

**GEORGE
MACDONALD**

THE PORTENT
AND OTHER
STORIES

George MacDonald

The Portent and Other Stories

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George MacDonald
The Portent and Other Stories

THE PORTENT

A STORY OF THE INNER VISION OF THE HIGHLANDERS,

COMMONLY CALLED *THE SECOND SIGHT*

DEDICATION

MY DEAR SIR, KENSINGTON, *May, 1864.*

Allow me, with the honour due to my father's friend, to inscribe this little volume with your name. The name of one friend is better than those of all the Muses.

And permit me to say a few words about the story.—It is a Romance. I am well aware that, with many readers, this epithet will be enough to ensure condemnation. But there ought to be a place for any story, which, although founded in the marvellous, is true to human nature and to itself. Truth to Humanity, and harmony within itself, are almost the sole unvarying essentials of a work of art. Even *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*—than which what more marvellous?—is true in these respects. And Shakespere himself will allow any amount of the marvellous, provided this truth is observed. I hope my story is thus true; and therefore, while it claims some place, undeserving of being classed with what are commonly called *sensational novels*.

I am well aware that such tales are not of much account, at present; and greatly would I regret that they should ever become the fashion; of which, however, there is no danger. But, seeing so much of our life must be spent in dreaming, may there not be a still nook, shadowy, but not miasmatic, in some lowly region of literature, where, in the pauses of labour, a man may sit down, and dream such a day-dream as I now offer to your acceptance, and that of those who will judge the work, in part at least, by its purely literary claims? If I confined my pen to such results, you, at least, would have a right to blame me. But you, for one, will, I am sure, justify an author in dreaming *sometimes*.

In offering you a story, however, founded on *The Second Sight*, the belief in which was common to our ancestors, I owe you, at the same time, an apology. For the tone and colour of the story are so different from those naturally belonging to a Celtic tale, that you might well be inclined to refuse my request, simply on the ground that your pure Highland blood revolted from the degenerate embodiment given to the ancient belief. I can only say that my early education was not Celtic enough to enable me to do better in this respect. I beg that you will accept the offering with forgiveness, if you cannot with approbation.

Yours affectionately,
GEORGE MACDONALD.

To DUNCAN MCCOLL, Esq., R.N., Huntly

THE PORTENT

CHAPTER I. *My Boyhood*

My father belonged to the widespread family of the Campbells, and possessed a small landed property in the north of Argyll. But although of long descent and high connection, he was no richer than many a farmer of a few hundred acres. For, with the exception of a narrow belt of arable land at its foot, a bare hill formed almost the whole of his possessions. The sheep ate over it, and no doubt found it good; I bounded and climbed all over it, and thought it a kingdom. From my very childhood, I had rejoiced in being alone. The sense of room about me had been one of my greatest delights. Hence, when my thoughts go back to those old years, it is not the house, nor the family room, nor that in which I slept, that first of all rises before my inward vision, but that desolate hill, the top of which was only a wide expanse of moorland, rugged with height and hollow, and dangerous with deep, dark pools, but in many portions purple with large-belled heather, and crowded with cranberry and blaeberry plants. Most of all, I loved it in the still autumn morning, outstretched in stillness, high uplifted towards the heaven. On every stalk hung the dew in tiny drops, which, while the rising sun was low, sparkled and burned with the hues of all the gems. Here and there a bird gave a cry; no other sound awoke the silence. I never see the statue of the Roman youth, praying with outstretched arms, and open, empty, level palms, as waiting to receive and hold the blessing of the gods, but that outstretched barren heath rises before me, as if it meant the same thing as the statue—or were, at least, the fit room in the middle space of which to set the praying and expectant youth.

There was one spot upon the hill, half-way between the valley and the moorland, which was my favourite haunt. This part of the hill was covered with great blocks of stone, of all shapes and sizes—here crowded together, like the slain where the battle had been fiercest; there parting asunder from spaces of delicate green—of softest grass. In the centre of one of these green spots, on a steep part of the hill, were three huge rocks—two projecting out of the hill, rather than standing up from it, and one, likewise projecting from the hill, but lying across the tops of the two, so as to form a little cave, the back of which was the side of the hill. This was my refuge, my home within a home, my study—and, in the hot noons, often my sleeping chamber, and my house of dreams. If the wind blew cold on the hillside, a hollow of lulling warmth was there, scooped as it were out of the body of the blast, which, sweeping around, whistled keen and thin through the cracks and crannies of the rocky chaos that lay all about; in which confusion of rocks the wind plunged, and flowed, and eddied, and withdrew, as the sea-waves on the cliffy shores or the unknown rugged bottoms. Here I would often lie, as the sun went down, and watch the silent growth of another sea, which the stormy ocean of the wind could not disturb—the sea of the darkness. First it would begin to gather in the bottom of hollow places. Deep valleys, and all little pits on the hill-sides, were well-springs where it gathered, and whence it seemed to overflow, till it had buried the earth beneath its mass, and, rising high into the heavens, swept over the faces of the stars, washed the blinding day from them, and let them shine, down through the waters of the dark, to the eyes of men below. I would lie till nothing but the stars and the dim outlines of hills against the sky was to be seen, and then rise and go home, as sure of my path as if I had been descending a dark staircase in my father's house.

On the opposite side the valley, another hill lay parallel to mine; and behind it, at some miles' distance, a great mountain. As often as, in my hermit's cave, I lifted my eyes from the volume I was reading, I saw this mountain before me. Very different was its character from that of the hill on which I was seated. It was a mighty thing, a chieftain of the race, seamed and scarred, featured with chasms and precipices and over-leaning rocks, themselves huge as hills; here blackened with shade, there overspread with glory; interlaced with the silvery lines of falling streams, which, hurrying from

heaven to earth, cared not how they went, so it were downwards. Fearful stories were told of the gulfs, sullen waters, and dizzy heights upon that terror-haunted mountain. In storms the wind roared like thunder in its caverns and along the jagged sides of its cliffs, but at other times that uplifted land—uplifted, yet secret and full of dismay—lay silent as a cloud on the horizon.

I had a certain peculiarity of constitution, which I have some reason to believe I inherit. It seems to have its root in an unusual delicacy of hearing, which often conveys to me sounds inaudible to those about me. This I have had many opportunities of proving. It has likewise, however, brought me sounds which I could never trace back to their origin; though they may have arisen from some natural operation which I had not perseverance or mental acuteness sufficient to discover. From this, or, it may be, from some deeper cause with which this is connected, arose a certain kind of fearfulness associated with the sense of hearing, of which I have never heard a corresponding instance. Full as my mind was of the wild and sometimes fearful tales of a Highland nursery, fear never entered my mind by the eyes, nor, when I brooded over tales of terror, and fancied new and yet more frightful embodiments of horror, did I shudder at any imaginable spectacle, or tremble lest the fancy should become fact, and from behind the whin-bush or the elder-hedge should glide forth the tall swaying form of the Boneless. When alone in bed, I used to lie awake, and look out into the room, peopling it with the forms of all the persons who had died within the scope of my memory and acquaintance. These fancied forms were vividly present to my imagination. I pictured them pale, with dark circles around their hollow eyes, visible by a light which glimmered within them; not the light of life, but a pale, greenish phosphorescence, generated by the decay of the brain inside. Their garments were white and trailing, but torn and soiled, as by trying often in vain to get up out of the buried coffin. But so far from being terrified by these imaginings, I used to delight in them; and in the long winter evenings, when I did not happen to have any book that interested me sufficiently, I used even to look forward with expectation to the hour when, laying myself straight upon my back, as if my bed were my coffin, I could call up from underground all who had passed away, and see how they fared, yea, what progress they had made towards final dissolution of form—but all the time, with my fingers pushed hard into my ears, lest the faintest sound should invade the silent citadel of my soul. If inadvertently I removed one of my fingers, the agony of terror I instantly experienced is indescribable. I can compare it to nothing but the rushing in upon my brain of a whole churchyard of spectres. The very possibility of hearing a sound, in such a mood, and at such a time, was almost enough to paralyse me. So I could scare myself in broad daylight, on the open hillside, by imagining unintelligible sounds; and my imagination was both original and fertile in the invention of such. But my mind was too active to be often subjected to such influences. Indeed life would have been hardly endurable had these moods been of more than occasional occurrence. As I grew older, I almost outgrew them. Yet sometimes one awful dread would seize me—that, perhaps, the prophetic power manifest in the gift of second sight, which, according to the testimony of my old nurse, had belonged to several of my ancestors, had been in my case transformed in kind without losing its nature, transferring its abode from the sight to the hearing, whence resulted its keenness, and my fear and suffering.

CHAPTER II. *The Second Hearing*

One summer evening, I had lingered longer than usual in my rocky retreat: I had lain half dreaming in the mouth of my cave, till the shadows of evening had fallen, and the gloaming had deepened half-way towards the night. But the night had no more terrors for me than the day. Indeed, in such regions there is a solitariness for which there seems a peculiar sense, and upon which the shadows of night sink with a strange relief, hiding from the eye the wide space which yet they throw more open to the imagination. When I lifted my head, only a star here and there caught my eye; but, looking intently into the depths of blue-grey, I saw that they were crowded with twinkles. The mountain rose before me, a huge mass of gloom; but its several peaks stood out against the sky with a

clear, pure, sharp outline, and looked nearer to me than the bulk from which they rose heaven-wards. One star trembled and throbbed upon the very tip of the loftiest, the central peak, which seemed the spire of a mighty temple where the light was worshipped—crowned, therefore, in the darkness, with the emblem of the day. I was lying, as I have said, with this fancy still in my thought, when suddenly I heard, clear, though faint and far away, the sound as of the iron-shod hoofs of a horse, in furious gallop along an uneven rocky surface. It was more like a distant echo than an original sound. It seemed to come from the face of the mountain, where no horse, I knew, could go at that speed, even if its rider courted certain destruction. There was a peculiarity, too, in the sound—a certain tinkle, or clank, which I fancied myself able, by auricular analysis, to distinguish from the body of the sound. Supposing the sound to be caused by the feet of a horse, the peculiarity was just such as would result from one of the shoes being loose. A terror—strange even to my experience—seized me, and I hastened home. The sounds gradually died away as I descended the hill. Could they have been an echo from some precipice of the mountain? I knew of no road lying so that, if a horse were galloping upon it, the sounds would be reflected from the mountain to me.

The next day, in one of my rambles, I found myself near the cottage of my old foster-mother, who was distantly related to us, and was a trusted servant in the family at the time I was born. On the death of my mother, which took place almost immediately after my birth, she had taken the entire charge of me, and had brought me up, though with difficulty; for she used to tell me, I should never be either *folk* or *fairy*. For some years she had lived alone in a cottage, at the bottom of a deep green circular hollow, upon which, in walking over a healthy table-land, one came with a sudden surprise. I was her frequent visitor. She was a tall, thin, aged woman, with eager eyes, and well-defined clear-cut features. Her voice was harsh, but with an undertone of great tenderness. She was scrupulously careful in her attire, which was rather above her station. Altogether, she had much the bearing of a gentle-woman. Her devotion to me was quite motherly. Never having had any family of her own, although she had been the wife of one of my father's shepherds, she expended the whole maternity of her nature upon me. She was always my first resource in any perplexity, for I was sure of all the help she could give me. And as she had much influence with my father, who was rather severe in his notions, I had had occasion to beg her interference. No necessity of this sort, however, had led to my visit on the present occasion.

