

THE DOCTOR'S STORY,

—OR—

A Bride From the Grave.

CONCLUDED.

BY the manoeuvres of mamma, who is a great matchmaker, in the very year of my debut in London she contrived, I scarcely know how, to have me engaged to a man for whom I cared nothing then, and O, how much less now! A young girl of eighteen, his presence dazzled, his attentions flattered me, and that was the whole matter. I tolerated him. I have done all I can to delay the marriage for many months by feigning illness; but papa and mamma say that to make a regular break-off will prove such an *escalandre* in society. Yet is my life, all my future, to be sacrificed for the myth we call society? I foresee too clearly what my fate will be, to pass through existence unloving and unloved; but it is Heaven's will, or rather mamma's pleasure."

"O, that I were rich, Gertrude, or that men could not stigmatize me as an adventurer and fortune-hunter, as they will if I—I—"

"Did what?"

"Proposed the alternative."

"Fear nothing, Fred, but speak. I need advice."

The sound of my name on her lips, the intense sweetness of her eyes and sorrow of her air, rendered me blind to all but her beauty, her love, and the passion that was in my own heart, and oblivious of those who might be passing near—and afterwards we had soon cruel reason to believe that we were not only seen but watched, as it was quite unusual for her to be out a-foot and alone—I told her that if she would rely upon my affection and honor, on the love with which she had already inspired me, it would be the duty of my life to render hers happy; that I would save her from the delusive snare called "society," and the thralldom of her proud old father and calculating mother. Of course I didn't call them so to her. I spoke with boldness, decision and facility, for love and passion lent me power. I looked into her eyes, and saw an answering light; but she answered, pale and trembling:

"You are poor, you say, Fred. Now papa is rich, and ambitious of being richer. Alas, you must be satisfied with—"

"What? Your friendship? O Gertrude, can you speak so coldly and to me?"

Her tears fell fast.

"You overrate my powers of endurance. To be your friend, and even that only in secret—to see you, after your avowal to me, the wife of another, perhaps, rendering all my existence hereafter a blank."

"I do not mean that, Fred. Alas, I know not what I do mean," she added, weeping so bitterly that my heart was pained.

"Mean—say that you will be mine, and not the wife of this mysterious other."

"To-morrow I shall be here again—to-morrow shall end all!"

She held up her sweet face; no one seemed near. With the speed of thought I pressed my lips to hers—for the first and last time on this side of the grave, as it proved—and we separated in a tumult of joy.

Next day I kept my appointment without fail, but not without difficulty, as I had a long and troublesome operation to perform in a totally different direction, near Springdon Street. I waited till I could linger no longer, and quitted the park slowly, filled by doubts and dread, and by the hope that visitors—something unavoidable—anything but illness, caprice, or change of mind—had prevented my bright Gertrude from meeting me.

The morning of the second day brought me a note from her, dated from St. George's Place.

A note!

We had met again and again by arrangement, but never had I got a note from her, and I read and kissed it a score of times, and committed many other absurdities while studying the bad writing, which somehow seemed totally unlike that of a lady; but then poor Gertrude had never ventured to write to me before.

It contained but three lines, saying that she was unable to meet me as usual, for reasons I should learn if I would call and see her after luncheon time, as papa and mamma had left town, and she should be quite alone.

The boldness of this proceeding was so altogether unlike her, and so strange, that my mind became filled with vague fears of some impending calamity, and I counted every moment till with a heart, the pulses of which certainly beat fast, I rang the sonorous bell at the door of the lofty house in St. George's Place, then a more fashionable locality than now, for the house itself is changed into a public building, I had never before entered it but once, though many a

promenade I had made before its stately plate-glass windows, in hopes of obtaining a glimpse, however brief, of her I loved so dearly.

"James"—he of the calves and whiskers—opened the door rather wider, I thought, than before, and his usual stolid and stupefied visage wore a strange expression. That might all have been fancy, for he could not know the secrets of his mistress. I warily did not ask for her; but on giving my card, inquired for Sir Percival Chalcot, or either of the ladies, certain that she I wanted alone was "at home."

