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The Two Strange Dreams.

ON the morning of August 4th, 1864, Col. Hunt was much surprised by a footman coming in and saying:

"If you please, sir, Simmons wishes to speak to you."

"By all means," replied the Colonel, apparently surprised that Simmons should make the request through the medium of the footman. "Tell him to come here an once."

A few moments later came a hesitating knock, and it was not until Colonel Holt had twice shouted "Come in," that the door opened to admit the aforesaid Simmons.

Looking up somewhat impatiently, Colonel Holt was struck by the change in the man's demeanor. No longer the spruce, erect, middle-aged butler, but a pallid, trembling man, stood before him.

"Good heavens! Are you ill Simmons?"

"No, sir, but I must go away this very day. You must let me go; indeed you must, sir."

"Certainly, if you wish it; but give me some reason for this sudden determination. What has happened?"

"I can tell you nothing, sir. Let me go without question, that is all I ask of you."

"It is a great deal to ask," said Col. Holt, more and more surprised; "and I am not sure that I can grant so much. Come Simmons, tell me honestly what has happened. If I can help you—"

"Thank you, sir, you can only let me go."

"Perhaps you are in some money trouble? Speak out frankly if you are." A faint flush came upon the man's face; he hesitated.

"Money, sir, has nothing to do with my trouble," he replied, "but it is not my reason for wishing to go away. Have pity on me, I implore you; let me go. I must, whether you consent or not." And a look of the utmost misery crossed the man's face.

"Well, well," said his easy-going master, "how long do you want to be away? for a time only or do you want to leave altogether?"

"If you are kind enough to let me return, sir, I can do so safely by the twentieth of this month."

"Safely," muttered Colonel Holt; "what does the fellow mean?" Then aloud; "And who is to fill your place; you know we have visitors coming to-day, and—"

Again that haggard look of terror came into Simmons' face as he ventured to interrupt his master.

"Yes, sir, I have thought of that, and I have a brother staying in the village who is butler to Sir Henry Curtis, at Beauchamp Park. The family are abroad, and he has a month's holiday, and will gladly take my place while I am absent. I am sure he will do his best to please you, sir."

There being nothing further to settle, his master dismissed Simmons. For a few minutes Colonel Holt pondered over the matter and the man's strange manner, then muttering something to the effect that servants' ways are past finding out, he dismissed the subject from his thoughts and became engrossed in business letters of importance.

At luncheon, much to Mrs. Holt's amazement, a strange servant was in attendance. "Where is Simmons?" she asked.

"Oh," exclaimed Colonel Holt, suddenly remembering he had not enlightened his wife, "this is Simmons' brother

who has taken his place for a week or two. I have been so busy I forgot to tell you."

Mrs. Holt asked no further questions till the man had left the room. Then she said: "My dear, when you allowed Simmons to leave, did you remember that Mrs. Perceval and Effie were coming to-day, and that we have a dinner-party to-morrow?"

"Yes, I did not forget, but the man would go. I could get nothing out of the fellow, except that he must go this very day, and would return by the twentieth."

"But what reason did he give for such extraordinary conduct?"

"None whatever. He looked miserably ill and changed, as pale as a ghost. I never saw such a scared object in my life."

"Do you think he has been drinking?"

"Oh, no, he was as sober as a judge. Never mind, his brother will do very well, no doubt; he's butler at Beauchamp, and looks a decent sort of fellow. By-the-by, what time is the carriage to be at the station to meet the Percevals?"

Before Mrs. Holt could reply, Simmons No. 2 appeared, bearing a telegram.

"This has just arrived, madam."

"A telegram! Some change of plans, I suppose, on the part of the Percevals," said Mrs. Holt, opening the envelope quickly. "Oh, how tiresome! Listen: 'So sorry we cannot come. Effie has one of her nervous attacks. Will write all particulars.'"

"Well, that's no end of a bore. Plague take these girls with their nervous attacks! Here we've the nuisance of a dinner-party of natives to-morrow all to no purpose."