I ran down the side of the basin, and entered the little cottage. Nurse was seated on a chair by the wall, with her usual knitting, a stocking, in one hand; but her hands were motionless, and her eyes wide open and fixed. I knew that the neighbours stood rather in awe of her, on the ground that she had the second sight; but, although she often told us frightful enough stories, she had never alluded to such a gift as being in her possession. Now I concluded at once that she was *seeing*. I was confirmed in this conclusion when, seeming to come to herself suddenly, she covered her head with her plaid, and sobbed audibly, in spite of her efforts to command herself. But I did not dare to ask her any questions, nor did she attempt any excuse for her behaviour. After a few moments, she unveiled herself, rose, and welcomed me with her usual kindness; then got me some refreshment, and began to question me about matters at home. After a pause, she said suddenly: "When are you going to get your commission, Duncan, do you know?" I replied that I had heard nothing of it; that I did not think my father had influence or money enough to procure me one, and that I feared I should have no such good chance of distinguishing myself. She did not answer, but nodded her head three times, slowly and with compressed lips—apparently as much as to say, "I know better."

Just as I was leaving her, it occurred to me to mention that I had heard an odd sound the night before. She turned towards me, and looked at me fixedly. "What was it like, Duncan, my dear?"

"Like a horse galloping with a loose shoe," I replied.

"Duncan, Duncan, my darling!" she said, in a low, trembling voice, but with passionate earnestness, "you did not hear it? Tell me that you did not hear it! You only want to frighten poor old nurse: some one has been telling you the story!"

It was my turn to be frightened now; for the matter became at once associated with my fears as to the possible nature of my auricular peculiarities. I assured her that nothing was farther from my intention than to frighten her; that, on the contrary, she had rather alarmed me; and I begged her to explain. But she sat down white and trembling, and did not speak. Presently, however, she rose again, and saying, "I have known it happen sometimes without anything very bad following," began to put away the basin and plate I had been using, as if she would compel herself to be calm before me. I renewed my entreaties for an explanation, but without avail. She begged me to be content for a few days, as she was quite unable to tell the story at present. She promised, however, of her own accord, that before I left home she would tell me all she knew.

The next day a letter arrived announcing the death of a distant relation, through whose influence my father had had a lingering hope of obtaining an appointment for me. There was nothing left but to look out for a situation as tutor.

CHAPTER III. *My Old Nurses Story*

I was now almost nineteen. I had completed the usual curriculum of study at one of the Scotch universities; and, possessed of a fair knowledge of mathematics and physics, and what I considered rather more than a good foundation for classical and metaphysical acquirement, I resolved to apply for the first suitable situation that offered. But I was spared the trouble. A certain Lord Hilton, an English nobleman, residing in one of the midland counties, having heard that one of my father's sons was desirous of such a situation, wrote to him, offering me the post of tutor to his two boys, of the ages of ten and twelve. He had been partly educated at a Scotch university; and this, it may be, had prejudiced him in favour of a Scotch tutor; while an ancient alliance of the families by marriage was supposed by my nurse to be the reason of his offering me the situation. Of this connection, however, my father said nothing to me, and it went for nothing in my anticipations. I was to receive a hundred pounds a year, and to hold in the family the position of a gentleman, which might mean anything or nothing, according to the disposition of the heads of the family. Preparations for my departure were immediately commenced. I set out one evening for the cottage of my old nurse, to bid her good-bye for many months, probably years. I was to leave the next day for Edinburgh, on my way to London, whence I had to repair by coach to my new abode—almost to me like the land beyond the grave, so little did I know about it, and so wide was the separation between it and my home. The evening was sultry when I began my walk, and before I arrived at its end, the clouds rising from all quarters of the horizon, and especially gathering around the peaks of the mountain, betokened the near approach of a thunderstorm. This was a great delight to me. Gladly would I take leave of my home with the memory of a last night of tumultuous magnificence; followed, probably, by a day of weeping rain, well suited to the mood of my own heart in bidding farewell to the best of parents and the dearest of homes. Besides, in common with most Scotchmen who are young and hardy enough to be unable to realise the existence of coughs and rheumatic fevers, it was a positive pleasure to me to be out in rain, hail, or snow.

"I am come to bid you good-bye, Margaret; and to hear the story which you promised to tell me before I left home: I go to-morrow."

"Do you go so soon, my darling? Well, it will be an awful night to tell it in; but, as I promised, I suppose I must."

At the moment, two or three great drops of rain, the first of the storm, fell down the wide chimney, exploding in the clear turf-fire.

"Yes, indeed you must," I replied.

After a short pause, she commenced. Of course she spoke in Gaelic; and I translate from my recollection of the Gaelic; but rather from the impression left upon my mind, than from any

recollection of the words. She drew her chair near the fire, which we had reason to fear would soon be put out by the falling rain, and began.

“How old the story is, I do not know. It has come down through many generations. My grandmother told it to me as I tell it to you; and her mother and my mother sat beside, never interrupting, but nodding their heads at every turn. Almost it ought to begin like the fairy tales, *Once upon a time*,—it took place so long ago; but it is too dreadful and too true to tell like a fairy tale.—There were two brothers, sons of the chief of our clan, but as different in appearance and disposition as two men could be. The elder was fair-haired and strong, much given to hunting and fishing; fighting too, upon occasion, I dare say, when they made a foray upon the Saxon, to get back a mouthful of their own. But he was gentleness itself to every one about him, and the very soul of honour in all his doings. The younger was very dark in complexion, and tall and slender compared to his brother. He was very fond of book-learning, which, they say, was an uncommon taste in those times. He did not care for any sports or bodily exercises but one; and that, too, was unusual in these parts. It was horsemanship. He was a fierce rider, and as much at home in the saddle as in his study-chair. You may think that, so long ago, there was not much fit room for riding hereabouts; but, fit or not fit, he rode. From his reading and riding, the neighbours looked doubtfully upon him, and whispered about the black art. He usually bestrode a great powerful black horse, without a white hair on him; and people said it was either the devil himself, or a demon-horse from the devil’s own stud. What favoured this notion was, that, in or out of the stable, the brute would let no other than his master go near him. Indeed, no one would venture, after he had killed two men, and grievously maimed a third, tearing him with his teeth and hoofs like a wild beast. But to his master he was obedient as a hound, and would even tremble in his presence sometimes.

“The youth’s temper corresponded to his habits. He was both gloomy and passionate. Prone to anger, he had never been known to forgive. Debarred from anything on which he had set his heart, he would have gone mad with longing if he had not gone mad with rage. His soul was like the night around us now, dark, and sultry, and silent, but lighted up by the red levin of wrath and torn by the bellows of thunder-passion. He must have his will: hell might have his soul. Imagine, then, the rage and malice in his heart, when he suddenly became aware that an orphan girl, distantly related to them, who had lived with them for nearly two years, and whom he had loved for almost all that period, was loved by his elder brother, and loved him in return. He flung his right hand above his head, swore a terrible oath that if he might not, his brother should not, rushed out of the house, and galloped off among the hills.

“The orphan was a beautiful girl, tall, pale, and slender, with plentiful dark hair, which, when released from the snood, rippled down below her knees. Her appearance formed a strong contrast with that of her favoured lover, while there was some resemblance between her and the younger brother. This fact seemed, to his fierce selfishness, ground for a prior claim.

“It may appear strange that a man like him should not have had instant recourse to his superior and hidden knowledge, by means of which he might have got rid of his rival with far more of certainty and less of risk; but I presume that, for the moment, his passion overwhelmed his consciousness of skill. Yet I do not suppose that he foresaw the mode in which his hatred was about to operate. At the moment when he learned their mutual attachment, probably through a domestic, the lady was on her way to meet her lover as he returned from the day’s sport. The appointed place was on the edge of a deep, rocky ravine, down in whose dark bosom brawled and foamed a little mountain torrent. You know the place, Duncan, my dear, I dare say.”

(Here she gave me a minute description of the spot, with directions how to find it.)

“Whether any one saw what I am about to relate, or whether it was put together afterwards, I cannot tell. The story is like an old tree—so old that it has lost the marks of its growth. But this is how my grandmother told it to me.—An evil chance led him in the right direction. The lovers, startled by the sound of the approaching horse, parted in opposite directions along a narrow mountain-path

on the edge of the ravine. Into this path he struck at a point near where the lovers had met, but to opposite sides of which they had now receded; so that he was between them on the path. Turning his horse up the course of the stream, he soon came in sight of his brother on the ledge before him. With a suppressed scream of rage, he rode head-long at him, and ere he had time to make the least defence, hurled him over the precipice. The helplessness of the strong man was uttered in one single despairing cry as he shot into the abyss. Then all was still. The sound of his fall could not reach the edge of the gulf. Divining in a moment that the lady, whose name was Elsie, must have fled in the opposite direction, he reined his steed on his haunches. He could touch the precipice with his bridle-hand half outstretched; his sword-hand half outstretched would have dropped a stone to the bottom of the ravine. There was no room to wheel. One desperate practicability alone remained. Turning his horse's head towards the edge, he compelled him, by means of the powerful bit, to rear till he stood almost erect; and so, his body swaying over the gulf, with quivering and straining muscles, to turn on his hind-legs. Having completed the half-circle, he let him drop, and urged him furiously in the opposite direction. It must have been by the devil's own care that he was able to continue his gallop along that ledge of rock.

“He soon caught sight of the maiden. She was leaning, half fainting, against the precipice. She had heard her lover's last cry, and although it had conveyed no suggestion of his voice to her ear, she trembled from head to foot, and her limbs would bear her no farther. He checked his speed, rode gently up to her, lifted her unresisting, laid her across the shoulders of his horse, and, riding carefully till he reached a more open path, dashed again wildly along the mountain-side. The lady's long hair was shaken loose, and dropped trailing on the ground. The horse trampled upon it, and stumbled, half dragging her from the saddle-bow. He caught her, lifted her up, and looked at her face. She was dead. I suppose he went mad. He laid her again across the saddle before him, and rode on, reckless whither. Horse, and man, and maiden were found the next day, lying at the foot of a cliff, dashed to pieces. It was observed that a hind-shoe of the horse was loose and broken. Whether this had been the cause of his fall, could not be told; but ever when he races, as race he will, till the day of doom, along that mountain-side, his gallop is mingled with the clank of the loose and broken shoe. For, like the sin, the punishment is awful: he shall carry about for ages the phantom-body of the girl, knowing that her soul is away, sitting with the soul of his brother, down in the deep ravine, or scaling with him the topmost crags of the towering mountain-peaks. There are some who, from time to time, see the doomed man careering along the face of the mountain, with the lady hanging across the steed; and they say it always betokens a storm, such as this which is now raving around us.”

I had not noticed till now, so absorbed had I been in her tale, that the storm had risen to a very ecstasy of fury.

“They say, likewise, that the lady's hair is still growing; for, every time they see her, it is longer than before; and that now such is its length and the head-long speed of the horse, that it floats and streams out behind, like one of those curved clouds, like a comet's tail, far up in the sky; only the cloud is white, and the hair dark as night. And they say it will go on growing till the Last Day, when the horse will falter and her hair will gather in; and the horse will fall, and the hair will twist, and twine, and wreath itself like a mist of threads about him, and blind him to everything but her. Then the body will rise up within it, face to face with him, animated by a fiend, who, twining her arms around him, will drag him down to the bottomless pit.”