The tall loafer in livery bowed, and ushered me up the great staircase again; but instead of opening the door of the glittering drawing-room, where I expected to be met by the beaming face, the tender eyes and radiant figure of her I loved, I was shown into the library, and found myself face to face with the baronet himself.

He looked as high-nosed and aristocratic as ever, and, moreover, as grim, and pale, and stern as death. He barely acknowledged my somewhat bewildered bow—I felt conscious that I had not been sent for professionally—and instead of asking me to be seated, he took a chair himself, and left me standing opposite. Folding one leg over the other, and putting the tips of his fingers together, as he lay back, and mostly looking up to the ceiling—

"Sir," said he, "my son has, doubtless, informed you in his note of this morning that I wished to see you?"

"Your son, Sir Percival—I received no note from him!" I replied, in utter bewilderment. "If Miss Chalcot is indisposed—"

"Do not dare to name Miss Chalcot, fellow! She is by this time in France."

"In France?" I repeated, faintly, and with a sinking heart.

"Yes; and beyond the reach of beggarly adventurers and chevaliers d'industrie."

(So the letter had been a forgery by the brother—a lure for me.)

"Listen to me, sir, and attend," said the old man, gravely and calmly, "for this is the last time I shall ever degrade myself by addressing so contemptible a trickster!"

"Trickster, Sir Percival!" I exclaimed. "Your injurious language—"

"I said trickster," he continued with a mock bow. "All has now been discovered; the secret meetings in the park, the artful plans you have laid to worm yourself into the affections of a silly and wealthy young girl, luring her heart from the man—the gentleman, I mean—she is to marry; causing the delay of the marriage; making scandal and gossip even among the menials of my own household. Miss Chalcot, sir, has been sent to the Continent, and I hereby inform you that if you venture to follow, to trace, to speak with, or to write to her, this is but a small installment of what is in store for you!"

And ere I could think or act, the savagely-proud old man had snatched up a heavy riding-whip that lay at hand, and dealt me two severe cuts fairly across the face, almost laying it open, as if with a sword blade.

"Madman!" I exclaimed; "dare you strike me?"

"I have struck you twice, sir," said he, with a disdainful smile, as he rescatented himself.

"You are old, and your white hairs protect you; but you have a son, and I'll have him out at Chalk Farm,"—it was really Chalk Farm then—"and—and—but O heaven!—he is the brother of Gertrude!"

"Bah! I thought so, you presumptuous beggar; Go—go! or I shall chastise you again. Go, I say! and remember well my words and my warning!"

I was trying to say something—I know not what—when the door opened, and his son appeared, with several servants, and before I could speak, I was thrust, dragged, beaten by many clenched hands, and forcibly expelled—yea, literally spurned—into the public street—I, Frederick Morrison, M. D.

Right well did they know, old Chalcot and his son—that the very magnitude and depth of the insult to which they subjected me would protect them, and that, for her sake, they might have torn me limb from limb without revenge on my part. Yet every nerve and fibre tingled with shame and passion as I crossed the street, and while endeavoring to conceal my discolored and lacerated face by my handkerchief, sought the seclusion of the park opposite, going to the very place where I was wont to meet my lost Gertrude, and where the charm of her presence seemed to hover still.

There I remained for some hours in a state difficult to conceive. The insults to which I had been subjected drove me to the verge of insanity. My situation was unique, and I cannot now analyze or describe all the emotions that surged through my brain—memory furnishes nothing that will connect them. But there were rage and shame, grief, hatred and love and sorrow. It was here but

yesterday she had said, prophetically, "to-morrow shall end all."

And all was ended, indeed!

France!—she was in France; there would I follow her, and yet be revenged upon them all. I started up to seek old Crammer, and resign my situation as assistant.

