked in your eyes—I
don't know what I believe now. At least
you will own it has all been a mysterious
thing."

"Do you mean that charge?—those
letters?"

"No, about Sears—I don't know much
about the first affair—but James says you
had been living with William for a year
past."

"Robert Morris, I have not seen him for
a year until I met him in New York! I
knew him first in Paris—we were both free
—it was my right! In the midst of the only
month of happiness came that James, he
dragged William away, maddened him
with his horrible falsehoods, brought him
to America—"

"And then he married Nellie—after he
was betrothed to you—then he is a villain,
after all!"

"No, no, we were parted forever, James
told him that I had been his—his—oh, I
cannot speak it! William was ill, crazed,

he married Nellie to preserve his father
from ruin! He went back to Europe, found
me, and for the first time knew that he had
married my sister whom I believed to be
dead."

"This was James' doings—how he must
hate you!"

"He has followed me for years like a
fiend; to gratify his revenge on me he has
brought this misery upon us all."

In their earnestness they had uncon-
sciously returned to the parlor and seated
themselves. Robert sat leaning his head
upon his hand, striving to catch some con-
necting link in all this wickedness, with
the mystery of the past.

"Tell me all about that—those letters,"
he said, "I have only heard vague hints,
for my grandfather Morris has kept it a
secret, and James fears him more than any
other person in the world."

Even under happier auspices hers would
not have been a confiding nature, and in
her life she had learned to shut in upon her
heart the pain that ached and moaned for
expression.

But there she sat and told Robert Morris
everything—her departure for Europe—
her search for that darling sister—her pov-
erty and privations cheerfully endured, with
the thought that she should one day find
that cherished idol. Then came the tidings
of Nellie's death—another artifice of the
arch fiend who had so pursued her—their
toil for labor's sake—the new found fame
which fell so coldly upon the crushed and
broken heart! All, she told him all, sitting
there tearless and calm, while he, unused
to suffering and endurance, felt the hot
tears falling fast as he listened.

"Oh, Catharine, and I—you do not know
how much I suffer! It seems little in com-
parison with your wrongs, but I am so
young, I loved Nellie so fondly, and to
have all happiness torn from me—I cannot
bear it!"

He clenched his hands in sudden passion
and anguish, while Catharine looked at him
pityingly as if he had been a brother.

"And you love Nellie—oh, this is hard!
And she, does love you, Robert?"

"I think so, that's the worst of it all—
what are we to do? This James—oh, if I
had my hands on his throat! Look at it,
Catharine, we might all be happy now if
we were not in his infernal toils."

"You are so young," sighed Catharine;
"alas! poor Robert, poor Nellie!"

There was a sudden cry from the room
beyond which startled her, she rushed out
with William's name upon her lips. He
had awakened quickly, and finding her gone
called out for her with all his strength, be-
neath a terrible fear that she had left him
—a fear which haunted him always if he
woke and found her absent from his side.

When Robert Morris followed Catharine
into the room, she was sitting by Sears'
side, holding his hand and soothing his
agitation. Robert could not look unmoved
upon the man who had come between him
and his happiness, but in an instant the
sight of that wasted face brought his better
nature back, and he loathed himself for the
sudden burst of passion which had swept
over his heart.

"Who is that?" William asked, pointing
toward him.

Catharine whispered in his ear, and the
sick man held out his hand, saying only,
"Will you take it?"

Robert grasped the thin fingers without
a touch of bitterness, though it seemed
very strange to him. They returned to the
other room, and at once William's quick
eye caught sight of the open casket of
letters, which Catharine had forgotten on
the table.

"What are those?"

"The letters which were the beginning
of all this sorrow—the letters that Mr.
Lennox found in my desk, and of which I
knew and know nothing."

He held out his hand for them, and be-
gan looking them over.

"I do not know the writing," he said,
reading on. "Stay! Strange—how famil-
iar this seems!"

"What, William, what?"

"I don't know—perhaps it is fancy—
why, Catharine, I have read these be-
fore!"