I may mention something which now occurred, and which had a strange effect on my old nurse. It illustrates the assertion that we see around us only what is within us: marvellous things enough will show themselves to the marvellous mood.—During a short lull in the storm, just as she had finished her story, we heard the sound of iron-shod hoofs approaching the cottage. There was no bridle-way into the glen. A knock came to the door, and, on opening it, we saw an old man seated on a horse, with a long slenderly-filled sack lying across the saddle before him. He said he had lost the path in the storm, and, seeing the light, had scrambled down to inquire his way. I perceived at once, from

the scared and mysterious look of the old woman's eyes, that she was persuaded that this appearance had more than a little to do with the awful rider, the terrific storm, and myself who had heard the sound of the phantom-hoofs. As he ascended the hill, she looked after him, with wide and pale but unshrinking eyes; then turning in, shut and locked the door behind her, as by a natural instinct. After two or three of her significant nods, accompanied by the compression of her lips, she said:—

“He need not think to take me in, wizard as he is, with his disguises. I can see him through them all. Duncan, my dear, when you suspect anything, do not be too incredulous. This human demon is of course a wizard still, and knows how to make himself, as well as anything he touches, take a quite different appearance from the real one; only every appearance must bear some resemblance, however distant, to the natural form. That man you saw at the door was the phantom of which I have been telling you. What he is after now, of course, I cannot tell; but you must keep a bold heart, and a firm and wary foot, as you go home to-night.”

I showed some surprise, I do not doubt; and, perhaps, some fear as well; but I only said, “How do you know him, Margaret?”

“I can hardly tell you,” she replied; “but I do know him. I think he hates me. Often, of a wild night, when there is moonlight enough by fits, I see him tearing around this little valley, just on the top edge—all round; the lady's hair and the horses mane and tail driving far behind, and mingling, vaporous, with the stormy clouds. About he goes, in wild careering gallop; now lost as the moon goes in, then visible far round when she looks out again—an airy, pale-grey spectre, which few eyes but mine could see; for, as far as I am aware, no one of the family but myself has ever possessed the double gift of seeing and hearing both. In this case I hear no sound, except now and then a clank from the broken shoe. But I did not mean to tell you that I had ever seen him. I am not a bit afraid of him. He cannot do more than he may. His power is limited; else ill enough would he work, the miscreant.”

“But,” said I, “what has all this, terrible as it is, to do with the fright you took at my telling you that I had heard the sound of the broken shoe? Surely you are not afraid of only a storm?”

“No, my boy; I fear no storm. But the fact is, that that sound is seldom heard, and never, as far as I know, by any of the blood of that wicked man, without betokening some ill to one of the family, and most probably to the one who hears it—but I am not quite sure about that. Only some evil it does portend, although a long time may elapse before it shows itself; and I have a hope it may mean some one else than you.”

“Do not wish that,” I replied. “I know no one better able to bear it than I am; and I hope, whatever it may be, that I only shall have to meet it. It must surely be something serious to be so foretold—it can hardly be connected with my disappointment in being compelled to be a pedagogue instead of a soldier.”

“Do not trouble yourself about that, Duncan,” replied she. “A soldier you must be. The same day you told me of the clank of the broken horseshoe, I saw you return wounded from battle, and fall fainting from your horse in the street of a great city—only fainting, thank God. But I have particular reasons for being uneasy at your hearing that boding sound. Can you tell me the day and hour of your birth?”

“No,” I replied. “It seems very odd when I think of it, but I really do not know even the day.”

“Nor any one else; which is stranger still,” she answered.

“How does that happen, nurse?”

“We were in terrible anxiety about your mother at the time. So ill was she, after you were just born, in a strange, unaccountable way, that you lay almost neglected for more than an hour. In the very act of giving birth to you, she seemed to the rest around her to be out of her mind, so wildly did she talk; but I knew better. I knew that she was fighting some evil power; and what power it was, I knew full well; for twice, during her pains, I heard the click of the horseshoe. But no one could help her. After her delivery, she lay as if in a trance, neither dead, nor at rest, but as if frozen to ice, and conscious of it all the while. Once more I heard the terrible sound of iron; and, at the moment,

your mother started from her trance, screaming, 'My child! my child!' We suddenly became aware that no one had attended to the child, and rushed to the place where he lay wrapped in a blanket. Uncovering him, we found him black in the face, and spotted with dark spots upon the throat. I thought he was dead; but, with great and almost hopeless pains, we succeeded in making him breathe, and he gradually recovered. But his mother continued dreadfully exhausted. It seemed as if she had spent her life for her child's defence and birth. That was you, Duncan, my dear.

"I was in constant attendance upon her. About a week after your birth, as near as I can guess, just in the gloaming, I heard yet again the awful clank—only once. Nothing followed till about midnight. Your mother slept, and you lay asleep beside her. I sat by the bedside. A horror fell upon me suddenly, though I neither saw nor heard anything. Your mother started from her sleep with a cry, which sounded as if it came from far away, out of a dream, and did not belong to this world. My blood curdled with fear. She sat up in bed, with wide staring eyes and half-open rigid lips, and, feeble as she was, thrust her arms straight out before her with great force, her hands open and lifted up, with the palms outwards. The whole action was of one violently repelling another. She began to talk wildly as she had done before you were born, but, though I seemed to hear and understand it all at the time, I could not recall a word of it afterwards. It was as if I had listened to it when half asleep. I attempted to soothe her, putting my arms round her, but she seemed quite unconscious of my presence, and my arms seemed powerless upon the fixed muscles of hers. Not that I tried to constrain her, for I knew that a battle was going on of some kind or other, and my interference might do awful mischief. I only tried to comfort and encourage her. All the time, I was in a state of indescribable cold and suffering, whether more bodily or mental I could not tell. But at length I heard yet again the clank of the shoe. A sudden peace seemed to fall upon my mind—or was it a warm, odorous wind that filled the room? Your mother dropped her arms, and turned feebly towards her baby. She saw that he slept a blessed sleep. She smiled like a glorified spirit, and fell back exhausted on the pillow. I went to the other side of the room to get a cordial. When I returned to the bedside, I saw at once that she was dead. Her face smiled still, with an expression of the uttermost bliss."

Nurse ceased, trembling as overcome by the recollection; and I was too much moved and awed to speak. At length, resuming the conversation, she said: "You see it is no wonder, Duncan, my dear, if, after all this, I should find, when I wanted to fix the date of your birth, that I could not determine the day or the hour when it took place. All was confusion in my poor brain. But it was strange that no one else could, any more than I. One thing only I can tell you about it. As I carried you across the room to lay you down, for I assisted at your birth, I happened to look up to the window. Then I saw what I did not forget, although I did not think of it again till many days after,—a bright star was shining on the very tip of the thin crescent moon."

"Oh, then," said I, "it is possible to determine the day and the very hour when my birth took place."

"See the good of book-learning!" replied she. "When you work it out, just let me know, my dear, that I may remember it."

"That I will."

A silence of some moments followed. Margaret resumed:—

"I am afraid you will laugh at my foolish fancies, Duncan; but in thinking over all these things, as you may suppose I often do, lying awake in my lonely bed, the notion sometimes comes to me: What if my Duncan be the youth whom his wicked brother hurled into the ravine, come again in a new body, to live out his life on the earth, cut short by his brother's hatred? If so, his persecution of you, and of your mother for your sake, is easy to understand. And if so, you will never be able to rest till you find your fere, wherever she may have been born on the face of the earth. For born she must be, long ere now, for you to find. I misdoubt me much, however, if you will find her without great conflict and suffering between, for the Powers of Darkness will be against you; though I have good hope that you will overcome at last. You must forgive the fancies of a foolish old woman, my dear."

I will not try to describe the strange feelings, almost sensations, that arose in me while listening to these extraordinary utterances, lest it should be supposed I was ready to believe all that Margaret narrated or concluded. I could not help doubting her sanity; but no more could I help feeling very peculiarly moved by her narrative.

Few more words were spoken on either side, but after receiving renewed exhortations to carefulness on my way home, I said good-bye to dear old nurse, considerably comforted, I must confess, that I was not doomed to be a tutor all my days; for I never questioned the truth of that vision and its consequent prophecy.

I went out into the midst of the storm, into the alternating throbs of blackness and radiance; now the possessor of no more room than what my body filled, and now isolated in world-wide space. And the thunder seemed to follow me, bellowing after me as I went.

Absorbed in the story I had heard, I took my way, as I thought, homewards. The whole country was well known to me. I should have said, before that night, that I could have gone home blindfold. Whether the lightning bewildered me and made me take a false turn, I cannot tell; for the hardest thing to understand, in intellectual as well as moral mistakes, is—how we came to go wrong. But after wandering for some time, plunged in meditation, and with no warning whatever of the presence of inimical powers, a brilliant lightning-flash showed me that at least I was not near home. The light was prolonged for a second or two by a slight electric pulsation; and by that I distinguished a wide space of blackness on the ground in front of me. Once more wrapped in the folds of a thick darkness, I dared not move. Suddenly it occurred to me what the blackness was, and whither I had wandered. It was a huge quarry, of great depth, long disused, and half filled with water. I knew the place perfectly. A few more steps would have carried me over the brink. I stood still, waiting for the next flash, that I might be quite sure of the way I was about to take before I ventured to move. While I stood, I fancied I heard a single hollow plunge in the black water far below. When the lightning came, I turned, and took my path in another direction.

After walking for some time across the heath, I fell. The fall became a roll, and down a steep declivity I went, over and over, arriving at the bottom uninjured.

Another flash soon showed me where I was—in the hollow valley, within a couple of hundred yards from nurse's cottage. I made my way towards it. There was no light in it, except the feeblest glow from the embers of her peat fire. "She is in bed," I said to myself, "and I will not disturb her." Yet something drew me towards the little window. I looked in. At first I could see nothing. At length, as I kept gazing, I saw something, indistinct in the darkness, like an outstretched human form.

By this time the storm had lulled. The moon had been up for some time, but had been quite concealed by tempestuous clouds. Now, however, these had begun to break up; and, while I stood looking into the cottage, they scattered away from the face of the moon, and a faint vapoury gleam of her light, entering the cottage through a window opposite that at which I stood, fell directly on the face of my old nurse, as she lay on her back, outstretched upon chairs, pale as death, and with her eyes closed. The light fell nowhere but on her face. A stranger to her habits would have thought she was dead; but she had so much of the appearance she had had on a former occasion, that I concluded at once she was in one of her trances. But having often heard that persons in such a condition ought not to be disturbed, and feeling quite sure she knew best how to manage herself, I turned, though reluctantly, and left the lone cottage behind me in the night, with the death-like woman lying motionless in the midst of it.

I found my way home without any further difficulty, and went to bed, where I soon fell asleep, thoroughly wearied, more by the mental excitement I had been experiencing than by the amount of bodily exercise I had gone through.