"They must have been asked some time or other, my dear," said Mrs. Holt mildly; "but it's very provoking, I own."

"And so Miss Effie and her wonderful diamonds are not forthcoming," said her husband, getting up and lighting a cigar. "Well, I'm off. I think I'll take the dog-cart and drive to the station. No doubt there will be fish and other things to be fetched." And Colonel Holt sauntered out.

On his return, to his great surprise, Simmons himself met him at the hall door. "You back again? What does this mean?"

The man looked confused, stammering out, "I—I—thought better of it, sir, and—and—I hope you will forget what has passed."

"You are determined to puzzle me to-day, Simmons. Do you think you are quite right in your head? Have you no explanation to give of your strange conduct?"

"None, sir," was the answer, in low tones.

"Now, what on earth would be the proper thing to do, I wonder?" thought Colonel Holt. "Oh, if I didn't hate trouble so much, and the weather were not so hot! As it is, 'masterly inactivity' must gain the day." And without another look at the delinquent, he made the best of his way upstairs.

On this very morning, August 4th, 1864, Mrs. Perceval, as she pushed her chair back from the breakfast table, said:

"What can make Effie so late this very morning of all others, when there is so much to be done before we start?"

"What was the row with Effie in the night, mother?" asked James, a boy of fourteen, who at the moment was conveying a large piece of bread and jam to his mouth.

"With Effie," asked his mother.—

"What do you mean, Jem?"

"All I know is, I heard a scream in the night," replied Jem; "and imagined it came from Effie's room opposite. But I was awfully sleepy, and the next moment I was off again, and forgot all about it till just now."

Mrs. Perceval hastened up to her daughter's room. To her great dismay, Effie was sitting on the edge of the bed in a half fainting condition, only partly dressed.

"My darling, are you ill? What is it?" asked her mother.

"Oh, mother, mother," moaned the girl, clinging to her, "don't go away, was all poor Effie could say.

"Leave you, my child; of course not. But why didn't you send for me? I had no idea you were ill."

"I did not want to frighten you, and so I tried to get up and dress, and then this horrible faintness came over me, and I could not get to the bell. Oh, mamma, I have had such a terrible night."

"My darling! Then it was you Jem heard scream?"

"He must have heard me, but he didn't come, no one come; and oh, it was so terrible. I shall never, never forget it," and she trembled like an aspen leaf.

"One thing is clear," said Mrs. Perceval, "we cannot go to the Holts to-day."

"No, no," said Effie, "I can go on no visits; but I must get away from here, from this room, from this bed," she added with a shudder.

"We will go anywhere you like, darling," said her mother, soothingly. "Only try to be calm now, and tell me what has upset you so dreadfully."

It was some time before the girl was sufficiently collected to satisfy her mother's anxiety and curiosity, but at length with many breaks and halting sentences she spoke much as follows:

"I went to bed, as you know, perfectly well and looking forward to our visit to the Holts, and I soon fell asleep. About one o'clock, I fancy it must have been, I awoke with a feeling of the most frightful depression, just as if I were doomed to death. I tried to call out, and to sit up in bed, but a heavy weight seemed on me, and I could only lie still and gasp. Then I felt myself sinking into a sort of stupor. I knew I was not awake, and yet I was not asleep. Fearful shapes and forms flitted before my eyes, until at length they seemed to merge into the form of a man, with huge, prominent eyes, who stooped over me, and slowly waved a large knife in front of my face. I tried to scream, but felt that it was only inwardly, and that no sound escaped my lips. Again this terrible form bent over me, gradually fading away, only to return a third time with a still fiercer look in his eyes. Making a superhuman effort, my voice at last broke its bounds, and with a ringing scream I woke, and sprang out of bed. There was no one to be seen, my door was still locked; no one could have come in; it must then have been a dream, I thought, and at last, shivering and shaking, I crept into bed again, but could not go to sleep. Oh, I did so long for you, mother, and yet I was too frightened to come to you."

"My poor child," cried Mrs. Perceval soothingly. "It was indeed a dreadful dream."