The afternoon was far advanced, and many a patient must have been sorely neglected by that time. But what cared I if the world had burst like a bombshell beneath my feet? I sought the house in Bedford Street, with the red bottle in the fanlight to find that its crimson glow paled beside the hue of Crammer's face. He was literally boiling and choking with indignation at me.

He had received due information of my "insolence and presumption" from Sir Percival; was desired to send in his account, and appear at the house no more. Thus his most aristocratic patients were lost to him forever.

Ere I could speak, he took the initiative, and dismissed me, and that night found me in a humble residence, near the temple, with a few pounds in my purse, my worldly goods a portmanteau and a few medical books ("Bell on the Bones"), seeking to soothe my thoughts by the aid of an execrable cigar and a little weak brandy and water.

The bright bubble had burst! I had lost Gertrude, and she, being facile, or having little will of her own, on finding that she had lost me, would too probably make peace with her own family by fulfilling the engagement that was so odious to her.

As this conviction forced itself upon me, I could have wept; then I would start up, and mutter of going to France ere it might be too late; but I had no money, and traveling in those pre-railway times was not the cheap luxury it is now. Moreover, I knew not how or where to seek her; and while doubts grew thus, and time went on, I might lose her forever.

The result of all this was that the next day saw me in a raging fever, and months elapsed ere I was convalescent. For some time after sense returned I knew not where I was, or what had happened to me. Close by the table sat a familiar figure in his shirt-sleeves, smoking, and occasional taking a pull at a pint of stout. The pleasures he varied by reading aloud from a medical work, on pharmacy apparently, and breaking into a scrap from a song thus:

"*Plumbi subacet*: an aqueous solution of the salt thus produced with the acetate and oxide of lead. A dense, clear liquid. Colorless, odorless, and slightly alkaline in taste. Produces a white coating on glass. *Plumbi subacet*—that's the ticket!"

"*Soda chlorate*: a solution of carbonate of soda, after the absorption of chlorine gas. A clear liquid, and colorless. Odor—"

"Bob—Bob Asher!" said I, in a faint voice, and he started at once to my bedside; and from him I got a history of how ill I had been, and how he had been my chief attendant; how sore trials had come upon himself, and that, by his father's failure, he was at the lowest ebb now for funds, he had taken himself to study, and meant to pass now.

"But who the deuce is this Gertrude of whom you have been raving for weeks past? Not she 'of Wyoming'—eh, Fred?"

I told him my story, and he was excessively indignant.

"Why, death alive!" said he, "Chalcot is only a baronet, and in the civil line of precedence—that is pretty like a full corporal in the army—the second round of the long ladder of rank. I'd have chucked the old beggar over his own window!"

"Not if you loved his daughter, Bob," said I, mournfully.

"Well, no, perhaps."

"And you are reading up?"

"Hard, Fred. I am doing the 'Modified Examination' in pharmacy, and think I shall pass now."

I had been three months ill. Three months! Bob told me that the Chalcot's town house was still shut up, and no one knew in what part of the Continent they were traveling. Our separation seemed confirmed now. The dread of never again beholding that sweet face, with the bright eyes and the pretty crape bonnet, grew strong within me, and the idea that she might already have become the wife of another added to my torture of mind.

But lack of funds compelled me to bestir myself anon, and through Bob's kind offices and my own known skill while attending in the hospitals, I was fortunate enough to obtain temporary employment with Professor Sir—, then the most celebrated anatomical lecturer in England, as an under demonstrator, my duties, as I may inform the uninitiated, consisted to a great extent in the preparation of the various subjects for minute dissection prior to his lectures; and during the hot weather in London, I know of no task more nauseous, repulsive or typhoid in its

chances and nature. However, such work is as necessary for the progress of science and the conversation of life and health in others, as the terrible task of procuring the necessary subjects was then—when the tables of anatomical theatres and dissecting-rooms depended mostly if not solely, on the results of felony—often murder—and the abduction of the tenants of the tear-bedewed grave—an abduction in many instances, happily, never known to relatives.