My sleep was tormented with awful dreams; yet, strange to say, I awoke in the morning refreshed and fearless. The sun was shining through the chinks in my shutters, which had been closed because of the storm, and was making streaks and bands of golden brilliancy upon the wall. I had

dressed and completed my preparations long before I heard the steps of the servant who came to call me.

What a wonderful thing waking is! The time of the ghostly moonshine passes by, and the great positive sunlight comes. A man who dreams, and knows that he is dreaming, thinks he knows what waking is; but knows it so little, that he mistakes, one after another, many a vague and dim change in his dream for an awaking. When the true waking comes at last, he is filled and overflowed with the power of its reality. So, likewise, one who, in the darkness, lies waiting for the light about to be struck, and trying to conceive, with all the force of his imagination, what the light will be like, is yet, when the reality flames up before him, seized as by a new and unexpected thing, different from and beyond all his imagining. He feels as if the darkness were cast to an infinite distance behind him. So shall it be with us when we wake from this dream of life into the truer life beyond, and find all our present notions of being, thrown back as into a dim, vapoury region of dreamland, where yet we thought we knew, and whence we looked forward into the present. This must be what Novalis means when he says: "Our life is not a dream; but it may become a dream, and perhaps ought to become one."

And so I looked back upon the strange history of my past; sometimes asking myself,—“Can it be that all this really happened to the same *me*, who am now thinking about it in doubt and wonder?”

CHAPTER IV. *Hilton Hall*

As my father accompanied me to the door, where the gig, which was to carry me over the first stage of my journey, was in waiting, a large target of hide, well studded with brass nails, which had hung in the hall for time unknown—to me, at least—fell on the floor with a dull bang. My father started, but said nothing; and, as it seemed to me, rather pressed my departure than otherwise. I would have replaced the old piece of armour before I went, but he would not allow me to touch it, saying, with a grim smile,—

“Take that for an omen, my boy, that your armour must be worn over the conscience, and not over the body. Be a man, Duncan, my boy. Fear nothing, and do your duty.”

A grasp of the hand was all the good-bye I could make; and I was soon rattling away to meet the coach *for Edinburgh and London*. Seated on the top, I was soon buried in a reverie, from which I was suddenly startled by the sound of tinkling iron. Could it be that my adversary was riding unseen alongside of the coach? Was that the clank of the ominous shoe? But I soon discovered the cause of the sound, and laughed at my own apprehensiveness. For I observed that the sound was repeated every time that we passed any trees by the wayside, and that it was the peculiar echo they gave of the loose chain and steel work about the harness. The sound was quite different from that thrown back by the houses on the road. I became perfectly familiar with it before the day was over.

I reached London in safety, and slept at the house of an old friend of my father, who treated me with great kindness, and seemed altogether to take a liking to me. Before I left he held out a hope of being able, some day or other, to procure for me what I so much desired—a commission in the army.

After spending a day or two with him, and seeing something of London, I climbed once more on the roof of a coach; and, late in the afternoon, was set down at the great gate of Hilton Hall. I walked up the broad avenue, through the final arch of which, as through a huge Gothic window, I saw the hall in the distance. Everything about me looked strange, rich, and lovely. Accustomed to the scanty flowers and diminutive wood of my own country, what I now saw gave me a feeling of majestic plenty, which I can recall at will, but which I have never experienced again. Behind the trees which formed the avenue, I saw a shrubbery, composed entirely of flowering plants, almost all unknown to me. Issuing from the avenue, I found myself amid open, wide, lawny spaces, in which the flower-beds lay like islands of colour. A statue on a pedestal, the only white thing in the surrounding green, caught my eye. I had seen scarcely any sculpture; and this, attracting my attention by a favourite contrast of colour, retained it by its own beauty. It was a Dryad, or some nymph of the woods, who had just

glided from the solitude of the trees behind, and had sprung upon the pedestal to look wonderingly around her. A few large brown leaves lay at her feet, borne thither by some eddying wind from the trees behind. As I gazed, filled with a new pleasure, a drop of rain upon my face made me look up. From a grey, fleecy cloud, with sun-whitened border, a light, gracious, plentiful rain was falling. A rainbow sprang across the sky, and the statue stood within the rainbow. At the same moment, from the base of the pedestal rose a figure in white, graceful as the Dryad above, and neither running, nor appearing to walk quickly, yet fleet as a ghost, glided past me at a few paces, distance, and, keeping in a straight line for the main entrance of the hall, entered by it and vanished.

I followed in the direction of the mansion, which was large, and of several styles and ages. One wing appeared especially ancient. It was neglected and out of repair, and had in consequence a desolate, almost sepulchral look, an expression heightened by the number of large cypresses which grew along its line. I went up to the central door and knocked. It was opened by a grave, elderly butler. I passed under its flat arch, as if into the midst of the waiting events of my story. For, as I glanced around the hall, my consciousness was suddenly saturated, if I may be allowed the expression, with the strange feeling—known to everyone, and yet so strange—that I had seen it before; that, in fact, I knew it perfectly. But what was yet more strange, and far more uncommon, was, that, although the feeling with regard to the hall faded and vanished instantly, and although I could not in the least surmise the appearance of any of the regions into which I was about to be ushered, I yet followed the butler with a kind of indefinable expectation of seeing something which I had seen before; and every room or passage in that mansion affected me, on entering it for the first time, with the same sensation of previous acquaintance which I had experienced with regard to the hall. This sensation, in every case, died away at once, leaving that portion such as it might be expected to look to one who had never before entered the place.

I was received by the housekeeper, a little, prim, benevolent old lady, with colourless face and antique head-dress, who led me to the room prepared for me. To my surprise, I found a large wood-fire burning on the hearth; but the feeling of the place revealed at once the necessity for it; and I scarcely needed to be informed that the room, which was upon the ground floor, and looked out upon a little solitary grass-grown and ivy-mantled court, had not been used for years, and therefore required to be thus prepared for an inmate. My bedroom was a few paces down a passage to the right.

Left alone, I proceeded to make a more critical survey of my room. Its look of ancient mystery was to me incomparably more attractive than any show of elegance or comfort could have been. It was large and low, panelled throughout in oak, black with age, and worm-eaten in many parts—otherwise entire. Both the windows looked into the little court or yard before mentioned. All the heavier furniture of the room was likewise of black oak, but the chairs and couches were covered with faded tapestry and tarnished gilding, apparently the superannuated members of the general household of seats. I could give an individual description of each, for every atom in that room, large enough for discernable shape or colour, seems branded into my brain. If I happen to have the least feverishness on me, the moment I fall asleep, I am in that room.

CHAPTER V. *Lady Alice*

When the bell rang for dinner, I managed to find my way to the drawing-room, where were assembled Lady Hilton, her only daughter, a girl of about thirteen, and the two boys, my pupils. Lady Hilton would have been pleasant, could she have been as natural as she wished to appear. She received me with some degree of kindness; but the half-cordiality of her manner towards me was evidently founded on the impassableness of the gulf between us. I knew at once that we should never be friends; that she would never come down from the lofty table-land upon which she walked; and that if, after being years in the house, I should happen to be dying, she would send the housekeeper to me. All right, no doubt; I only say that it was so. She introduced to me my pupils; fine, open-eyed,

manly English boys, with something a little overbearing in their manner, which speedily disappeared in relation to me. Lord Hilton was not at home. Lady Hilton led the way to the dining-room; the elder boy gave his arm to his sister, and I was about to follow with the younger, when from one of the deep bay windows glided out, still in white, the same figure which had passed me upon the lawn. I started, and drew back. With a slight bow, she preceded me, and followed the others down the great staircase. Seated at table, I had leisure to make my observations upon them all; but most of my glances found their way to the lady who, twice that day, had affected me like an apparition. What is time, but the airy ocean in which ghosts come and go!

She was about twenty years of age; rather above the middle height, and rather slight in form; her complexion white rather than pale, her face being only less white than the deep marbly whiteness of her arms. Her eyes were large, and full of liquid night—a night throbbing with the light of invisible stars. Her hair seemed raven-black, and in quantity profuse. The expression of her face, however, generally partook more of vagueness than any other characteristic. Lady Hilton called her Lady Alice; and she never addressed Lady Hilton but in the same ceremonious style.

I afterwards learned from the old house-keeper, that Lady Alice's position in the family was a very peculiar one. Distantly connected with Lord Hilton's family on the mother's side, she was the daughter of the late Lord Glendarroch, and step-daughter to Lady Hilton, who had become Lady Hilton within a year after Lord Glendarroch's death. Lady Alice, then quite a child, had accompanied her stepmother, to whom she was moderately attached, and who had been allowed to retain undisputed possession of her. She had no near relatives, else the fortune I afterwards found to be at her disposal would have aroused contending claims to the right of guardianship.

Although she was in many respects kindly treated by her stepmother, certain peculiarities tended to her isolation from the family pursuits and pleasures. Lady Alice had no accomplishments. She could neither spell her own language, nor even read it aloud. Yet she delighted in reading to herself, though, for the most part, books which Mrs. Wilson characterised as very odd. Her voice, when she spoke, had a quite indescribable music in it; yet she neither sang nor played. Her habitual motion was more like a rhythmical gliding than an ordinary walk, yet she could not dance. Mrs. Wilson hinted at other and more serious peculiarities, which she either could not, or would not describe; always shaking her head gravely and sadly, and becoming quite silent, when I pressed for further explanation; so that, at last, I gave up all attempts to arrive at an understanding of the mystery by her means. Not the less, however, I speculated on the subject.

One thing soon became evident to me: that she was considered not merely deficient as to the power of intellectual acquirement, but in a quite abnormal intellectual condition. Of this, however, I could myself see no sign. The peculiarity, almost oddity, of some of her remarks, was evidently not only misunderstood, but, with relation to her mental state, misinterpreted. Such remarks Lady Hilton generally answered only by an elongation of the lips intended to represent a smile. To me, they appeared to indicate a nature closely allied to genius, if not identical with it—a power of regarding things from an original point of view, which perhaps was the more unfettered in its operation from the fact that she was incapable of looking at them in the ordinary common-place way. It seemed to me, sometimes, as if her point of observation was outside of the sphere within which the thing observed took place; and as if what she said, had a relation, occasionally, to things and thoughts and mental conditions familiar to her, but at which not even a definite guess could be made by me. I am compelled to acknowledge, however, that with such utterances as these mingled now and then others, silly enough for any drawing-room young lady; which seemed again to be accepted by the family as proofs that she was not *altogether* out of her right mind. She was gentle and kind to the children, as they were still called; and they seemed reasonably fond of her.

There was something to me exceedingly touching in the solitariness of this girl; for no one spoke to her as if she were like other people, or as if any heartiness were possible between them. Perhaps no one could have felt quite at home with her but a mother, whose heart had been one with

hers from a season long anterior to the development of any repulsive oddity. But her position was one of peculiar isolation, for no one really approached her individual being; and that she should be unaware of this loneliness, seemed to me saddest of all. I soon found, however, that the most distant attempt on my part to show her attention, was either received with absolute indifference, or coldly repelled without the slightest acknowledgment.

But I return to the first night of my sojourn at Hilton Hall.

