

Stories from the Diary of a Doctor.

By the Authors of "THE MEDICINE LADY."

V.—A DEATH CERTIFICATE.



FEW things in my busy life gave me more pleasure than the engagement of my friend, Will Raymond. He was a man of a peculiar temperament, and, from time to time, his friends had experienced some slight anxiety about him. He was a hermit, and eschewed society. Women in especial were detestable to him, and although those who knew him well could speak much in his favour, he made few friends and lived a solitary life on his large and beautiful estate in Berkshire.

When Raymond fell in love, however—over head and ears in love is quite the correct phrase on this occasion, and the girl of his choice turned out to be all that the most fastidious could desire—there was rejoicing among his acquaintances, and the wedding-day was hailed with anticipations of pleasure.

Raymond Towers was refurbished for the coming of the bride, and Raymond suddenly blossomed out in a new character—he was friendly to everyone, he laughed at girls' jokes, and was jolly to the many men whom he met; in short, he was a transformed being. All this change was due to the sunny influence of pretty Margaret Travers, or Maggie, as her lover called her.

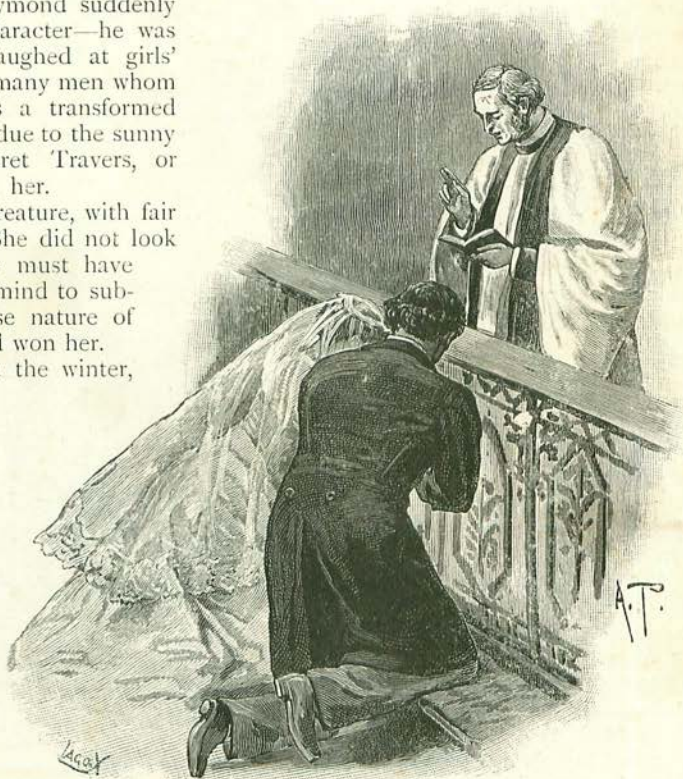
She was a slight little creature, with fair hair and dark grey eyes. She did not look particularly strong, but she must have had some latent strength of mind to subdue the rough and morose nature of the man who had wooed and won her.

The pair were married in the winter, and were attended to the altar by a numerous company of friends.

I happened to be one of them, for Will would not hear of the knot being tied except in my presence. I was too busy to do anything more than attend the pair to the altar. It was then I first noticed a peculiar look in Mrs. Raymond's beautiful eyes. They were large, of a very dark grey, with such thick lashes that at a little distance the eyes themselves

looked black. These eyes, set in the midst of a fair face, with soft, light curling hair, would in themselves attract attention. But it was something about the pupils which arrested my observation at this moment. They were not only rather more dilated than usual, but there was an indescribable expression about them which gave me a sort of uneasiness. I had felt very happy about my friend Will ever since I knew of the engagement. Now a sudden sense of depression swept over me, and I wondered if the shy visitor, Happiness, would long remain his guest.

In a busy doctor's life, however, such thoughts have little room to grow. They were soon banished by the pressure of more immediate interests. I had forgotten Will, his bride, and his new-found happiness, when one afternoon a telegram was handed to me.



"THEY WERE MARRIED."

"The answer is prepaid, sir. The boy is waiting."

I tore the telegram open and read as follows:—

"Please come as quickly as you can to Llanmordaff, North Wales. Maggie not well.—Will Raymond."

"Now, what is up?" I said to myself. "Of course I must go; but it is precious inconvenient. What am I to do?"

Here the memory of several cases of importance darted through my brain. I hastily scribbled a reply to the telegram:—

"Starting by midnight train. Meet me to-morrow morning."

This dispatched, I turned to my servant.

"I am going to North Wales," I said, "and shall start by the train which leaves Paddington Station about midnight. Look up the exact hour in the A,B,C. Pack all I require, and tell Roberts to bring the carriage round immediately."

"Won't you take some dinner, sir?" asked the man.

"Yes, yes; have it served, and be sure you send Roberts round without delay."

My servant withdrew.

I was fond of attending my patients at this hour in a private hansom, and this conveyance was ready for me in a few minutes.

I drove to the house of a brother physician, arranged with him to take my patients for the next day or two if necessary, and brought him back with me to give him names and addresses, and what further particulars he would require. Then I spent the remaining hours until it was time to catch my train, visiting one sick person after another, and assuring them of the complete confidence which I put in Denbigh's skill.

At last the time came when I must start on my long journey, and, with a feeling of natural irritation at the inconvenience of leaving my work, I entered my hansom once more, and desired the man to drive me to Paddington Station.

