



CHAPTER XVI  
A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

Now all this time while the tragedy of life was being played in these three suburban villas, while on a commonplace stage love and humor and fears and lights and shadows were so swiftly succeeding each other, and while these three families, drifted together by fate, were shaping each other's destinies and working out in their own fashion the strange, intricate ends of human life, there were human eyes which watched over every stage of the performance, and which were keenly critical of every actor on it. Across the road beyond the green palings and the close cropped lawn, behind the curtains of their creper framed windows, sat the two old ladies, Miss Bertha and Miss Monica Williams, looking out as from a private box at all that was being enacted before them.

The growing friendship of the three families, the engagement of Harold Denver with Clara Walker, the engagement of Charles Westmacott with her sister, the dangerous fascination which the widow exercised over the doctor, the preposterous behavior of the Walker girls and the unhappiness which they had caused their father, not one of these incidents escaped the notice of the two maiden ladies. Bertha, the younger, had a smile or a sigh for the lovers; Monica, the elder, a frown or a shrug for the elders. Every night they talked over what they had seen, and their own dull, uneventful life took a warmth and a coloring from their neighbors, as a blank wall reflects a beacon fire.

And now it was destined that they should experience the one keen sensation of their later years, the one memorable incident from which all future incidents should be dated.

It was on the very night which succeeded the events which have just been narrated when suddenly into Monica Williams' head, as she tossed upon her sleepless bed, there shot a thought which made her sit up with a thrill and a gasp. "Bertha," said she, plucking at the shoulder of her sister, "I have left the front window open."

"No, Monica, surely not," Bertha sat up also and thrilled in sympathy. "I am sure of it. You remember I had forgotten to water the pots, and then I opened the window, and Jane called me about the jam, and I have never been in the room since."

"Good gracious, Monica, it is a mercy that we have not been murdered in our beds. There was a house broken into at Forest Hill last week. Shall we go down and shut it?"

"I dare not go down alone, dear, but if you will come with me. Put on your slippers and dressing gown. We do not need a candle. Now, Bertha, we will go down together."

Two little white patches moved vaguely through the darkness, the stairs creaked, the door whined, and they were at the front room window. Monica closed it gently down and fastened the snib.

"What a beautiful moon!" said she, looking out. "We can see as clearly as if it were day. How peaceful and quiet the three houses are over yonder. It seems quite safe to see that 'To Let' card upon No. 1. I wonder how No. 2 will like their going. For my part I could better spare that dreadful woman at No. 3 with her short skirts and her snake. But, oh, Bertha, look! look! look!" Her voice had fallen suddenly to a quivering whisper, and she was pointing to the Westmacott's house. Her sister gave a gasp of horror and stood with a clutch at Monica's arms, staring in the same direction.

There was a light in the front room, a slight wavering light such as would be given by a small candle or taper. The blind was down, but the light shone dimly through. Outside in the garden, with his figure outlined against the luminous square, there stood a man, his back to the road, his two hands upon the window ledge and his body rather bent as though he were trying to peep in past the blind. So absolutely still and motionless was he that in spite of the moon they might well have overlooked him were it not for that telltale light behind.

rigidly in the one position, while from time to time a shadow passed in front of it to show that her midnight visitor was pacing up and down in front of her. Once they saw his outline clearly, with his hands outstretched as if in appeal or entreaty. Then suddenly there was a dull sound, a cry, the noise of a fall, the taper was extinguished, and a dark figure fled in the moonlight, rushed across the garden and vanished amid the shrubs at the further side.

Then only did the two old ladies understand that they had looked on while a tragedy had been enacted. "Help! help!" they cried, and "help!" in their high, thin voices, timidly at first, but gathering volume as they went on until the Wilderness rang with their shrieks. Lights shone in all the windows opposite, chains rattled, bars were unshut, doors opened, and out rushed friends to the rescue. Harold, with a stick; the admiral, with his sword, his gray head and bare feet protruding from either end of a long, brown ulster; finally Dr. Walker, with a poker, all ran to the Westmacotts. The door had been already opened, and they crowded tumultuously into the front room.

Charles Westmacott, white to his lips, was kneeling on the floor supporting his



Supporting his aunt's head upon his knee. aunt's head upon his knee. She lay outstretched, dressed in her ordinary clothes, the extinguished taper still grasped in her hand, no mark or wound upon her pale, placid and senseless.

"Thank God, you are come, doctor," said Charles, looking up. "Do tell me how she is, and what I should do."

Dr. Walker knelt beside her and passed his left hand over her head, while he grasped her pulse with the right.

"She has had a terrible blow," said he. "It must have been with some blunt weapon. Here is the place, behind the ear. But she is a woman of extraordinary physical powers. Her pulse is full and slow. There is no stertor. It is my belief that she is merely stunned and that she is in no danger at all."

"Thank God for that!"

"We must get her to bed. We shall carry her up stairs, and then I shall send my girls in to her. But who has done this?"

"Some robber," said Charles. "You see that the window is open. She must have heard him and come down, for she was always perfectly fearless. I wish to goodness she had called me."