CHAPTER VI. *My Quarters*

After making arrangements for commencing work in the morning, I took my leave, and retired to my own room, intent upon carrying out with more minuteness the survey I had already commenced: several cupboards in the wall, and one or two doors, apparently of closets, had especially attracted my attention. Strange was its look as I entered—as of a room hollowed out of the past, for a memorial of dead times. The fire had sunk low, and lay smouldering beneath the white ashes, like the life of the world beneath the snow, or the heart of a man beneath cold and grey thoughts. I lighted the candles which stood upon the table, but the room, instead of being brightened looked blacker than before, for the light revealed its essential blackness.

As I cast my eyes around me, standing with my back to the hearth (on which, for mere companionship's sake, I had just heaped fresh wood), a thrill ran suddenly throughout my frame. I felt as if, did it last a moment longer, I should become aware of another presence in the room; but, happily for me, it ceased before it had reached that point; and I, recovering my courage, remained ignorant of the cause of my fear, if there were any, other than the nature of the room itself. With a candle in my hand, I proceeded to open the various cupboards and closets. At first I found nothing remarkable about any of them. The latter were quite empty, except the last I came to, which had a piece of very old elaborate tapestry hanging at the back of it. Lifting this up, I saw what seemed at first to be panels, corresponding to those which formed the room; but on looking more closely, I discovered that this back of the closet was, or had been, a door. There was nothing unusual in this, especially in such an old house; but the discovery roused in me a strong desire to know what lay behind the old door. I found that it was secured only by an ordinary bolt, from which the handle had been removed. Soothing my conscience with the reflection that I had a right to know what sort of place had communication with my room, I succeeded, by the help of my deer-knife, in forcing back the rusty bolt; and though, from the stiffness of the hinges, I dreaded a crack, they yielded at last with only a creak.

The opening door revealed a large hall, empty utterly, save of dust and cobwebs, which festooned it in all quarters, and gave it an appearance of unutterable desolation. The now familiar feeling, that I had seen the place before, filled my mind the first moment, and passed away the next. A broad, right-angled staircase, with massive banisters, rose from the middle of the hall. This staircase could not have originally belonged to the ancient wing which I had observed on my first approach, being much more modern; but I was convinced, from the observations I had made as to the situation of my room, that I was bordering upon, if not within, the oldest portion of the pile. In sudden horror, lest I should hear a light footfall upon the awful stair, I withdrew hurriedly, and having secured both the doors, betook myself to my bedroom; in whose dingy four-post bed, with its carving and plumes reminding me of a hearse, I was soon ensconced amidst the snowiest linen, with the sweet and clean odour of lavender. In spite of novelty, antiquity, speculation, and dread, I was soon fast asleep; becoming thereby a fitter inhabitant of such regions, than when I moved about with restless and disturbing curiosity, through their ancient and death-like repose.

I made no use of my discovered door, although I always intended doing so; especially after, in talking about the building with Lady Hilton, I found that I was at perfect liberty to make what excursions I pleased into the deserted portions.

My pupils turned out to be teachable, and therefore my occupation was pleasant. Their sister frequently came to me for help, as there happened to be just then an interregnum of governesses: soon she settled into a regular pupil.

After a few weeks Lord Hilton returned. Though my room was so far from the great hall, I heard the clank of his spurs on its pavement. I trembled; for it sounded like the broken shoe. But I shook off the influence in a moment, heartily ashamed of its power over me. Soon I became familiar enough both with the sound and its cause; for his lordship rarely went anywhere except on horseback, and was booted and spurred from morning till night.

He received me with some appearance of interest, which immediately stiffened and froze. Beginning to shake hands with me as if he meant it, he instantly dropped my hand, as if it had stung him.

His nobility was of that sort which stands in constant need of repair. Like a weakly constitution, it required keeping up, and his lordship could not be said to neglect it; for he seemed to find his principal employment in administering continuous doses of obsequiousness to his own pride. His rank, like a coat made for some large ancestor, hung loose upon him: he was always trying to persuade himself that it was an excellent fit, but ever with an unacknowledged misgiving. This misgiving might have done him good, had he not met it with renewed efforts at looking that which he feared he was not. Yet this man was capable of the utmost persistency in carrying out any scheme he had once devised. Enough of him for the present: I seldom came into contact with him.

I scarcely ever saw Lady Alice, except at dinner, or by accidental meeting in the grounds and passages of the house; and then she took no notice of me whatever.

CHAPTER VII. *The Library*

One day, a week after his arrival, Lord Hilton gave a dinner-party to some of his neighbours and tenants. I entered the drawing-room rather late, and saw that, though there were many guests, not one was talking to Lady Alice. She appeared, however, altogether unconscious of neglect. Presently dinner was announced, and the company marshalled themselves, and took their way to the dining-room. Lady Alice was left unattended, the guests taking their cue from the behaviour of their entertainers. I ventured to go up to her, and offer her my arm. She made me a haughty bow, and passed on before me unaccompanied. I could not help feeling hurt at this, and I think she saw it; but it made no difference to her behaviour, except that she avoided everything that might occasion me the chance of offering my services.

Nor did I get any further with Lady Hilton. Her manner and smile remained precisely the same as on our first interview. She did not even show any interest in the fact that her daughter, Lady Lucy, had joined her brothers in the schoolroom. I had an uncomfortable feeling that the latter was like her mother, and was not to be trusted. Self-love is the foulest of all foul feeders, and will defile that it may devour. But I must not anticipate.

The neglected library was open to me at all hours; and in it I often took refuge from the dreariness of unsympathetic society. I was never admitted within the magic circle of the family interests and enjoyments. If there was such a circle, Lady Alice and I certainly stood outside of it; but whether even then it had any real inside to it, I doubted much. Nevertheless, as I have said, our common exclusion had not the effect of bringing us together as sharers of the same misfortune. In the library I found companions more to my need. But, even there, they were not easy to find; for the books were in great confusion. I could discover no catalogue, nor could I hear of the existence of such a useless luxury. One morning at breakfast, therefore, I asked Lord Hilton if I might arrange and catalogue the books during my leisure hours. He replied:—

“Do anything you like with them, Mr. Campbell, except destroy them.”

Now I was in my element. I never had been by any means a book-worm; but the very outside of a book had a charm to me. It was a kind of sacrament—an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace; as, indeed, what on God's earth is not? So I set to work amongst the books, and soon became familiar with many titles at least, which had been perfectly unknown to me before. I found a perfect set of our poets—perfect according to the notion of the editor and the issue of the publisher, although it omitted both Chaucer and George Herbert. I began to nibble at that portion of the collection which belonged to the sixteenth century; but with little success. I found nothing, to my idea, but love poems without any love in them, and so I soon became weary. But I found in the library what I liked far better—many romances of a very marvellous sort, and plentiful interruption they gave to the formation of the catalogue. I likewise came upon a whole nest of the German classics which seemed to have kept their places undisturbed, in virtue of their unintelligibility. There must have been some well-read scholar in the family, and that not long before, to judge by the near approach of the line of this literature; happening to be a tolerable reader of German, I found in these volumes a mine of wealth inexhaustible. I learned from Mrs. Wilson that this scholar was a younger brother of Lord Hilton, who had died about twenty years before. He had led a retired, rather lonely life, was of a melancholy and brooding disposition, and was reported to have had an unfortunate love-story. This was one of many histories which she gave me. For the library being dusty as a catacomb, the private room of Old Time himself, I had often to betake myself to her for assistance. The good lady had far more regard than the owners of it for the library, and was delighted with the pains I was taking to re-arrange and clean it. She would allow no one to help me but herself; and to many a long-winded story, most of which I forgot as soon as I heard them, did I listen, or seem to listen, while she dusted the shelves and I the books.

One day I had sent a servant to ask Mrs. Wilson to come to me. I had taken down all the books from a hitherto undisturbed corner, and had seated myself on a heap of them, no doubt a very impersonation of the genius of the place; for while I waited for the housekeeper, I was consuming a morsel of an ancient metrical romance. After waiting for some time, I glanced towards the door, for I had begun to get impatient for the entrance of my helper. To my surprise, there stood Lady Alice, her eyes fixed upon me with an expression I could not comprehend. Her face instantly altered to its usual look of indifference, dashed with the least possible degree of scorn, as she turned and walked slowly away. I rose involuntarily. An old cavalry sword, which I had just taken down from the wall, and had placed leaning against the books from which I now rose, fell with a clash to the floor. I started; for it was a sound that always startled me; and stooping I lifted the weapon. But what was my surprise when I raised my head, to see once more the face of Lady Alice staring in at the door! yet not the same face, for it had changed in the moment that had passed. It was pale with fear—not fright; and her great black eyes were staring beyond me as if she saw something through the wall of the room. Once more her face altered to the former scornful indifference, and she vanished. Keen of hearing as I was, I had never yet heard the footstep of Lady Alice.

CHAPTER VIII. *The Somnambulist*

One night I was sitting in my room, devouring an old romance which I had brought from the library. It was late. The fire blazed bright; but the candles were nearly burnt out, and I grew sleepy over the volume, romance as it was.

Suddenly I found myself on my feet, listening with an agony of intention. Whether I had heard anything I could not tell; but I felt as if I had. Yes; I was sure of it. Far away, somewhere in the labyrinthine pile, I heard a faint cry. Driven by some secret impulse, I flew, without a moment's reflection, to the closet door, lifted the tapestry within, unfastened the second door, and stood in the great waste echoing hall, amid the touches, light and ghostly, of the cobwebs set afloat in the eddies occasioned by my sudden entrance.

A faded moonbeam fell on the floor, and filled the place with an ancient dream-light, which wrought strangely on my brain, and filled it, as if it, too, were but a deserted, sleepy house, haunted by old dreams and memories. Recollecting myself, I went back for a light; but the candles were both flickering in the sockets, and I was compelled to trust to the moon. I ascended the staircase. Old as it was, not a board creaked, not a banister shook—the whole felt solid as rock. Finding, at length, no more stair to ascend, I groped my way on; for here there was no direct light from the moon—only the light of the moonlit air. I was in some trepidation, I confess; for how should I find my way back? But the worst result likely to ensue was, that I should have to spend the night without knowing where; for with the first glimmer of morning, I should be able to return to my room. At length, after wandering into several rooms and out again, my hand fell on a latched door. I opened it, and entered a long corridor, with many windows on one side. Broad strips of moonlight lay slantingly across the narrow floor, divided by regular intervals of shade.

I started, and my heart swelled; for I saw a movement somewhere—I could neither tell where, nor of what: I was only aware of motion. I stood in the first shadow, and gazed, but saw nothing. I sped across the light to the next shadow, and stood again, looking with fearful fixedness of gaze towards the far end of the corridor. Suddenly a white form glimmered and vanished. I crossed to the next shadow. Again a glimmer and vanishing, but nearer. Nerving myself to the utmost, I ceased the stealthiness of my movements, and went forward, slowly and steadily. A tall form, apparently of a woman, dressed in a long white robe, appeared in one of the streams of light, threw its arms over its head, gave a wild cry—which, notwithstanding its wildness and force, had a muffled sound, as if many folds, either of matter or of space, intervened—and fell at full length along the moonlight. Amidst the thrill of agony which shook me at the cry, I rushed forward, and, kneeling beside the prostrate figure, discovered that, unearthly as was the scream which had preceded her fall, it was the Lady Alice. I saw the fact in a moment: the Lady Alice was a somnambulist. Startled by the noise of my advance, she had awaked; and the usual terror and fainting had followed. She was cold and motionless as death. What was to be done? If I called, the probability was that no one would hear me; or if any one should hear—but I need not follow the course of my thought, as I tried in vain to recover the poor girl. Suffice it to say, that both for her sake and my own, I could not face the chance of being found, in the dead of night, by common-minded domestics, in such a situation.