The duties assigned to me at the rooms of Sir— brought me in contact, under cloud of night, with wretches whose character was revolting, and caused me to shudder. Scores of bodies were brought me—valued at from five to twenty guineas each.

Use and wont is everything, and by me at that time they were viewed as coolly and callously as we may the fish that lie on marble slabs in the curer's window.

Weary with a long day's work at the dissecting-room, I had retired to my little lodgings, and thinking sadly over the bright past that could come no more, I felt disposed to ask heaven, upbraidingly, why I had ever been cast under the spell of Gertrude, when I was startled by the unusual sound of carriage wheels stopping before my humble place. There were steps on the rickety stairs, and to my astonishment the professor entered, and shutting the door, said he wished to speak to me alone, as he had suddenly "an expedition" to suggest to me—one that would require decision and care to carry out, as so many morbid and vulgar rumors of violated graves were abroad, and the suspected, if caught, had but small chance of mercy from the mob.

"But Sir—, surely you don't expect me to go on such an errand?" I asked, with an incredulous smile.

"By Jove, but I do!" said he, laughing. "I have frequently done so, when a student here, in many a feild London burying-ground, now closed up or built over; but this is a most particular case—a subject we must positively have for demonstration, and, if possible, to skeletonize afterwards."

"Is it peculiar then?"

"Most peculiar!"

My curiosity was excited.

"Where is the burying-ground?" I asked.

"At R—, eight miles from town. No 'outrage,' as they call it, has occurred there. The place is unwatched and open. Would go with you myself—but two, you see—should be just in the way. Yesterday an old woman was buried there. Cholera, they say, caused her death; but anything is called cholera now. She was fifty-eight years old, and known well in the neighborhood for a singular malformation of the spinal column, and I must have that portion of her for my museum; but as the old dame will not be very heavy, you may as well bring the whole of her. Young Phosfat, so long my assistant, who has the practice there, has written me all about it. Take a trap and Bob Asher with you—he's game for any thing—to-morrow afternoon, and if you can, manage the matter without fuss. We'll call her an old Dutch woman in the class, say she came pickled in a cask from Holland."

The whole affair was a little exciting, so the high spirits of Bob Asher, who had frequently been engaged in such affairs in the churchyards of Edinburg, decided me at once. We engaged a dog-cart, took large overcoats with us, as the nights were chilly, a cloak, a coil of rope, heavy sticks, and even a brace of pistols for an extreme emergency, which I prayed devoutly might not occur, and we soon left London behind us.

Tom Phosfat was duly prepared by a letter from the professor for our arrival. He was a bachelor, and made us thoroughly welcome, so we had supper and a glass of grog with him; I should rather say several glasses of grog—too many for the work we were on. However, we set out at midnight for the churchyard, which stood apart from the village, on the borders of a wide waste common, dark, secluded among trees, and lonely.

The night was gloomy and starless, and not a sound was heard—not even a withered leaf whirled by the passing wind—as we left the horse and trap under a high hedge, and vaulted over the low churchyard wall. My heart beat quickly, all the more so that Tom's brandy had been pretty potent.

The mouldering tombstones, half sunk in the long reedy grass, and tossing nettles, studded all the mournful place. God's Acre seemed very solemn that night. The lonely old church, old as the days of the third Edward, half hidden by ivy, and spotted by lichens, raised its square Norman tower against the vapor-laden sky, and quaint heads and demon faces were peeping out of the mouldings and gurgoyles upon us.

"You know the grave, Phosfat?" said I.

"Yes—hush—this must be it. There

is no other new one in the ground," stuttered Tom, who had imbibed too much.

"This seems the burial place of wealthy people," said Bob Asher. "The old dame must have had money to spare."

"By Jove, it is open!" said I, in a low whisper.

"It has not been quite filled up—boards are over it; only some branches and soil thrown in. How is this?"