I caught my train and, establishing myself as comfortably as I could in a first-class carriage, tried to sleep. It has often been my lot to make hurried night journeys, and I can generally while away the long hours in almost unbroken slumber, but on this night I found that sleep would not come. My

brain felt particularly active. I thought over many things—Raymond and his pretty wife in particular. I wondered why my thoughts would linger so pertinaciously around Will and his pretty, delicate-looking wife. I saw her again in her soft bridal dress—I met again the full-satisfied, absolutely contented look on her almost childish face—but what really worried me was the remembrance which came again, and again, and yet again of the expression in her large grey eyes—the strange look which was not caused by anything mental, but was due to some peculiar physical organization.

I had made hysteria, in its many forms, my study, and I had a sort of conviction that Mrs. Raymond's temperament must be closely allied to this strange, mysterious, and overpowering disorder which comes in so many guises and wrecks so many lives.

Towards morning I fell asleep, and about nine o'clock arrived at Llanmordaff, a very out-of-the-way little place, to which a small local train bore me during the last eight miles of my journey.

I expected Will to meet me on the platform, but to my surprise he was not there. He had only given me the address, "Llanmordaff, North Wales," on his telegram. I concluded, therefore, that he must be putting up at the inn, and went there at once to inquire for him.

I was right in this conjecture. Immediately on my arrival I was informed that the Ray-



"I SENT UP MY CARD."

monds were occupying the best rooms in the establishment. I sent up my card, and a moment later found myself in a nondescript sort of apartment—between a dining-room and a drawing-room—and shaking hands with Will.

He was always a haggard-looking fellow, not the least handsome, with rugged features, deep-set eyes, a wide mouth, and a lean, brown face. There was something manly about him, however; his figure was splendid; he was tall without a scrap of superfluous flesh, and very muscular. He came up to me at once and wrung my hand, hard.

"This *is* good of you," he said. "I might have known you would not fail me. Now, sit down and have some breakfast."

He strode across the room as he spoke, and gave a violent jerk to the bell. It sounded with a clanging noise in the distance, and in a moment a waiter, not too clean in his appearance, answered it.

"What will you have, Halifax—tea or coffee?" inquired Raymond.

"Strong coffee," I answered.

"Coffee at once, and anything cold you have in the house," said Raymond to the man.

He withdrew, and we found ourselves alone.

I looked round for Mrs. Raymond.

"How about my patient?" I said. "How is she? I trust your wife is better, my dear fellow."

"No, she is very unwell," replied Raymond. "I do not suppose it is really anything serious, but she is in a very queer, nervous state—it has all been caused by that railway accident."

"What in the world do you mean?" I exclaimed.

"Didn't you see the account in the papers? Surely you must have done so. Two days after our wedding we were jogging along in one of these atrocious little local trains, when an express ran into us. Fortunately no one was killed, but Maggie got a shake, and she was knocked about a good bit. She made wonderfully little of it at the time. In fact, I never saw anyone so plucky, but that night she fainted off, and was unconscious for over an hour. Since then she has been very poorly and shaken: and—and—I don't want to conceal the truth from you, Halifax—she is completely changed; she is an absolutely different woman. She is morose, and even suspicious; one moment full of tenderness and devotion to me, in short, quite the old Maggie whom I loved and

married; then, again, she treats me with suspicion. Often for hours she will not allow me to come near her room. Of course, the whole thing is caused by that beastly shock, but still I thought you had better see her."

"Yes, this nervous condition is undoubtedly caused by the shock," I answered, as cheerfully as I could. "Your wife will probably have to rest for some little time, and then she will be quite herself again. Shall I see her now, or would you like to prepare her for my visit?"

"No, I won't prepare her. She hates the most remote idea of seeing a doctor; and although, of course, you are an old friend, I doubt if I prepared her for your visit if she would admit you to her presence. No, you have your breakfast first, and then we'll go together to her room."

The waiter appeared at this moment with the coffee, a cold game pie, and other preparations for breakfast. He placed them on the table, looked round to see if everything was all right, and then withdrew, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

The moment my hasty meal was over Will put his hand through my arm and, walking towards the door, we crossed a wide landing and entered his wife's room. It was a large room, nearly as big as the drawing-room. There was a great, old-fashioned four-post bedstead occupying a considerable part of one wall. It was hung with dark red velvet, and looked unpleasant and funereal, as for some intangible reason these sort of bedsteads always do.

Mrs. Raymond was sitting up in bed. Her abundant tresses of soft, light hair were falling all over her shoulders—they curled naturally—and she was occupying herself winding one of the tendrils round and round her fingers, and stroking it with the other hand, when we entered the room. She looked up at her husband, and then I saw how greatly changed she was. All the pretty colour which had added to her beauty on her wedding-day had given place to a grey sort of pallor—her childish mouth was drawn, her lips looked thin and parched. Her eyes were intensely bright, lovely still in shape and colour, but unnatural and strained in expression.

Will smiled at her and spoke in a confident, hearty voice.

"Well, my darling," he said, "I have brought an old friend to see you—you will give Halifax a welcome, won't you, Maggie?"

She did not smile when her husband spoke; on the contrary, after giving him a



"HER EYES WERE INTENSELY BRIGHT."

quick, flashing glance, she once more resumed her occupation of stroking her soft hair. Her attitude, her manner, her occupation belonged to childhood—I did not like the aspect of things at all.

Will cast a glance at me. I read despair in his eyes. He evidently thought his wife even worse than she was, but I had often seen the effect of shock on peculiar nervous temperaments, and although I was anything but pleased at the aspect of affairs, still I thought it likely that Mrs. Raymond would recover perfectly, if she were carefully attended to.