I was kneeling by her side, not knowing what to do, when a horror, as from the presence of death suddenly recognized, fell upon me. I thought she must be dead. But at the same moment, I hear, or seemed to hear, (how should I know which?) the rapid gallop of a horse, and the clank of a loose shoe.

In an agony of fear, I caught her up in my arms, and, carrying her on my arms, as one carries a sleeping child, hurried back through the corridor. Her hair, which was loose, trailed on the ground; and, as I fled, I trampled on it and stumbled. She moaned; and that instant the gallop ceased. I lifted her up across my shoulder, and carried her more easily. How I found my way to the stair I cannot tell: I know that I groped about for some time, like one in a dream with a ghost in his arms. At last I reached it, and descending, crossed the hall, and entered my room. There I placed Lady Alice upon an old couch, secured the doors, and began to breathe—and think. The first thing was to get her warm, for she was cold as the dead. I covered her with my plaid and my dressing-gown, pulled the couch before the fire, and considered what to do next.

CHAPTER IX. *The First Waking*

While I hesitated, Nature had her own way, and, with a deep-drawn sigh, Lady Alice opened her eyes. Never shall I forget the look of mingled bewilderment, alarm, and shame, with which her great eyes met mine. But, in a moment, this expression changed to that of anger. Her dark eyes flashed with light; and a cloud of roseate wrath grew in her face, till it glowed with the opaque red of a camellia. She had almost started from the couch, when, apparently discovering the unsuitableness of

her dress, she checked her impetuosity, and remained leaning on her elbow. Overcome by her anger, her beauty, and my own confusion, I knelt before her, unable to speak, or to withdraw my eyes from hers. After a moment's pause, she began to question me like a queen, and I to reply like a culprit.

"How did I come here?"

"I carried you."

"Where did you find me, pray?"

Her lip curled with ten times the usual scorn.

"In the old house, in a long corridor."

"What right had you to be there?"

"I heard a cry, and could not help going."

"Tis impossible.—I see. Some wretch told you, and you watched for me."

"I did not, Lady Alice."

She burst into tears, and fell back on the couch, with her face turned away. Then, anger reviving, she went on through her sobs:—

"Why did you not leave me where I fell? You had done enough to hurt me without bringing me here."

And again she fell a-weeping.

Now I found words.

"Lady Alice," I said, "how could I leave you lying in the moonlight? Before the sun rose, the terrible moon might have distorted your beautiful face."

"Be silent, sir. What have you to do with my face?"

"And the wind, Lady Alice, was blowing through the corridor windows, keen and cold as the moonlight. How could I leave you?"

"You could have called for help."

"Forgive me, Lady Alice, if I erred in thinking you would rather command the silence of a gentleman to whom an accident had revealed your secret, than be exposed to the domestics who would have gathered round us."

Again she half raised herself, and again her eyes flashed.

"A secret with *you*, sir!"

"But, besides, Lady Alice," I cried, springing to my feet, in distress at her hardness, "I heard the horse with the clanking shoe, and, in terror, I caught you up, and fled with you, almost before I knew what I did. And I hear it now—I hear it now!" I cried, as once more the ominous sound rang through my brain.

The angry glow faded from her face, and its paleness grew almost ghastly with dismay.

"Do *you* hear it?" she said, throwing back her covering, and rising from the couch. "I do not."

She stood listening with distended eyes, as if *they* were the gates by which such sounds entered.

"I do not hear it," she said again, after a pause. "It must be gone now." Then, turning to me, she laid her hand on my arm, and looked at me. Her black hair, disordered and entangled, wandered all over her white dress to her knees. Her face was paler than ever; and her eyes were so wide open that I could see the white all round the large dark iris.

"Did you hear it?" she said. "No one ever heard it before but me. I must forgive you—you could not help it. I will trust you, too. Take me to my room."

Without a word of reply, I wrapped my plaid about her. Then bethinking me of my chamber-candle, I lighted it, and opening the two doors, led her out of the room.

"How is this?" she asked. "Why do you take me this way? I do not know the place."

"This is the way I brought you in, Lady Alice," I answered. "I know no other way to the spot where I found you. And I can guide you no farther than there—hardly even so far, for I groped my way there for the first time this night or morning—whichever it may be."

“It is past midnight, but not morning yet,” she replied, “I always know. But there must be another way from your room?”

“Yes, of course; but we should have to pass the housekeeper’s door—she is always late.”

“Are we near her room? I should know my way from there. I fear it would not surprise any of the household to see me. They would say—‘It is only Lady Alice.’ Yet I cannot tell you how I shrink from being seen. No—I will try the way you brought me—if you do not mind going back with me.”

This conversation passed in low tone and hurried words. It was scarcely over before we found ourselves at the foot of the staircase. Lady Alice shivered, and drew the plaid close round her.

We ascended, and soon found the corridor; but when we got through it, she was rather bewildered. At length, after looking into several of the rooms, empty all, except for stray articles of ancient furniture, she exclaimed, as she entered one, and, taking the candle from my hand, held it above her head—

“Ah, yes! I am right at last. This is the haunted room. I know my way now.”

I caught a darkling glimpse of a large room, apparently quite furnished; but how, except from the general feeling of antiquity and mustiness, I could not tell. Little did I think then what memories—old, now, like the ghosts that with them haunt the place—would ere long find their being and take their abode in that ancient room, to forsake it never more. In strange, half-waking moods, I seem to see the ghosts and the memories flitting together through the spectral moonlight, and weaving mystic dances in and out of the storied windows and the tapestried walls.

At the door of this room she said, “I must leave you here. I will put down the light a little further on, and you can come for it. I owe you many thanks. You will not be afraid of being left so near the haunted room?”

I assured her that at present I felt strong enough to meet all the ghosts in or out of Hades. Turning, she smiled a sad, sweet smile, then went on a few paces, and disappeared. The light, however, remained; and I found the candle, with my plaid, deposited at the foot of a short flight of steps, at right angles to the passage she left me in. I made my way back to my room, threw myself on the couch on which she had so lately lain, and neither went to bed nor slept that night. Before the morning, I had fully entered that phase of individual development commonly called *love*, of which the real nature is as great a mystery to me now, as it was at any period previous to its evolution in myself.

CHAPTER X. *Love and Power*

When the morning came, I began to doubt whether my wakefulness had not been part of my dream, and I had not dreamed the whole of my supposed adventures. There was no sign of a lady’s presence left in the room.—How could there have been?—But throwing the plaid which covered me aside, my hand was caught by a single thread of something so fine that I could not see it till the light grew strong. I wound it round and round my finger, and doubted no longer.

At breakfast there was no Lady Alice—nor at dinner. I grew uneasy, but what could I do? I soon learned that she was ill; and a weary fortnight passed before I saw her again. Mrs. Wilson told me that she had caught cold, and was confined to her room. So I was ill at ease, not from love alone, but from anxiety as well. Every night I crept up through the deserted house to the stair where she had vanished, and there sat in the darkness or groped and peered about for some sign. But I saw no light even, and did not know where her room was. It might be far beyond this extremity of my knowledge; for I discovered no indication of the proximity of the inhabited portion of the house. Mrs. Wilson said there was nothing serious the matter; but this did not satisfy me, for I imagined something mysterious in the way in which she spoke.

As the days went on, and she did not appear, my soul began to droop within me; my intellect seemed about to desert me altogether. In vain I tried to read. Nothing could fix my attention. I read and re-read the same page; but although I understood every word as I read, I found when I came to a

pause, that there lingered in my mind no palest notion of the idea. It was just what one experiences in attempting to read when half-asleep.

I tried Euclid, and fared a little better with that. But having now to initiate my boys into the mysteries of equations, I soon found that although I could manage a very simple one, yet when I attempted one more complex—one in which something bordering upon imagination was necessary to find out the object for which to appoint the symbol to handle it by—the necessary power of concentration was itself a missing factor.

But although my thoughts were thus beyond my control, my duties were not altogether irksome to me. I remembered that they kept me near her; and although I could not learn, I found that I could teach a little.

Perhaps it is foolish to dwell upon an individual variety of an almost universal stage in the fever of life; but one exception to these indications of mental paralysis I think worth mentioning.

I continued my work in the library, although it did not advance with the same steadiness as before. One day, in listless mood, I took up a volume, without knowing what it was, or what I sought. It opened at the *Amoretti* of Edmund Spenser. I was on the point of closing it again, when a line caught my eye. I read the sonnet; read another; found I could understand them perfectly; and that hour the poetry of the sixteenth century, hitherto a sealed fountain, became an open well of refreshment, and the strength that comes from sympathy. What if its second-rate writers were full of conceits and vagaries, the feelings are very indifferent to the mere intellectual forms around which the same feelings in others have gathered, if only by their means they hint at, and sometimes express themselves. Now I understood this old fantastic verse, and knew that the foam-bells on the torrent of passionate feeling are iris-hued. And what was more—it proved an intellectual nexus between my love and my studies, or at least a bridge by which I could pass from the one to the other.

That same day, I remember well, Mrs. Wilson told me that Lady Alice was much better. But as days passed, and still she did not make her appearance, my anxiety only changed its object, and I feared that it was from aversion to me that she did not join the family. But her name was never mentioned in my hearing by any of the other members of it; and her absence appeared to be to them a matter of no moment or interest.

One night, as I sat in my room, I found, as usual, that it was impossible to read; and throwing the book aside, relapsed into that sphere of thought which now filled my soul, and had for its centre the Lady Alice. I recalled her form as she lay on the couch, and brooded over the remembrance till a longing to see her, almost unbearable, arose within me.

“Would to heaven,” I said to myself, “that will were power!”

In this concurrence of idleness, distraction, and vehement desire, I found all at once, without any foregone resolution, that I was concentrating and intensifying within me, until it rose almost to a command, the operative volition that Lady Alice should come to me. In a moment more I trembled at the sense of a new power which sprang into conscious being within me. I had had no prevision of its existence, when I gave way to such extravagant and apparently helpless wishes. I now actually awaited the fulfilment of my desire; but in a condition ill-fitted to receive it, for the effort had already exhausted me to such a degree, that every nerve was in a conscious tremor. Nor had I long to wait.

I heard no sound of approach: the closet-door folded back, and in glided, open-eyed, but sightless pale as death, and clad in white, ghostly-pure and saint-like, the Lady Alice. I shuddered from head to foot at what I had done. She was more terrible to me in that moment than any pale-eyed ghost could have been. For had I not exercised a kind of necromantic art, and roused without awaking the slumbering dead? She passed me, walking round the table at which I was seated, went to the couch, laid herself down with a maidenly care, turned a little on one side, with her face towards me, and gradually closed her eyes. In something deeper than sleep she lay, and yet not in death. I rose, and once more knelt beside her, but dared not touch her. In what far realms of life might the lovely soul be straying! What mysterious modes of being might now be the homely surroundings of

her second life! Thoughts unutterable rose in me, culminated, and sank, like the stars of heaven, as I gazed on the present symbol of an absent life—a life that I loved by means of the symbol; a symbol that I loved because of the life. How long she lay thus, how long I gazed upon her thus, I do not know. Gradually, but without my being able to distinguish the gradations, her countenance altered to that of one who sleeps. But the change did not end there. A colour, faint as the blush in the centre of a white rose, tinged her lips, and deepened; then her cheek began to share in the hue, then her brow and her neck. The colour was that of the cloud which, the farthest from the sunset, yet acknowledges the rosy atmosphere. I watched, as it were, the dawn of a soul on the horizon of the visible. The first approaches of its far-off flight were manifest; and as I watched, I saw it come nearer and nearer, till its great, silent, speeding pinions were folded, and it looked forth, a calm, beautiful, infinite woman, from the face and form sleeping before me.