"But, was it only a dream?" sighed Effie; "it seemed so much more—and that face, shall I ever forget it?"

"Only a dream, darling. Something had upset your nerves. Now, try and shake off the remembrance of it. Come down stairs, and, after breakfast, we will settle where we will go. I think the Lakeside will be best, but you shall decide."

Mrs. Perceval treated the matter lightly. Effie always had been highly nervous, and this was only a bad attack of nightmare. It was, however, some time before the girl took the same view as her mother; and, although the change to the seaside braced her nerves, and did her very much good, it was far from being a complete cure. At times, the remembrance of the face she had seen would return and cause her hours of torture. Mrs. Perceval, like a wise woman, had kept her own counsel concerning the dream, or vision, whichever it was, so that it had not become an eight-day wonder in the household. She rarely allowed Effie to dwell upon it to her, and when, a year later, a new interest sprang up in the girl's life, she rejoiced, feeling sure the ghost would now be laid forever. For Effie was engaged to be married, and two honest brown eyes now haunted her waking as well as sleeping moments, and a sense of peace and security hedged her round. To Launce Spencer she had, of course, told the tale, and Launce had petted and soothed her, and made nothing of it; and with her hand in his, and her head on her shoulder, she could feel no fear.

It was once more the beginning of August, when, one bright morning, Launce unexpectedly received a sum-

mons to join his regiment; a court-martial, or some duty equally important required his presence. Poor Effie wandered about the house like an unquiet spirit after his departure. At length, a bright thought struck her.

"Mother, this would be the very time for my visit to the Holts. Let me send a telegram to say I will arrive to-morrow. They have always begged me to come at a moment's notice, and I may not be able to go later on."

"But they have people staying with them," objected Mrs. Perceval.

"Never mind; they will put me up somehow. Do let me go."

"Very well, dear," agreed her mother, rather reluctantly; to oppose any wish of Effie's was an impossibility to her. "You must take Susan with you."

"Oh, yes; and my diamonds," laughed Effie. "Do you remember I was to have taken them last year to show Mrs. Holt? She was so envious at my good luck in having them left to me; 'a chit like you,' I remember she said."

Mrs. Perceval rejoiced to find that all remembrance of the shock her daughter had sustained a year ago seemed blotted out of her mind. No painful thoughts appeared to linger of that interrupted visit to the Priory.

"Well, Effie, send off your telegram, then; but you need not say your diamonds will accompany you," she added laughing.

Effie flew up to the little village post office, and dashed off the following message:

"I am coming to-morrow for a few days, unless you telegram back to the contrary."

In the evening, Mrs. Perceval inquired if she had received an answer.

"Oh, no; I told them not to answer unless they could not have me."

"Still I wonder you have not heard," returned her mother; but Effie was quite sure it was all right, so no more was said.

Next morning she was up early, putting the finishing strokes to her packing, laughing and singing, apparently in the highest spirits. "Good-by, darling mother. I shall write to you to-morrow. Isn't it odd? It was this very day, August fourth, that we were to have gone to the Holts last year." Still no painful reminiscences on the subject. Her mother kissed and blessed her, preached care and caution, and so they parted.

On arriving at X— station, Effie was somewhat surprised to find that no vehicle awaited her from the Priory; however, as she was able to procure a fly without any difficulty, the omission was of little consequence. It so happened she had never visited the Holts before, great friends though they were. They had met abroad and at the houses of common friends, but something had always come in the way of a visit to the Priory, and Effie could scarcely believe she was really on her way thither. As the fly drove up to the door of the old house, she saw Mrs. Holt in the garden, and putting out her head, nodded and smiled gaily. Up ran her hostess, exclaiming, "Effie, my dear child, what a delightful surprise! Why didn't you let us know you were coming?"

"Surely you received my telegram yesterday?"

"No; did you send one? Oh, that dreadful boy at the post office. He really must be got rid of. This is the third telegram he has lost in a month—careless, good-for-nothing young rascal. Never mind about that now, however. How delightful to think you really are here at last!"