"But she was dressed."

"Sometimes she sits up very late."

"I did sit up very late," said a voice. She had opened her eyes and was blinking at them in the lamplight. "A villain came in through the window and struck me with a life preserver. You can tell the police so when they come. Also that it was a little fat man. Now, Charles, give me your arm, and I shall go upstairs."

But her spirit was greater than her strength, for as she staggered to her feet her head swam round, and she would have fallen again had her nephew not thrown his arms around her. They carried her up stairs among them and laid her upon the bed, where the doctor watched beside her, while Charles went off to the police station, and the Denvers mounted guard over the frightened maids.

CHAPTER XVII  
IN PORT AT LAST.

ida, just pass me my cigarettes and open me a bottle of stout."

"Now, then," she continued as the doctor joined their party, "I don't quite know what I ought to say to you, admiral. You want some very plain speaking to."

"The idea of you at your age talking of going to sea and leaving that dear patient little wife of yours at home, who has seen nothing of you all her life! It's all very well for you. You have the life, and the change, and the excitement, but you don't think of her eating her heart out in a dreary London lodging. You men are all the same."

"Well, ma'am, since you know so much, you probably know also that I have sold my pension. How am I to live if I do not turn my hand to work?"

Mrs. Westmacott produced a large registered envelope from beneath the sheets and tossed it over to the old seaman.

"That excuse won't do. There are your pension papers. Just see if they are right."

He broke the seal, and out tumbled the very papers which he had made over to McAdam two days before.

"But what am I to do with these now?" he cried in bewilderment.

"You will put them in a safe place, or get a friend to do so, and if you do your duty you will go to your wife and beg her pardon for leaving even for an instant thought of having her."

The admiral passed his hand over his rugged forehead. "This is very good of you, ma'am," said he, "very good of you, ma'am, and I know that you are a staunch friend, but for all that these papers mean money, and though we may have been in broken water of late we are not quite in such straits as to have to signal to our friends. When we do, ma'am, there's no one we would look to sooner than to you."

"Don't be ridiculous," said the widow. "You know nothing whatever about it, and yet you stand there laying down the law. I'll have my way in the matter, and you shall take the papers, for it is no favor that I am doing you, but simply a restoration of stolen property."

"How's that, ma'am?"

"I am just going to explain, though you might take a lady's word for it without asking any questions. Now, what I am going to say is just between you four and must go no further. I have my own reasons for wishing to keep it from the police. Who do you think it was who struck me last night, admiral?"

"Some villain, ma'am. I don't know his name."

"But I do. It was the same man who ruined or tried to ruin your son. It was my only brother, Jeremiah."

"Ah!"

"I will tell you about him—or a little about him, for he has done much which I would not care to talk of nor you to listen to. He was always a villain, smooth spoken and plausible, but a dangerous, subtle villain all the same. If I have some hard thoughts about mankind, I can't more than think back to the childhood which I spent with my brother. He is my only living relative, for my other brother, Charles' father, was killed in the Indian mutiny."

"Our father was rich, and when he died he made a good provision both for Jeremiah and for me. He knew Jeremiah, and he distrusted him, however, so instead of giving him all that he meant him to have he handed me over a part of it, telling me with what was almost his dying breath to hold it in trust for my brother and to use it in his behalf when he should have squandered or lost all that he had. This arrangement was meant to be a secret between my father and myself, but unfortunately his words were overheard by the nurse, and she repeated them afterward to my brother, so that he came to know that I held some money in trust for him. I suppose tobacco will not harm my head, doctor? Thank you, then I shall trouble you for the matches, Ida." She lit a cigarette and leaned back upon the pillow, with the blue wreaths curling from her lips.

"I cannot tell you how often he has attempted to get that money from me. He has bullied, cajoled, threatened, coaxed—done all that a man could do. I still held it with the presentiment that a need for it would come. When I heard of this villainous business—his flight and his leaving his partner to face the storm—above all, that my old friend had been driven to surrender his income in order to make up for my brother's defalcations—I felt that now indeed I had a need for it. I sent in Charles yesterday to Mr. McAdam, and his client, upon hearing the facts of the case, very graciously consented to give back the papers and to take the money which he had advanced. Not a word of thanks to me, admiral. I tell you that it was very cheap benevolence, for it was all done with his own money, and how could I use it better?"

"I thought that I should probably hear from him soon, and I did. Last evening there was handed in a note of the usual whining, cringing tone. He had come back from abroad at the risk of his life and liberty just in order that he might say goodbye to the only sister he ever had and to treat my forgiveness for me and to treat my forgiveness for me and to treat my forgiveness for me."

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GEMS IN VERSE.

The Hidden Hoard.  
There is not a word that hath ever said,  
There is not a glance of mine,  
That I have not by stealth made mine  
And hoarded away for the wintry day  
When thy love shall have ceased to shine!

The Convict's Dream.  
The moon looked in on his lonely cell,  
The barren floor, and the untouched fare,  
And its holy veil on his face fell  
And covered the pain and sin marks there,  
And a smile, the first for many a day,  
The first for many a weary year,  
Crept over his lips his sleeping lay  
And banished the look of haunted fear.