I knew that she was awake, some moments before she opened her eyes. When at last those depths of darkness disclosed themselves, slowly uplifting their white cloudy portals, the same consternation she had formerly manifested, accompanied by yet greater anger, followed.

“Yet again! Am I your slave, because I am weak?” She rose in the majesty of wrath, and moved towards the door.

“Lady Alice, I have not touched you. I am to blame, but not as you think. Could I help longing to see you? And if the longing passed, ere I was aware, into a will that you should come, and you obeyed it, forgive me.”

I hid my face in my hands, overcome by conflicting emotions. A kind of stupor came over me. When I lifted my head, she was standing by the closet-door.

“I have waited,” she said, “to make a request of you.”

“Do not utter it, Lady Alice. I know what it is. I give you my word—my solemn promise, if you like—that I will never do it again.” She thanked me, with a smile, and vanished.

Much to my surprise, she appeared at dinner next day. No notice was taken of her, except by the younger of my pupils, who called out,—

“Hallo, Alice! Are you down?”

She smiled and nodded, but did not speak. Everything went on as usual. There was no change in her behaviour, except in one point. I ventured the experiment of paying her some ordinary enough attention. She thanked me, without a trace of the scornful expression I all but expected to see upon her beautiful face. But when I addressed her about the weather, or something equally interesting, she made no reply; and Lady Hilton gave me a stare, as much as to say, “Don’t you know it’s of no use to talk to her?” Alice saw the look, and colouring to the eyes, rose, and left the room. When she had gone, Lady Hilton said to me,—

“Don’t speak to her, Mr. Campbell—it distresses her. She is very peculiar, you know.”

She could not hide the scorn and dislike with which she spoke; and I could not help saying to myself, “What a different thing scorn looks on *your* face, Lady Hilton!” for it made her positively and hatefully ugly for the moment—to my eyes, at least.

After this, Alice sat down with us at all our meals, and seemed tolerably well. But, in some indescribable way, she was quite a different person from the Lady Alice who had twice awaked in my presence. To use a phrase common in describing one of weak intellect—she never seemed to be all there. There was something automatical in her movements; and a sort of frozen indifference was the prevailing expression of her countenance. When she smiled, a sweet light shone in her eyes, and she looked for the moment like the Lady Alice of my nightly dreams. But, altogether, the Lady Alice of the night, and the Lady Alice of the day, were two distinct persons. I believed that the former was the real one.

What nights I had now, watching and striving lest unawares I should fall into the exercise of my new power! I allowed myself to think of her as much as I pleased in the daytime, or at least as much as I dared; for when occupied with my pupils, I dreaded lest any abstraction should even hint

that I had a thought to conceal. I knew that I could not hurt her then; for that only in the night did she enter that state of existence in which my will could exercise authority over her. But at night—at night—when I knew she lay there, and might be lying here; when but a thought would bring her, and that thought was fluttering its wings, ready to spring awake out of the dreams of my heart—then the struggle was fearful. And what added force to the temptation was, that to call her to me in the night, seemed like calling the real immortal Alice forth from the tomb in which she wandered about all day. It was as painful to me to see her such in the day, as it was entrancing to remember her such as I had seen her in the night. What matter if her true self came forth in anger against me? What was I? It was enough for my life, I said, to look on her, such as she really was. “Bring her yet once, and tell her all—tell her how madly, hopelessly you love her. She will forgive you at least,” said a voice within me. But I heard it as the voice of the tempter, and kept down the thought which might have grown to the will.

CHAPTER XI. *A New Pupil*

One day, exactly three weeks after her last visit to my room, as I was sitting with my three pupils in the schoolroom, Lady Alice entered, and began to look on the bookshelves as if she wanted some volume. After a few moments, she turned, and, approaching the table, said to me, in an abrupt, yet hesitating way.

“Mr. Campbell, I cannot spell. How am I to learn?”

I thought for a moment, and replied: “Copy a passage every day, Lady Alice, from some favourite book. Then, if you allow me, I shall be most happy to point out any mistakes you may have made.”

“Thank you, Mr. Campbell, I will; but I am afraid you will despise me, when you find how badly I spell.”

“There is no fear of that,” I rejoined. “It is a mere peculiarity. So long as one can *think* well, spelling is altogether secondary.”

“Thank you; I will try,” she said, and left the room. Next day, she brought me an old ballad, written tolerably, but in a school-girl’s hand. She had copied the antique spelling, letter for letter.

“This is quite correct,” I said; “but to copy such as this will not teach you properly; for it is very old, and consequently old-fashioned.”

“Is it old? Don’t we spell like that now? You see I do not know anything about it. You must set me a task, then.”

This I undertook with more pleasure than I dared to show. Every day she brought me the appointed exercise, written with a steadily improving hand. To my surprise, I never found a single error in the spelling. Of course, when, advancing a step in the process, I made her write from my dictation, she did make blunders, but not so many as I had expected; and she seldom repeated one after correction.

This new association gave me many opportunities of doing more for her than merely teaching her to spell. We talked about what she copied; and I had to explain. I also told her about the writers. Soon she expressed a desire to know something of figures. We commenced arithmetic. I proposed geometry along with it, and found the latter especially fitted to her powers. One by one we included several other necessary branches; and ere long I had four around the schoolroom table—equally my pupils. Whether the attempts previously made to instruct her had been insufficient or misdirected, or whether her intellectual powers had commenced a fresh growth, I could not tell; but I leaned to the latter conclusion, especially after I began to observe that her peculiar remarks had become modified in form, though without losing any of their originality. The unearthliness of her beauty likewise disappeared, a slight colour displacing the almost marbly whiteness of her cheek.

Long before Lady Alice had made this progress, my nightly struggles began to diminish in violence. They had now entirely ceased. The temptation had left me. I felt certain that for weeks she had never walked in her sleep. She was beyond my power, and I was glad of it.

I was, of course, most careful of my behaviour during all this period. I strove to pay Lady Alice no more attention than I paid to the rest of my pupils; and I cannot help thinking that I succeeded. But now and then, in the midst of some instruction I was giving Lady Alice, I caught the eye of Lady Lucy, a sharp, common-minded girl, fixed upon one or the other of us, with an inquisitive vulgar expression, which I did not like. This made me more careful still. I watched my tones, to keep them even, and free from any expression of the feeling of which my heart was full. Sometimes, however, I could not help revealing the gratification I felt when she made some marvellous remark—marvellous, I mean, in relation to her other attainments; such a remark as a child will sometimes make, showing that he has already mastered, through his earnest simplicity, some question that has for ages perplexed the wise and the prudent. On one of these occasions, I found the cat eyes of Lady Lucy glittering on me. I turned away; not, I fear, without showing some displeasure.

Whether it was from Lady Lucy's evil report, or that the change in Lady Alice's habits and appearance had attracted the attention of Lady Hilton, I cannot tell; but one morning she appeared at the door of the study, and called her. Lady Alice rose and went, with a slight gesture of impatience. In a few minutes she returned, looking angry and determined, and resumed her seat. But whatever it was that had passed between them, it had destroyed that quiet flow of the feelings which was necessary to the working of her thoughts. In vain she tried: she could do nothing correctly. At last she burst into tears and left the room. I was almost beside myself with distress and apprehension. She did not return that day.

Next morning she entered at the usual hour, looking composed, but paler than of late, and showing signs of recent weeping. When we were all seated, and had just commenced our work, I happened to look up, and caught her eyes intently fixed on me. They dropped instantly, but without any appearance of confusion. She went on with her arithmetic, and succeeded tolerably. But this respite was to be of short duration. Lady Hilton again entered, and called her. She rose angrily, and my quick ear caught the half-uttered words, "That woman will make an idiot of me again!" She did not return; and never from that hour resumed her place in the schoolroom.

The time passed heavily. At dinner she looked proud and constrained; and spoke only in monosyllables.

For two days I scarcely saw her. But the third day, as I was busy in the library alone, she entered. "Can I help you, Mr. Campbell?" she said.

I glanced involuntarily towards the door.

"Lady Hilton is not at home," she replied to my look, while a curl of indignation contended with a sweet tremor of shame for the possession of her lip.—"Let me help you."

"You will help me best if you sing that ballad I heard you singing just before you came in. I never heard you sing before."

"Didn't you? I don't think I ever did sing before."

"Sing it again, will you, please?"

"It is only two verses. My old Scotch nurse used to sing it when I was a little girl—oh, so long ago! I didn't know I could sing it."

She began without more ado, standing in the middle of the room, with her back towards the door.

Annie was dowie, an' Willie was wae:
What can be the matter wi' siccan a twae?
For Annie was bonnie's the first o' the day,
And Willie was strang an' honest an' gay.

Oh! the tane had a daddy was poor an' was proud;
An' the tither a minnie that cared for the gowd.
They lo'ed are anither, an' said their say—
But the daddy an' minnie hae pairtit the twae.

Just as she finished the song, I saw the sharp eyes of Lady Lucy peeping in at the door.

“Lady Lucy is watching at the door, Lady Alice,” I said.

“I don't care,” she answered; but turned with a flush on her face, and stepped noiselessly to the door.

“There is no one there,” she said, returning.

“There was, though,” I answered.

“They want to drive me mad,” she cried, and hurried from the room.

The next day but one, she came again with the same request. But she had not been a minute in the library before Lady Hilton came to the door and called her in angry tones.

“Presently,” replied Alice, and remained where she was.

“Do go, Lady Alice,” I said. “They will send me away if you refuse.”

She blushed scarlet, and went without another word.

She came no more to the library.

CHAPTER XII. *Confession*

Day followed day, the one the child of the other. Alice's old paleness and unearthly look began to reappear; and, strange to tell, my midnight temptation revived. After a time she ceased to dine with us again, and for days I never saw her. It was the old story of suffering with me, only more intense than before. The day was dreary, and the night stormy. “Call her,” said my heart; but my conscience resisted.

I was lying on the floor of my room one midnight, with my face to the ground, when suddenly I heard a low, sweet, strange voice singing somewhere. The moment I became aware that I heard it I felt as if I had been listening to it unconsciously for some minutes past. I lay still, either charmed to stillness, or fearful of breaking the spell. As I lay, I was lapt in the folds of a waking dream.