I went up to the bed, therefore, and spoke to her, just as if it were the most natural thing in the world that I should drop in to breakfast at the little inn in Llanmordaff.

I asked her several questions, none of them of a medical character, and presently she roused herself, looked at me attentively, and ceased to play with her hair. With both hands she pushed it back impatiently from her face, and let it fall in long, lovely waves of light over her shoulders. Forcing herself to give me an attentive glance, she spoke:—

"Why have you come?"

Before I could reply Will came up to her, and passed his big hand caressingly over her brow.

"Halifax has come to see you, Maggie, because you are not quite well."

"Yes, I am perfectly well," she retorted. "I wish you would not touch me, Will; I hate being touched." She pulled herself petulantly away.

"You have got a shock," I said. Will looked at me in despair, but I knew that in order to get to the bottom of her malady it was absolutely necessary to rouse her. "You were in a railway accident and you got a shock."

"I don't remember anything about it," she said. "Oh, no, I have not been in a railway accident—you make a mistake. Will was in one, but I was not there." She laughed lightly. Her laugh was terrible to hear.

Will walked across the room and stood by one of the windows.

"Go away, Will," said his wife. "I want to speak to Dr. Halifax alone."

He obeyed, closing the door gently after him.

When he had gone, the expression of her face altered, it became much more intelligent, but there was something intensely painful about it. The intelligence which now animated the eyes and filled the face was not of the gentle and gracious order which used to characterize pretty Margaret Travers. There was a sort of cunning about it, which allied it to that of the animal.

"Look here," she said, almost in a whisper. "I don't want Will to know it, but I have made a discovery."

"I would not keep things from my husband, Mrs. Raymond, if I were you," I answered. "Never mind your discovery, now. I want to ask you a few questions about your health."

"How strange of you," she replied. "I am perfectly well."

"If you were perfectly well you would not stay in bed."

"I like to stay in bed," she replied. "When I am up I am obliged to be with Will all day; now he goes for long walks, and I can be alone. The discovery which I have made, and which I wish to confide to you is this: I have broken my marriage vow!"

"What do you mean?" I said, starting back in momentary horror.

"Yes," she replied, with a light laugh. "I said in church that I would love, honour, and obey Will. I don't love him; I don't honour him; and I don't mean to obey him."

She laughed again as she said this, gave me a fixed, long gaze, and looking towards the door said, in an eager voice:—

"You have always been a kind friend to me. You were very glad when I was engaged."

"Certainly I was," I replied, with some indignation. "Your husband is about the best fellow in the world."

"Oh, no," she replied. "He is not good at all."

I knew she was in no state to argue with, so I continued:—

"We won't discuss this subject just at present. You are not very well, and I am going to prescribe certain medicines for you. It is sometimes quite possible for people to be ill without being aware of it themselves. That is your case at the present moment. You are ill, and you must remain quiet, and you must take the necessary medicines which I am going to prescribe. If you are very good, and do exactly what I tell you, you will soon find all that now troubles and perplexes you vanish away, and you will be the happy girl who stood in church and promised to obey, to love, and honour the kindest of husbands."

There was something in my voice which seemed to rouse her. She tried to look at me steadily, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I don't want to feel as I do," she said, suddenly. "I should like to get back my old self; only I cannot, in the least, remember what it was like. My present self worries me, and yet I do not know why it should."

"Oh, it is quite accountable," I replied. "You are suffering from a sort of physical shock, which causes you to forget many things. Now keep perfectly quiet; I want to examine your heart."

I did so. I found the action of the heart decidedly weak and irregular. I then looked into my patient's eyes. The pupils were not working properly. Altogether her condition was the reverse of satisfactory. She was very weak, and there was not the least doubt that for the time the brain was affected.

I soothed and cheered her as well as I could, and then returned to her husband.

"Well," he said. "What do you think of her?"

"She is in a queer condition," I replied. "There is no use mincing matters, Will—

just at present your wife is not accountable for her actions."

"You don't mean to tell me that she is out of her mind?" he asked, in a strained voice.

"I feel convinced," I replied, "that the present condition of things is only temporary. Mrs. Raymond will soon recover her mental equilibrium; at least, I fondly hope so. In the meantime we must have a nurse for her."

"We cannot get a nurse in these parts."

"Very well, I will telegraph to town and have one sent down immediately."

"No, I won't let you do that," replied Raymond. "Maggie is very peculiar and fastidious. She won't have *any* nurse. You must choose one in all particulars fitted to her case, and until she arrives, I am more than ready and willing to attend to her myself."

"No," I answered. "You cannot do that. In your wife's present condition your presence only excites her."

Will looked startled for a moment, and I saw gloom gathering on his brow.

"Very well," he said, after a pause. "I must not gainsay the doctor, but in any case I insist on your personally selecting Maggie's nurse."

"As you please," I answered. "I will stay with you until to-night; then if Mrs. Raymond continues to remain much as she is at present, and no fresh symptoms of a grave character appear, I must return to my patients in town; for many of them are in a critical condition. But I will promise to send you down the best and most suitable nurse I can possibly find, by the first train in the morning."

"Thanks," replied Raymond. He looked depressed, as well he might. He began to walk restlessly up and down in front of the fire.

"I wish you could stay yourself," he said, suddenly.

"So do I, my dear fellow; but that is impossible."

"If it is a case of money, I can make it worth your while," he continued.

I interrupted hastily.

"No," I answered, "money does not come into the question at all. I go, because I am absolutely wanted in town, and because I can do Mrs. Raymond no good—no good whatever—by remaining."