He dreamed that, a boy again, he strayed  
Afar in the glowing, dying wood;  
The golden sunlight around him played,  
And the ripe nuts fell with a pleasant thud.  
And a squirrel in fearful flight  
Sought shelter up in a whispering tree,  
And a rabbit, wild in its eager flight,  
Dashed into the bushes tremblingly.

And again, grown weary of wand'ring play,  
He turns his steps to his welcome home,  
Where a face as sweet as a sweet June day  
Is smiling a greeting to her son.  
"My boy! My boy!" and the lips close sweet,  
While he tells of the day's work, and all amaze,  
And his wondrous hope that in future lies.

But the moonlight fades—and he wakes.  
From the white, drawn lips in anguish breaks  
And tears his heart with a mighty throes.  
His boyhood is past—the mother sleeps  
And he thinks of his life and weeps  
Till it seems if the bursting heart must break.

God pity him there! And pity the men  
Who languish behind the prison wall,  
Who look on the past through the eyes of sin,  
And long for the love beyond recall.  
Let thy love, like the moonlight, sweet and still,  
Steal over them—bid their anguish cease—  
And speak that word which is holy thrill:  
"Behold, I forgive thee, brother, Peace!"  
—Philadelphia Ledger.

Requiem.  
Let her rest; the weary night  
Never brought her dreams like this.  
Let her sleep the morning light  
Shall not wake her from her bliss.  
Glad was she to end the fight;  
Death had conquered with a kiss.

Tired eyes need watch no more;  
Plunging feet, the race is run;  
Hands that heavy burdens bore,  
Set them down, the day is done;  
Heart, be still—through anguish sore,  
Everlasting peace is won.  
—Chambers' Journal.

Chemistry of Character.  
John and Peter and Robert and Paul—  
God in his wisdom created them all.  
John was a statesman and Peter a slave,  
Robert a preacher and Paul was a knave.  
Evil or good, as the case may be,  
White or colored or bond or free,  
John and Peter and Robert and Paul—  
God in his wisdom created them all.

Out of earth's elements, mingled with flame,  
Out of life's compounds of glory and shame,  
Fashioned and shaped by the will of their own  
And helplessly into life's history thrown;  
Born by the law that compels man to be,  
Born to conditions they could not foresee—  
John and Peter and Robert and Paul—  
God in his wisdom created them all.

John was the head and heart of his state,  
Was trusted and honored, was noble and great.  
Peter was made "neath life's burden to groan  
And never once dreamed that his soul was his own."  
Robert great glory and honor received  
For zealously preaching what no one believed,  
While Paul of the pleasures of sin took his fill  
And gave up his life in the service of ill.

It chanced that these men, in their passing  
Away  
From earth and its conflicts, all died the same  
Day.  
John was mourned through the length and the  
breadth of the land;  
Peter fell "neath the lash in a merciless hand;  
Robert died with the praise of the Lord in his  
tongue.

While Paul was convicted of murder and hung,  
John and Peter and Robert and Paul—  
The purpose of life was fulfilled in them all.  
Men said of the statesman, "How noble and  
brave!"  
Of Peter, alas, "He is only a slave  
Of Robert, "Tis well with his soul; it is well!"  
While Paul they consigned to the torments of  
hell.

Born by one law, through all nature the same,  
What made them different, and who was to  
blame?  
John and Peter and Robert and Paul—  
God in his wisdom created them all.

Out in that region of infinite light,  
Where the soul of the black man is pure as the  
white;  
Out where the spirit, through sorrow made  
wise,  
No longer resorts to deception and lies;  
Out where the flesh can no longer control  
The freedom and faith of the God given soul,  
Who shall determine what change may befall  
John and Peter and Robert and Paul?

John may in wisdom and goodness increase;  
Peter rejoice in an infinite peace;  
Robert may learn that the truths of the Lord  
Are more in the spirit and less in the word,  
And Paul may be blessed with a holier birth  
Than the patience of man had allowed him on  
earth.

John and Peter and Robert and Paul—  
God in his mercy will care for them all.  
—Burlington Hawkeye.

Enormous Loss of Power.  
At the electric light convention in St. Louis Mr. L. B. Stillwell remarked that the Central station manager, who is buying energy in the form of coal and selling it in the form of light and wasting it at every step in the process, is losing far more before the energy passes through the dynamo than afterward. He estimates that out of each 1,000 horsepower bought in the form of coal it is at present possible to sell not more than about 2.8 horsepower in the form of light. Some 990 horsepower is lost before reaching the dynamo and the rest afterward. It seems clear therefore that the problem of cheap electricity is in its final analysis a problem of thermodynamics.—Engineering News.

The far and "frontier" west does not appear to be peopled exclusively by tough citizens. At Winnemucca, Nev., a jury was formed last week of men whose average age was 27, who were all total abstainers from drink; none smoked cigarettes, and none had ever chewed tobacco.

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