I was in bed in a castle, on the seashore; the wind came from the sea in chill *eerie soughs*, and the waves fell with a threatening tone upon the beach, muttering many maledictions as they rushed up, and whispering cruel portents as they drew back, hissing and gurgling, through the million narrow ways of the pebbly ramparts; and I knew that a maiden in white was standing in the cold wind, by the angry sea, singing. I had a kind of dreamy belief in my dream; but, overpowered by the spell of the music, I still lay and listened. Keener and stronger, under the impulses of my will, grew the power of my hearing. At last I could distinguish the words. The ballad was *Annie of Lochroyan*; and Lady Alice was singing it. The words I heard were these:—

Oh, gin I had a bonnie ship,
And men to sail wi' me,
It's I wad gang to my true love,
Sin' he winna come to me.

Lang stood she at her true love's door,
And lang tirdled at the pin;
At length up gat his fause mother,
Says, “Wha's that wad be in?”

Love Gregory started frae his sleep,
And to his mother did say:
“I dreamed a dream this night, mither,
That maks my heart right wae.

“I dreamed that Annie of Lochroyan,
The flower of a’ her kin,
Was standing mournin’ at my door,
But nane wad let her in.”

I sprang to my feet, and opened the hidden door. There she stood, white, asleep, with closed eyes, singing like a bird, only with a heartful of sad meaning in every tone. I stepped aside, without speaking, and she passed me into the room. I closed the door, and followed her. She lay already upon the couch, still and restful—already covered with my plaid. I sat down beside her, waiting; and gazed upon her in wonderment. That she was possessed of very superior intellectual powers, whatever might be the cause of their having lain dormant so long, I had already fully convinced myself; but I was not prepared to find art as well as intellect. I had already heard her sing the little song of two verses, which she had learned from her nurse. But here was a song, of her own making as to the music, so true and so potent, that, before I knew anything of the words, it had surrounded me with a dream of the place in which the scene of the ballad was laid. It did not then occur to me that, perhaps, our idiosyncrasies were such as not to require even the music of the ballad for the production of *rapport* between our minds, the brain of the one generating in the brain of the other the vision present to itself.

I sat and thought:—Some obstruction in the gateways, outward, prevented her, in her waking hours, from uttering herself at all. This obstruction, damming back upon their sources the out-goings of life, threw her into this abnormal sleep. In it the impulse to utterance, still unsatisfied, so wrought within her unable, yet compliant form, that she could not rest, but rose and walked. And now, a fresh surge from the sea of her unknown being, unrepressed by the *hitherto* of the objects of sense, had burst the gates and bars, swept the obstructions from its channel, and poured from her in melodious song.

The first green lobes, at least, of these thoughts, appeared above the soil of my mind, while I sat and gazed on the sleeping girl. And now I had once more the delight of watching a spirit-dawn, a soul-rise, in that lovely form. The light flushing of its pallid sky was, as before, the first sign. I dreaded the flash of lovely flame, and the outburst of regnant anger, ere I should have time to say that I was not to blame. But when, at length, the full dawn, the slow sunrise came, it was with all the gentleness of a cloudy summer morn. Never did a more celestial rosy red hang about the skirts of the level sun, than deepened and glowed upon her face, when, opening her eyes, she saw me beside her. She covered her face with her hands; and instead of the words of indignant reproach which I dreaded to hear, she murmured behind the snowy screen: “I am glad you have broken your promise.”

My heart gave a bound and was still. I grew faint with delight. “No,” I said; “I have not broken my promise, Lady Alice; I have struggled nearly to madness to keep it—and I have kept it.”

“I have come then of myself. Worse and worse! But it is their fault.”

Tears now found their way through the repressing fingers. I could not endure to see her weep. I knelt beside her, and, while she still covered her face with her hands, I said—I do not know what I said. They were wild, and, doubtless, foolish words in themselves, but they must have been wise and true in their meaning. When I ceased, I knew that I had ceased only by the great silence around me. I was still looking at her hands. Slowly she withdrew them. It was as when the sun breaks forth on a cloudy day. The winter was over and gone; the time of the singing of birds had come. She smiled on me through her tears, and heart met heart in the light of that smile.

She rose to go at once, and I begged for no delay. I only stood with clasped hands, gazing at her. She turned at the door, and said;

“I daresay I shall come again; I am afraid I cannot help it; only mind you do not wake me.”

Before I could reply, I was alone; and I felt that I must not follow her.

CHAPTER XIII. *Questioning*

I laid myself on the couch she had left, but not to sleep. A new pulse of life, stronger than I could bear, was throbbing within me. I dreaded a fever, lest I should talk in it, and drop the clue to my secret treasure. But the light of the morning stilled me, and a bath in ice-cold water made me strong again. Yet I felt all that day as if I were dying a delicious death, and going to a yet more exquisite life. As far as I might, however, I repressed all indications of my delight; and endeavoured, for the sake both of duty and of prudence, to be as attentive to my pupils and their studies as it was possible for man to be. This helped to keep me in my right mind. But, more than all my efforts at composure, the pain which, as far as my experience goes, invariably accompanies, and sometimes even usurps, the place of the pleasure which gave it birth, was efficacious in keeping me sane.

Night came, but brought no Lady Alice. It was a week before I saw her again. Her heart had been stilled, and she was able to sleep aright.

But seven nights after, she did come. I waited her awaking, possessed with one painful thought, which I longed to impart to her. She awoke with a smile, covered her face for a moment, but only for a moment, and then sat up. I stood before her; and the first words I spoke were:

“Lady Alice, ought I not to go?”

“No,” she replied at once. “I can claim some compensation from them for the wrong they have been doing me. Do you know in what relation I stand to Lord and Lady Hilton? They are but my stepmother and her husband.”

“I know that.”

“Well, I have a fortune of my own, about which I never thought or cared—till—till—within the last few weeks. Lord Hilton is my guardian. Whether they made me the stupid creature I *was*, I do not know; but I believe they have represented me as far worse than I was, to keep people from making my acquaintance. They prevented my going on with my lessons, because they saw I was getting to understand things, and grow like other people; and that would not suit their purposes. It would be false delicacy in you to leave me to them, when you can make up to me for their injustice. Their behaviour to me takes away any right they had over me, and frees you from any obligation, because I am yours.—Am I not?”

Once more she covered her face with her hands. I could answer only by withdrawing one of them, which I *was* now emboldened to keep in my own.

I was very willingly persuaded to what was so much my own desire. But whether the reasoning was quite just or not, I am not yet sure. Perhaps it might be so for her, and yet not for me: I do not know; I am a poor casuist.

She resumed, laying her other hand upon mine:—

“It would be to tell the soul which you have called forth, to go back into its dark moaning cavern, and never more come out to the light of day.”

How could I resist this?

A long pause ensued.

“It is strange,” she said, at length, “to feel, when I lie down at night, that I may awake in your presence, without knowing how. It is strange, too, that, although I should be utterly ashamed to come wittingly, I feel no confusion when I find myself here. When I feel myself coming awake, I lie for a little while with my eyes closed, wondering and hoping, and afraid to open them, lest I should find

myself only in my own chamber; shrinking a little, too—just a little—from the first glance into your face.”

“But when you awake, do you know nothing of what has taken place in your sleep?”

“Nothing whatever.”

“Have you no vague sensations, no haunting shadows, no dim ghostly moods, seeming to belong to that condition, left?”

“None whatever.”

She rose, said “Good-night,” and left me.

CHAPTER XIV. *Jealousy*

Again seven days passed before she revisited me. Indeed, her visits had always an interval of seven days, or a multiple of seven, between.

Since the last, a maddening jealousy had seized me. For, returning from those unknown regions into which her soul had wandered away, and where she had stayed for hours, did she not sometimes awake with a smile? How could I be sure that she did not lead two distinct existences?—that she had not some loving spirit, or man, who, like her, had for a time left the body behind—who was all in all to her in that region, and whom she forgot when she forsook it, as she forgot me when she entered it? It was a thought I could not brook. But I put aside its persistency as well as I could, till she should come again. For this I waited. I could not now endure the thought of compelling the attendance of her unconscious form; of making her body, like a living cage, transport to my presence the unresisting soul. I shrank from it as a true man would shrink from kissing the lips of a sleeping woman whom he loved, not knowing that she loved him in return.

It may well be said that to follow such a doubt was to inquire too curiously; but once the thought had begun, and grown, and been born, how was I to slay the monster, and be free of its hated presence? Was its truth not a possibility?—Yet how could even she help me, for she knew nothing of the matter? How could she vouch for the unknown? What news can the serene face of the moon, ever the same to us, give of the hidden half of herself turned ever towards what seems to us but the blind abysmal darkness, which yet has its own light and its own life? All I could hope for was to see her, to tell her, to be comforted at least by her smile.

My saving angel glided blind into my room, lay down upon her bier, and awaited the resurrection. I sat and awaited mine, panting to untwine from my heart the cold death-worm that twisted around it, yet picturing to myself the glow of love on the averted face of the beautiful spirit—averted from me, and bending on a radiant companion all the light withdrawn from the lovely form beside me. That light began to return. “She is coming, she is coming,” I said within me. “Back from its glowing south travels the sun of my spring, the glory of my summer.” Floating slowly up from the infinite depths of her being, came the conscious woman; up—up from the realms of stillness lying deeper than the plummet of self-knowledge can sound; up from the formless, up into the known, up into the material, up to the windows that look forth on the embodied mysteries around. Her eyelids rose. One look of love all but slew my fear. When I told her my grief, she answered with a smile of pity, yet half of disdain at the thought.

“If ever I find it so, I will kill myself there, that I may go to my Hades with you. But if I am dreaming of another, how is it that I always rise in my vision and come to you? You will go crazy if you fancy such foolish things,” she added, with a smile of reproof.

The spectral thought vanished, and I was free.

“Shall I tell you,” she resumed, covering her face with her hands, “why I behaved so proudly to you, from the very first day you entered the house? It was because, when I passed you on the lawn, before ever you entered the house, I felt a strange, undefinable attraction towards you, which continued, although I could not account for it and would not yield to it. I was heartily annoyed at it.

But you see it was of no use—here I am. That was what made me so fierce, too, when I first found myself in your room.”

It was indeed long before she came to my room again.

CHAPTER XV. *The Chamber of Ghosts*

But now she returned once more into the usual routine of the family. I fear I was unable to repress all signs of agitation when, next day, she entered the dining-room, after we were seated, and took her customary place at the table. Her behaviour was much the same as before; but her face was very different. There was light in it now, and signs of mental movement. The smooth forehead would be occasionally wrinkled, and she would fall into moods which were evidently not of inanity, but of abstracted thought. She took especial care that our eyes should not meet. If by chance they did, instead of sinking hers, she kept them steady, and opened them wider, as if she was fixing them on nothing at all, or she raised them still higher, as if she was looking at something above me, before she allowed them to fall. But the change in her altogether was such that it must have attracted the notice and roused the speculation of Lady Hilton at least. For me, so well did she act her part, that I was thrown into perplexity by it. And when day after day passed, and the longing to speak to her grew, and remained unsatisfied, new doubts arose. Perhaps she was tired of me. Perhaps her new studies filled her mind with the clear, gladsome morning light of the pure intellect, which always throws doubt and distrust and a kind of negation upon the moonlight of passion, mysterious, and mingled ever with faint shadows of pain. I walked as in an unresting sleep. Utterly as I loved her, I was yet alarmed and distressed to find how entirely my being had grown dependent upon her love; how little of individual, self-existing, self-upholding life, I seemed to have left; how little I cared for anything, save as I could associate it with her.

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