Raymond was silent. His rugged face looked old. His brow had heavy lines across it. He pushed his hair, already

slightly grizzled, with an impatient movement, off his forehead.

"You don't know what Maggie is to me," he said, abruptly.

He sank into a chair as he spoke, and bent eagerly forward. His voice was full of nervous tension.

"You have known me for years," he continued. "You have known what I used to be before I met her. I was an inhospitable, selfish, egotistical hermit. I hated women, and I only tolerated men. I had an insane desire to shut myself away from the world. I am rich, but it never occurred to me to have to give an account of my stewardship. My agent looked after my property, and I did not care two pins whether my tenants lived or died, were happy or miserable. Then I met Margaret—Maggie, as I call her. She was different from other girls. Her refined, half shy, and yet bright face stole into my heart before I was aware. I fell in love with her, and immediately the world changed. We had a

I felt my whole moral nature growing and expanding. Oh, pshaw! why should I go on with this? The old cloud is on me again, and my wife—my wife! Halifax, old fellow, will my wife ever be better?"

"Assuredly," I replied, cheerfully. "I see nothing whatever to cause serious alarm. Mrs. Raymond has got a shock which, instead of producing ordinary concussion of the brain, has affected some of the higher centres in a somewhat unexpected manner. She will not, I fear, recover speedily, but that you will have her the old Maggie, in three months' time at the farthest, I feel convinced."

Raymond sighed heavily.

"Well, I must go to her now," he said. "She hates to have me in the room, and yet she must not be left alone."

"Yes, leave her alone," I replied. "I shall stay near her most of the day. I will endeavour to find someone, some nurse, even if not a trained one, to look after her for the night. You only weaken her tired-out nerve

centres by going to her at present. Don't let her see you. I am giving you painful advice, I know, Raymond, but I am sure I am acting for the best."

"What in the world has she taken a dislike to me for?" answered the poor fellow, turning his head aside.

"Oh, that is very often the case. In brain conditions like hers, people are known to turn from their nearest and dearest."

"I have heard of it, in the insane. But, good God! Maggie is not so bad as that?"

"Her condition is temporary," I replied, as evasively as I could; "and now I should like to see the local doctor."

"I don't know anything about him."

"Well," I answered, "there is sure to be a medical man in the place. I had better see him and put Mrs. Raymond into his charge. I'll just go downstairs and inquire his name."

"One moment first, Halifax. Can I move her from this beastly hole?"



"MAGGIE IS NOT SO BAD AS THAT?"

short engagement, and now we are married a week. During the days which followed our wedding, up to that fatal Thursday when the railway accident occurred, I tasted Paradise.

"Certainly not," I replied. "You are fixed here for a week or a fortnight at the very least."

"You don't say so? We meant to go home on the Saturday of this week. We intended to finish our honeymoon at home. Unconventional, of course, but just what we wished for. The tenants were getting up no end of demonstrations. I have just received a letter from my steward, Berring."

"You must postpone everything for the present," I replied, and then I ran downstairs to get the address of the doctor. His name was Grey—he was a middle-aged man, and lived in a small side street not far away. I called, found him at home, and gave him full particulars with regard to Mrs. Raymond's case. I was not predisposed in his favour. He seemed narrow-minded and old-fashioned. It was necessary, however, that some medical man should take charge of my patient, and as Grey alone represented the faculty in this little, out-of-the-world town, I was forced to make the best of circumstances. I took him to see Mrs. Raymond; marked out very carefully a certain line of treatment, which he promised to adopt, and finally was able, through his assistance, to secure the services of a fairly capable nurse, who would remain with the patient until I could send down a professional nurse from town.

During the day that followed there was no change whatever in the condition of the young wife. She still sat up in bed, and played with her hair, and seemed feebly and childishly happy. She laughed with pleasure when she saw the nurse, clapped her hands as if she were a child of six, and whispered to her to be sure to keep Raymond out of the room. I shall never forget the expression on my poor friend's face when he witnessed this action; and when the nurse was forced to tell him what the poor girl had said, he turned away with a groan, and clutching my arm with his strong hand, said, half to himself:—

"It's all up, then. That dream of happiness is shattered."

He saw me into the train, and I returned to town much disturbed and more fearful as to the results than I cared to own.

I arrived in London at an early hour the next morning, and going straight to Hanover Square, saw the matron of the excellent establishment for trained nurses which is to be found there. I described the case, and chose a bright-looking young woman who I was sure had tact as well as experience. Making hasty arrangements that she should start at once, I wired what I had done to Will.

My own duties were sufficiently arduous to occupy every moment of my time and every atom of my thoughts during the rest of that day. I returned home, fagged out, at a late hour that evening, and had just desired my servant to bring up supper, of which I stood much in need, when, instead, he handed me a telegram on a salver.

"When did this come?" I asked, looking at it suspiciously, and my thoughts instantly darting away to poor Will Raymond and his unhappy little wife.

"The telegram came half an hour ago, sir," replied the servant.

I tore it open and uttered a groan. I was not prepared for the news which it contained.

"Mrs. Raymond died at three o'clock this afternoon.—Grey."

The pink slip of paper fluttered out of my hand, and I sat in an almost dazed condition for several minutes. I had not time, however, for any long meditation. There came a sharp peal to my front door, and another telegram was brought to me.

This was from Will. It contained the sort of news which I might have expected:—

"For God's sake, come to me, Halifax. Come to-night."