"Never, you never saw them till now."

"I know it, and yet—" He broke off,
opening more letters and reading hurriedly.
"I tell you, Catharine, these letters
are familiar to me—I recognize the ex-
pressions—I could almost swear that I had
written them!"

He looked so excited that Catharine was
more disturbed than often happened.

"Don't William, you only distress me;
do not add to the mystery."

"But it is strange, it is strange!" re-

peated Sears, crushing them impatiently in
his hand. "If I could only think!"

Catharine feared this excitement, and
sought to change the subject.

"Where is Nellie?" he asked, turning
to Robert.

"At Mr. James' house in the city; she
was too sick to be moved for a time, and
since then she has chosen to remain there."

"I must see her, William," continued
Catharine, "I must go to her. You are
quite strong to-day—I shall not fear to
leave you a little time."

"She will not see you, Catharine."

"She will—she must! She trusts Robert,
he will tell her how bad and false that man
is."

"Oh, you do not dream of the influence
that he has over her," returned Morris,
"she has trusted in him since her child-
hood—looked up to him as a saint, it will
be very hard to make her doubt now."

William Sears groaned and laid his fore-
head down upon the table—that man was
his father—it seemed the most terrible
thing of all—his father!

"I must go—something tells me that it
is best!" exclaimed Catharine; "indeed I
must, William."

"You are right," he said, lifting his
head, "go, Catharine, but come back be-
fore it is too late; remember how little
time is left to us now."

"I will return to-morrow—Janet will
watch you! Oh, William, it kills me to
leave you even for these few hours, but I
must go—I feel that something is about to
happen."

Almost unconsciously while speaking,
she thrust the packet of letters into her
dress, shuddering as she always did at their
contact.

"Go, Catharine, my Catharine—God
help you—go!"

CHAPTER XII.

Nellie had been much alone since her ill-
ness; even the companionship of Mrs. Dex-
ter, kind and gentle as she had always
been, was irksome to her. She liked best
to sit in her chamber, her hands idly fold-
ed in her lap, looking dreamily out upon
the children playing in the little park op-
posite the house, or watching the fountain
as it cast up its glittering clouds of spray.
She had been very ill, but was now rapidly
recovering, though the buoyancy of spirit
which had made her lovely was gone; she
looked like the shadow of her former self,
and her voice was fast falling into that
dreary monotone of suffering which is so
painful.

Without possessing the genius which
was the fatal endowment of her sister,
Nellie was a highly gifted girl, cursed with
that peculiarly sensitive organization
which had wrought half the misery of
Catharine's life. She had remained a child
longer than the young are apt to do, and
the events of the past weeks had forced
her on to a maturity of thought and pur-
pose which brought with it its own wretch-
edness.

Once Mr. James alluded to the subject,
but she checked him, and when he spoke
of the redress which she must claim, and
made her understand the legal rights which
he intended to seek, her anguish was such
that he had not again ventured to recur to
it. But his will was immovable, and he
determined not to be balked of the full
measure of his vengeance though he
trampled her heart down to obtain it, even
as he had crushed that of the woman
against whom he had sworn a hate so dead-
ly and so lasting.

Nellie was alone one day, Mrs. Dexter
had gone upon some business to their
house in the country, a place to which
Nellie would not return, thinking of it
only with an added pang, and Mr. James
was also absent.

She sat for a long time in her chamber,
and at length descended to the floor below,
wandering about the vast apartments like
some desolate spirit doomed to keep that
unquiet vigil. At last her strength be-
gan to fail, and she sat down in the library
which her guardian usually occupied as
his study. She looked idly around for
something with which to occupy herself,
and was at length attracted by a quaint old
cabinet at the farther end of the room.

She went up to it, and with the childish
curiosity of recent illness, opened the
numerous doors and drawers, without ever
thinking that there could be anything im-
proper in her aimless researches. At length
she reached a compartment which was
locked, but the key, apparently from
thoughtlessness, had been left in the lock.