"The bricking of the vault has been postponed till to-morrow," said Bob Asher, shovelling out the debris. "We have no time to lose, Fred. Shall we break open the top of the coffin, and use the rope to pull up the subject by the neck? That was the way with Knox's fellows in Edinburg."

"Nay," said I, "by such a process the spinal column may be disturbed; and that won't suit the professor's purpose."

"Look round, and listen well; here goes then," and half leaning the coffin on its side, Bob and Tom, by inserting their shovels under the lid, burst it with a hideous jarring sound, and then the ghostly tenant was seen, enveloped in a shroud of white from head to foot; and even to us, prepared as we were for it, that figure had something horrible in its angular rigidity. Muffling it in the dark cloak, I cast it over my shoulder, and deposited it in a sitting position—the *rigot mortis* had passed away apparently—between the seat and splashboard of the trap. My companions meanwhile rearranged the grave and coffin as we had found them. Voices and lights now scared us. Phosfat was so tipsy that I had to leave Bob Asher to take care of him; and casting our shovels and rope into a clover field, I drove at a breaking pace towards London, intensely anxious to reach the professor's house before day should dawn, lest the police or a passer-by might detect something weird in the person who was my companion. It seemed to me that we had not proceeded a mile toward, between hedges, when the waning moon, hitherto in visible, began to glimmer over Hampstead, shedding a ghostly farewell ray upon the silent country, where not a dog barked.

A strange sound, like the murmur of a voice, came to my ear at times. Was it a pursuit? I looked anxiously back, and even pulled up for an instant. Behind all was silence—but O, almighty heaven! what was this? The old woman was moving—her feeble hands essayed to lift the cloth that covered her face! A wild spasm of terror contracted my heart; and any one but a medical man, I am assured, would have abandoned the trap and an adventure so terrible; but the idea of a recovery from trance immediately flashed upon my mind, and my first thought was, the professor would not get the prized vertebrae, after all. I lifted the almost inanimate woman beside me, and felt that she was warm, fleshy too, and had returning pulse, which the motion of the trap accelerated. I uncovered her face that she might respire, and a wild cry escaped me—a cry that rang far over the heath.

Heavens! Was I going mad outright? She was Gertrude—Gertrude Chalcot—pale as death could make her, yet living still, her hazel eyes lurid and sunken, her dark hair falling about her face.

All that followed was like a swift nightmare; the drive to town, muffled in my overcoat and cloak; the abandonment of the trap in the street; her conveyance in secret to my lodgings, and placing her coolly in my own bed till I could get her other quarters and attendance. Luckily, Bob Asher, and the professor too, came about midday, or I should soon have been fit for Hanwell.

How all this came to pass was very simple. Unwedded still, she had returned with her family to England in wretched health; her illness took a more serious form, and would seem to have culminated in a species of trance, with the medical technicalities of which it might be wearisome to trouble the reader. Suffice it, that the alarm of cholera was abroad, as, perhaps, in too many other cases, hastily and prematurely; hence the vault being left unfinished, permitted her to respire, and our adventure—a mistake, by the way—ended in her rescue, though a horror of what her fate might have been filled my heart, and for a long period we were compelled to conceal from her the awful place in which she was found.

Under our united care she recovered fast. But my space is short.

Sweet is the union of lovers after a separation; but with all its charm, much that was sad, startling and even terrible, mingled with ours. She was mine now. Not even that proud and cruel father, who had so fiercely spurned me, could dispute the claim, I thought. Mine—O, how strangely and how terribly mine!

The close of the year found us married, Bob Asher acting as groomsmen with great éclat. Sir— took me as a partner, and for a month I went with my bride to Baden. There, one day, at the *table d'hôte*, she found herself face to face with her own parents. The alarm, the consternation, the scene proved frightful; but all ended in a complete reconciliation, and Christmas day saw us all happy at Chalcot Park, and I felt, on seeing my blooming Gertrude, in all the splendor of her beauty, opening the yearly ball, that I could, with a whole heart forgive even her father for his pride and fury on the day that saw us separated.