Alas, it was impossible for me to comply. I had a case to attend to which by no possibility could I depute to another. I telegraphed to Will telling him that I could not leave for Wales until the following evening, but that then nothing should hinder my joining him.

I have nothing special to say about the time which intervened. I had the satisfaction of knowing that I had pulled my patient through a severe illness, and, weary but thankful, I stepped into the midnight train which was to take me to Wales.

Once again I arrived there in the morning, but this time Grey was waiting for me on the platform. He came forward to meet me with much eagerness, shook my hand and looked into my face. His manner was disturbed, and his somewhat phlegmatic nature evidently stirred to its depths.

"I am more than glad you have come," he said. "Raymond is in a very queer way. I thought his wife insane before her death; I now think that unless something is immediately done for his relief, his brain will go."

"Nonsense, nonsense," I retorted. "Raymond has as steady a brain as any fellow I know."

But then I stopped abruptly. Certain peculiarities with regard to his past history occurred to me, and I was silent. Raymond



"THE NEWS."

was undoubtedly my friend, but I knew nothing of the psychological history of his house. I made up my mind to treat the doctor's fears lightly, and proceeded in a steady and cheerful voice :—

"You must make full allowance for the terrible shock my poor friend has sustained."

"Yes, yes," said Grey; "of course, anyone would make allowance for grief and even violent distress, but the man's conduct is more than eccentric. Do you know what he has done?"

"No," I said. "What?"

"He is going to take that poor dead young woman home to Berkshire. I am given to understand that there were no end of demonstrations getting ready at his place for the return of the bride and bridegroom. He and Mrs. Raymond seem to have talked over this home-coming a good deal, and he says she shall cross the threshold of his house dead or living. He has given orders that a coffin is to be made for her out of some of the oak at Raymond Towers, and, in the meantime, she has been put into a hastily improvised shell, and the miserable funeral procession is to start from here at five o'clock to-morrow morning."

"So soon?" I inquired.

"Yes, there has been an awful hurry about everything. All arrangements are now, however, complete. Raymond has engaged a special train, and the line is to be cleared along the entire route; of course, at enormous expense. He has asked me to accompany him, but now that you have arrived, that will scarcely be necessary."

"Probably not," I answered.

We had by this time entered the house, and Grey took me upstairs to the wretched apology for a drawing-room where I had sat with Raymond a couple of days ago. He was not present; I looked around for him anxiously.

"He is in the room with his poor wife," said Grey, noticing my perturbed glance; "he spends almost all his time there. The worst place in the world for him, I should say, in his present state of nervous excitement."

"Well, I must go and find him," I said; "but before I do so I shall be glad if you will give me any particulars in your power with regard to Mrs. Raymond's last moments. When I left Llanmordaff two nights ago, I had not the slightest fears for the poor girl's life. I was anxious, of course, with regard to her state, but my anxiety pointed altogether to her mental condition. When did a change for the worst take place, and why was I not telegraphed for immediately?"

"There was no time. We none of us thought her dying until she was dead. I visited her twice the night you left, and found her quiet and inclined to sleep. She seemed to like the woman I had sent in to nurse her *pro tem.*, and asked her to sit by her and hold her hand. The following morning she was very quiet and still sleeping. I visited her at about ten o'clock, took her temperature, which was normal, and felt her pulse. It was slow and fairly regular. I noticed, how-

ever, a very grey hue over her face, and wondered what her complexion was in health."

"She had a bright complexion," I answered, hastily.

"Well, she looked grey, but there were no other symptoms to indicate any danger, and I thought her desire for sleep a good sign, and begged of the nurse to encourage it as much as possible. I spoke to Raymond hopefully, poor fellow, and promised to call again at noon.

"I was hindered coming until nearly one o'clock. I then saw her again; she was asleep, breathing easily and with a happy smile on her face. About a quarter past three, I was just about to leave my house to see a patient at a little distance, when the woman I had engaged as nurse rushed in frantically and informed me, with a burst of tears, that Mrs. Raymond was dead.

"She died in her sleep," said the woman, 'without never a sigh or a groan. She just stopped breathing, that was all.'

"I went over at once to the hotel to see her, but Raymond had locked the door and would not allow anyone into the room. I even tried to force an entrance, but he did not listen to me or reply to my repeated knocks. I heard him muttering and moaning to himself, and in a couple of hours he came out of the room with a wild expression in his eyes. The moment he saw me he told me I was a 'confounded fool,' and used some more strong expressions which I do not care to repeat. I asked to see the dead woman. With a great oath he swore that not a soul should look at her now again except himself."

"Then you did not see her after death?" I interrupted.

"No—there was no use in worrying the poor fellow."

"And now she is in her coffin?" I continued.

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"Yes, fastened up: all ready for her last long journey."

I said nothing further, and in a few moments was in Will's presence.

I must draw a veil over the scene which followed. Will's excitement was all too real. He could not keep still for a moment. His eyes were bright and glassy, his hair unkempt; he had not shaved for a day or two. The moment he saw me he poured out a volley of eager words. Then he burst into the most heartrending groans I had ever listened to. The next moment his manner altered: he laughed and told me with an awful kind of glee of the arrangements he had made for the funeral.

"I have ordered them to light bonfires," he exclaimed. "Just the same as if Maggie were alive. We have often talked of those bonfires, and nothing pleased her more than to hear of the reception we should receive on our home-coming. She shall have her coming-home all the same, Halifax. I myself will help to bear her across the threshold of her house and mine. She shall sleep for at least one night under its roof before she goes to join the other wives of our house in the family vault. That will please her—yes, that will please her, poor darling."