She unlocked it, and found an antique
casket of tarnished silver, curiously
wrought and of singular form. She took
it out with an exclamation of pleasure, and

finding it heavy, set it down on the table
to examine it at her ease.

It seemed to be locked also, for the
spring did not yield to her hand, and she
made no effort to open it. Around the
front edge of the lid were several curiously
cut ornaments, and she stooped to observe
more closely the workmanship, passing her
hand over each in succession. As her
fingers touched the centre-piece, the lid
flew open with a sound which startled her,
giving to view a roll of manuscript that
seemed to have lain there for a long time.

She remembered then that she had no
right to examine those things, and was
about closing the lid, when the door open-
ed suddenly, and a woman entered the
apartment. Nellie gave a little nervous
cry, for sickness had rendered her timid,
but before she could recover from her as-
tonishment, the stranger had crossed the
room, and throwing back the heavy veil,
revealed to her the features of her sister
Catharine.

The girl looked round, as if for help,
feeling no anger, only a vague terror and
desire to escape her presence.

"What do you wish?" gasped the
frightened girl; "you can have nothing to
say to me—let me pass."

"Nothing to say to you! Oh, Nellie, am
I not your sister?"

"Don't speak that name, don't!" she
returned, shivering from head to foot.

"What, Nellie?"

"I can't explain—I hardly understand—
I could forget weakness, sin; but oh,
Catharine, he was my husband, and you
my sister!"

"My name, you have spoken my name—
bless you, heaven bless you! Listen Nellie,
I tell you that there is no guilt in my
heart, nor in my life."

"But I saw—you were there—it was his
room—you had come from Europe with
him!" she uttered these words in broken
gasps, supporting herself against the table,
for there was a sudden mist before her
sight which was like the faintness of death.

"It was true that you saw me, but I did
not come from Europe with him—I had
not met him for a year! I knew that he
was sick, and I hurried back to this place
that I might see him before he died."

"You love him?" Nellie exclaimed;
"you love him?"

"I did love him when I had the right,
there is no feeling in my heart now for
which I need blush, nor you condemn!"

"And he loved you—why did he marry
me? I tell you it was wicked, terrible!"

"It was that man's work too! Nellie, he
wished to complete his revenge on me. He
told William that he had spent your for-
tune, and called upon him to marry you lest
it should be discovered."

"But why did Mr. Sears consent—it was
so wicked?"

"Because that man was his father, could
he refuse to save him?"

"Nellie slid slowly to the floor, sitting
there with her face hidden, rocking to and
fro gasping for breath.

"Do you believe me, Nellie?—will you
trust me? I am your sister—I love you so
fondly! When they drove me away, home-
less and friendless, I went searching for
you afar in a foreign land—then they told
me you were dead, and I was all alone in
the world! Father—mother—and my lit-
tle sister—all dead, and I left without a
friend. Oh, Nellie, Nellie, do trust and
believe me."

Nellie half rose from the floor, extended
her arms, and Catharine sank into them
with a burst of weeping, which eased her
heart as nothing had done for years.—
Neither spoke for many moments, there
they knelt locked in each other's arms, a
murmured thanksgiving upon the lips of
the older.

The girl nestled close to her bosom like a
young bird, murmuring through her tears:
"I know your voice now—I know your
voice!"

"And you trust me?"

"Feel my heart beat, Catharine, every
pulse throbs in witness to your truth."

"And we shall part no more?"

"No more, never more! Mr. James will
consent, oh, I know he will."

"Oh, heaven, I had forgotten him!
Come away, sister, come away, he will tear
you from me—make haste, oh, come!"

It was Nellie's turn to comfort her, and
to calm her agitation.

"I tell you, Catharine, there is no pow-
er strong enough to separate my heart
from yours!"

"But that man—oh, Nellie, you do not
know him?"

"I hope not—oh, I hope you are deceiv-
ed, Catharine! I have loved him so long,
trusted him so entirely." Concluded next
week.