"But is it convenient? Are you sure you can put me up?" asked Effie.

"Oh, I forgot! every room is full," cried her friend, stopping short in dismay as she was hurrying her into the house. "But I can manage; you won't mind. Oh yes, I know; that will do nicely. There's Fred; he will be surprised. Do you know who this is?" she called out to her husband, who was coming down stairs.

"Effie Perceval. Can I believe my eyes?"

"Yes; and she telegraphed yesterday to say she was coming, and that horrible boy must have lost the message. Fred, you must have him sent away."

While Effie was luncheon, Colonel Holt ran over the names of those who were staying in the house, and of those

of the neighbors who were coming to dinner.

"I hope you have brought a smart dress, young lady, and all your diamonds, for there is to be a perfect invasion of natives."

"Oh, I think I shall do," laughed Effie, "though I was not prepared for such a festivity."

"They don't happen often, thank goodness; why, now I think of it, you left us in the lurch on the last grand occasion; this very day, last year, by Jove, so it was."

"Yes, Oh, we won't talk of that," said Effie, shuddering and turning pale. She was relieved by the entrance of Mrs. Holt, who offered to take her to her room.

"I have done the best I can, dear; ordered my den to be turned into a bed room for you. There was literally no other room available. There is only one drawback; it is at the end of a long passage, has no lock to the door, and is not very near any other room."

"It will do beautifully, I am sure," cried Effie, vexed at the trouble she was giving, and feeling she could not in reason make any objections, though the idea of an isolated room did not strike her pleasantly.

"That is my husband's dressing-room," said Mrs. Holt, as they passed an open door. "Now turn to the right and at the end of this passage is your room. I chose it for my den on account of its inaccessibility."

When reached it looked such a cheerful, bright little room, with the afternoon sun streaming into it that Effie was charmed. "If I feel lonely I can keep Susan with me," she thought.

"Now I shall leave you to rest," said Mrs. Holt. "If you could get a little nap before dinner, you would be all the better for it."

"I must write to mamma and Launce, that will be better than sleeping, and will refresh me quite as much. What time do you dine? 7:30? Very well; good-by till then."

"I really believe Simmons is wrong in his head," said Colonel Holt to his wife as he came into her room half an hour before dinner.

"What has he done now, then?"

"The fellow's manner is so odd I can't understand him. As soon as you had taken Effie up to her room I sent for him to say an extra plate must be laid at the dinner table, and stated the reason. He didn't make any answer, and looking up I saw he was white as death and shaking all over; then he began a stammering request to be allowed to go away, he was not well, and so on. However, I cut him short, and told him if he wanted to go he must wait till to-morrow, and that then, if he would, it must be for good; but that, of course, he must stop and do his work to-night. With that I left him, and just now I saw him at work in the dining-room, so I suppose he has recovered his senses."

"How very strange his conduct is," said Mrs. Holt. "It is exactly a year ago to-day since his last vagary."

Contrary to her wont, Mrs. Holt felt somewhat of an anxious hostess as she greeted her guests that evening, but she was reassured by Simmons' manner, which was as composed as usual. Effie, obeyed her natural instincts, was late, and reaching the drawing-room after dinner had been announced, fell to the lot of a shy, red-haired youth, who took her in in solemn silence, apparently abashed by the radiance of her diamonds. It was a pleasant, social dinner enough, and all went well, to Mrs. Holt's secret relief. She gave a sigh of satisfaction on reaching the drawing-room, feeling now that all danger was over. Never had Effie been brighter or merrier. As soon as the men came up, Mrs. Holt persuaded her to sing. She had a lovely voice, but was usually too shy and nervous to perform before strangers. However, to-night she seemed a different creature, and not a little to her own surprise felt every inclination to comply with the request. Every one was enchanted, and she was besieged for another song.

"You must have some coffee first," said Colonel Holt, beckoning to Simmons to bring it.

"I am better without coffee," said Effie, looking up to decline it, when her eyes suddenly met those of Simmons,