"But she won't know anything about it," I replied.

Will fixed me with his bright eyes.

"How can you tell?" he retorted. "Do you think her spirit has gone far from mine? No, no; you won't get me to believe that. We are twin spirits, and it is impossible to part us. There was a cloud over the sweet soul during the last few days of her life; but Death has lifted it, she is mine again now."

He paused abruptly here, locked his hands together tightly and gazed into the fire as if he were looking at something. After a pause he said, with another laugh:



"A WILD EXPRESSION IN HIS EYES."

"I have an impression, Halifax, that in the future a spirit will haunt Raymond Towers. Nothing will induce Maggie to stay in her grave when I am living close to her. Do you believe in ghosts?"

I retorted briefly. There was nothing whatever for it but to soothe the poor fellow. If he were not insane at present, he was evidently on the borderland.

When he became a little more reasonable I tried to show him how more than absurd his different arrangements were.

"You think you are showing respect for your poor wife's memory by all this sort of thing," I said. "But you are greatly mistaken—people will pity her and think that grief for her loss has turned your brain."

"It has not done that," he said, with a sort of jerk of his shoulders. "I am all right as far as my brain is concerned, and if you think, Halifax, that I care *that*—snapping his fingers with a loud click as he spoke—"for what anyone thinks of me, you are finely mistaken. Maggie is dead, but her spirit lives. All the future of my life will be devoted to pleasing that poor wandering ghost, until—until I meet her and clasp her again."

There was an exalted sort of look about his face. I saw it was hopeless to argue with him. There was nothing whatever for it but to humour him and let this ghastly travesty of woe take its course.

Once again that night I saw Grey. He was sitting in the drawing-room of the inn, filling in the death certificate.

The usual details were rapidly entered, but when he came to the clause which obliged him to certify the fact of death having taken place, he had recourse to words provided in the certificate for medical men who had not seen the dead body.

"I regret beyond words," I said, "that you did not see Mrs. Raymond after death. You are unable to state as an eye-witness that you saw her. For my part I should be glad to see the present law altered. I would make it compulsory that no doctor should sign a death certificate without having first seen the dead body."

"That would be well in most cases," answered Grey, "but there are exceptions, and legitimate ones, as in this case. You may remember that I *did* express a wish to see the body, but was prevented by Mr. Raymond's extraordinary behaviour."

"Well, it cannot be helped now," I said. "Poor Mrs. Raymond undoubtedly died from syncope or shock—the said syncope or shock was caused by the railway accident which

occurred a few days ago. Were this known a coroner's inquest would have been necessary. We must be careful to say nothing about it, however, for it would give her husband intense pain, which is for every reason to be avoided."

"Certainly," said Grey.

"By the way," I asked, "did the nurse, who must have arrived from London yesterday morning, see the body?"

"No; Raymond would not allow her near the room. Of course, Mrs. McAllister, the nurse from here, was obliged to perform the last duties to the dead, and the undertaker's men had to measure her for the coffin, or rather shell; but no one else has seen her, Halifax, except her wretched husband. I am told that he put her into the coffin himself and screwed the lid down with his own hands."

I turned away. I had nothing further to add, and soon afterwards retired to my room.

I had scarcely dropped asleep, or so it seemed to me, before I was awakened by strange sounds in the room next to my own. I started and listened attentively. I suddenly remembered that Mrs. Raymond was lying in her coffin in this room.

Pretty, bright Maggie Raymond! I recalled her face as it was when I first saw it. A more innocent and a happier face it would have been difficult to find, but even then I was attracted by something peculiar in her eyes—they were beautiful; but it was not their beauty which arrested my professional interest. Two days ago I saw her for the last time—she sat up in bed and played with her soft hair. Then the mystery which dwelt in her lovely eyes was solved. It was latent insanity which gave her that peculiar expression. This insanity had been rudely awakened into active life by the shock of the railway accident.

Well, now, all was over. A short life had come to an abrupt termination. There was no use worrying about Maggie—she had gone to join the majority. Nothing of life could affect her again. My real anxiety now, my real regret, was for poor Raymond. Through the long hours of the night I heard him walking up and down the room which contained his wife's coffin. Now and then I heard his groans, and once, good God! I listened to his laughter. That laugh sent a thrill of horror through me. Was his case similar to his wife's? Was he, too, fast becoming insane? I turned over in my mind several plans for helping him, and in the midst of my meditations fell asleep again.

At a very early hour we were all stirring.

and at five o'clock on this winter's morning, in the midst of drizzling rain and fog, we steamed slowly out of the little station, carrying all that was mortal of poor Mrs. Raymond back to her husband's home.

I do not think in my whole life I ever experienced anything longer or more utterly dreary than this journey. We had a saloon carriage to ourselves, in one corner of which the coffin was placed.

I was glad to find that the excitement which had rendered Raymond's conduct so strange the night before was now greatly subdued. He was very quiet, scarcely speaking a word, but now and then laying his big hand with a caressing movement on the lid of the coffin, and now and then looking out of the window and smiling.

I did not like the smile, nor the sort of satisfied expression on his face. Had he been plunged in the deepest woe, I could have understood him. He looked almost happy, however. I saw plainly that he was as much in a world apart from mine as was the dead woman who lay in her coffin.

I wondered how all this was going to end, and my fears with regard to Raymond's mental condition were considerable.

The longest journeys come at last to an end, however, and in the darkness of evening we arrived at a little wayside station three miles distant from Raymond Towers.

Here the station-master and several gentlemen from the neighbourhood met us. They were all dressed in mourning, and I saw that this fact roused poor Raymond's indignation at once.

"I don't want this to be a mournful procession," he said, in a testy tone, to a neighbour who came and with deep feeling shook the poor fellow by the hand. "I am not conventional, and I don't wish anything conventional to be done. Where is my steward? Where is Berring?"

"Here, sir," answered the man, taking off his hat.

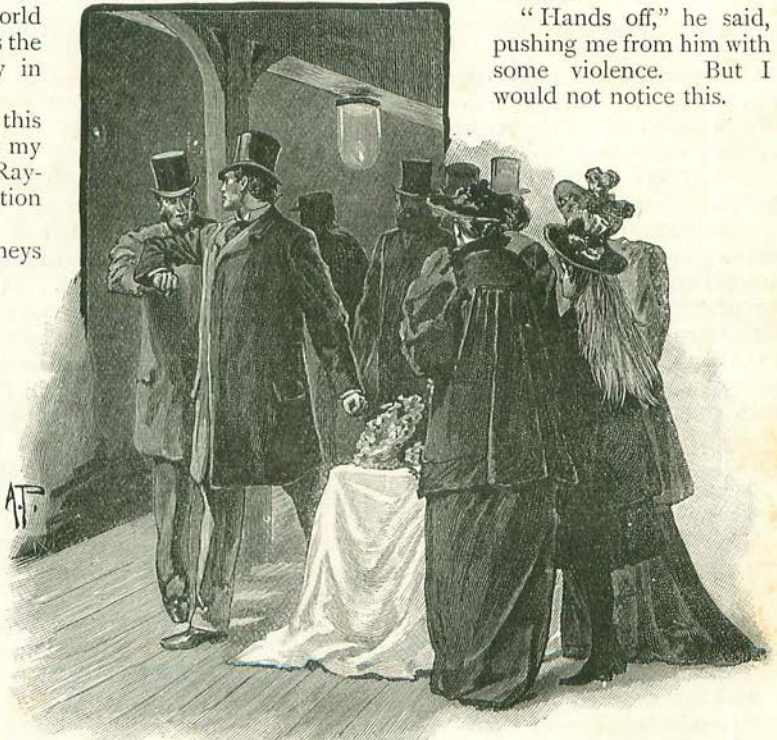
"Berring, have you attended to all my orders—bonfires, and all that sort of thing?"

Berring muttered something which no one could quite distinguish. There was a bustle on the platform owing to the removal of the coffin, which was placed on a bier covered with a white velvet cloth. At this moment a touching thing happened—six young girls came forward and laid wreaths of white flowers on the coffin. They were daughters of neighbouring squires. This token of respect touched Raymond, who went up and shook hands with one of them, and fortunately forgot to ask anything more about the bonfires.

I saw the gentlemen who had come to meet him and to offer their hearty sympathy and condolences looking at one another in a very significant manner, and I also saw that the moment had come for me to interfere.

I went up and took my friend firmly by the arm.

"Hands off," he said, pushing me from him with some violence. But I would not notice this.



"HANDS OFF!"

"Come," I said, "your carriage is waiting. Don't make yourself remarkable, I beg of you, Raymond. I am going with you in the carriage. See, they are already moving forward with ——"

"My wife—my bride!" said Raymond. "How often we talked of this home-coming! Halifax, my dear fellow, I feel dazed. What has come to me?"

"You are tired and worn out," I answered, soothingly. "Come." I took his arm, and he entered the brougham, which was waiting for him, without another word. I shall never forget that journey. The slow pace of the mourning carriages, the solemn look of the hearse on in front. It was a moon-lit and fine night, and the whole ghastly procession was, I could see, viewed the entire way by lines of spectators. Fortunately there were no bonfires, and more fortunately still, Raymond never noticed the fact.

We entered the winding and splendid avenue which led to the Towers, and after a time drew up at the principal entrance, in the centre of the pile of buildings.

"This door is never opened except for a bridal, a funeral, or a christening," said Raymond, in a light tone. "Heigh-ho!" he continued, "what a home-coming for the bonny bride."

He sprang out of the carriage and went up to the hearse. The bearers came forward to lift the coffin out. He pushed two of them roughly aside, and himself helped to carry his dead wife across the threshold of her home.

The coffin was placed on a raised dais in the great central hall. This dais was completely covered with flowers. Raymond, having helped to put the coffin in its place, turned round, and began to make a speech to the assembled visitors. Fortunately, this ghastly performance was more than he had strength for. He suddenly gave way, covered his face with his big hands, and rushed from the scene.

I immediately asked the friendly neighbours to leave us.

They did so, evidently in the greatest consternation, and I felt a slight sense of satisfaction as I closed the wide doors on the last of them.

An old, white-headed butler was standing in the hall.

His face was perfectly scared.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "May I ask, sir, if you're a doctor?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Can you tell me what's the matter with my poor master?"

"He is out of his mind for the time being," I answered, promptly.

"Then God help us all," replied the man.

"What is your name?" I inquired of him.

"Jasper, sir. I have served the family for close on thirty years. I was in the house when Mr. William was born. He was never quite like other lads, more shy like and morose a bit—but, oh, the change in him when he got engaged to Miss Travers! Oh, dear, oh, dear, why did she die, poor young lady?"

"It was very sudden," I replied. "I will tell you about it later on. I don't mind saying now that your master's condition fills me with anxiety, but the best thing all the rest of us can do is to keep our heads. What is the name of the steward?"

"Berring, Mr. Berring."

"I will see him by-and-by. Have all preparations been made for the funeral ceremony to-morrow?"

"I believe so, doctor—the oak coffin was sent in to-day."

"Tell Mr. Berring that I want to see him before he leaves for the night."

"He will sleep here to-night, sir."

"That is good," I replied. "I am going to your master now. Bring food and wine to the study, and be in readiness to come to me, should I ring."

"Yes, doctor."

The man retired, casting a pitying glance on the white coffin, which was now almost covered with flowers.

I looked at it, too, and could not help uttering a sigh as I thought of all the tragedy which it contained. I then went to find my poor friend. He was sitting in his study, warming his hands by a blazing fire. He had quite recovered from his temporary breakdown, and once again I saw that awful smile hovering round his lips.

"Come in," he said to me when he saw me at the door; "not that we want you—we are very happy here together; I knew that we should be."

I had no need to ask what he meant. I knew too well that this was a further development of his insanity. He thought, poor fellow, that his wife was really bearing him company. After a moment's hesitation, I determined to speak in a cheerful tone.

"Come, come," I said, "even though you are happy you must not turn out an old friend." I drew a chair forward as I spoke.

A frown crept over his face.

"She goes away when you come in," he said. "I wish you would leave us."

"I will presently," I answered. "I want some supper, and so do you. Ah, and here it comes. Lay it on that table, please, Jasper; thanks, that will do nicely."

The man withdrew noiselessly. I went to the table and insisted on Raymond's eating. I was relieved to find that he was hungry, and ate a good meal. I noticed that as he ate his face became less exalted and more natural in expression.

"She's dead," he said, suddenly. "I can't quite realize it."

"Have a glass of sherry," I interrupted.

He took it from my hand and tossed it off.

"She's dead," he continued, "although her spirit has come to me, as I knew it would. Hers was the first dead body I ever saw. She looked beautiful in her last sleep."

"I am sure she did," I answered. "I should like to have seen her."

"I always thought that dead people were cold," he continued; "but she was warm—after death she was very warm. The next day she was cold, but not icy—not as books describe the dead."

"She died suddenly and was young," I answered. "Sometimes chemical changes account for warmth after death. Now, Raymond, I am going to see you to your room; you must go to bed at once."

"No, I shall stay here."

"Just as you please," I answered. "There is a sofa here, a comfortable one. You must lie down and go to sleep."

"My dear fellow," he answered, "I have not slept since Maggie died."

"You will to-night, for I am going to give you a sleeping draught."

"I don't think I'll take it. Should she visit me again, she would think my conduct heartless."

"No, she won't—she sleeps well, and so

must you. Come, lie down. You need not even undress; all I want you to do is to rest." He was a bigger man than I, but I forced him to obey me. He lay down obediently on the sofa. I put a rug over him, and then going to my bag which lay on the floor, I took out a small medicine chest, mixed a certain draught, and gave it to him. In five minutes he was soundly asleep, and I could leave the room.

Berring was waiting to speak to me. Old Jasper hovered about in the passages. Berring assured me that all was ready for the morrow's ceremony. I said I wished it to be as quiet as possible, and to take place

early in the day. Berring said this should be done, and proposed that Mr. Herbert, the vicar, who was to officiate, should come and see me that evening.

"I will see him to-morrow," I said. "It is too late now."

Then the men began to question me with regard to Raymond. "Was he really insane? Had Mrs. Raymond gone out of her mind before she died?"

"I am sorry that I am unable to answer you," I replied. "Mrs. Raymond died from the effects of shock, caused by a railway accident, and her husband's mind

is at present in a very disturbed condition. If great care is exercised, however, and he is spared all undue excitement, I trust soon to see an improvement in him. I am now going to sit in his room, and will wish you good-night."

The men retired, and I went softly back to the shaded study, and sat down in a chair by the fire. Raymond was sound asleep. I knew that by his tranquil and regular breathing. I also thought it extremely unlikely that he would wake before the morning. The



"I MIXED A CERTAIN DRAUGHT."

bromidia I had given him would produce deeper and deeper slumber as the hours went by. There was a possibility also that he might awake calm, self-possessed, and in his right mind once more.

I sat on by the fire, and my thoughts wandered back to the tragic events of the last few days. The house was intensely quiet, but a bright light burnt in the hall, where the coffin on its daïs of flowers lay, the central object of attraction. There lay the bride, and here was I taking care of the bridegroom.

All of a sudden I felt an intense desire to look once again on the face of the dead girl. I felt almost a sense of shock as this wish came over me. Why should I disturb the peaceful dead? Why not respect poor Raymond's desire that no eyes should look on his wife after death but his? I banished the thought almost as soon as it came, but not effectually, for it returned again, again, and yet again. Then, to add force to my wish, I recalled Raymond's words.

"After death she was warm—she grew cold later on, but was never icy."

"Good God!" I said to myself, springing to my feet in my agitation, "and no medical man, not even a professional nurse, saw this poor soul after death. No one expected her death. When I saw her last she was hysterical, nervous, over-wrought.

"There was no doubt that she was either partly or wholly insane. She was suffering from shock, and shock might lead to—to *cataplexy*! How do I know that she is dead? I will not rest until I find out for myself whether the spirit has really left this body." I felt painfully excited; but with the excitement came also an accompanying coolness and steadiness of nerve.

"What an ass Grey was not to see Mrs. Raymond," I said to myself. "Certainly death certificates ought to be altered—no medical man ought to be allowed to give one unless he has first seen the body, and testified with his own eyes to the presence of death. In this case, no one capable of judging saw that poor girl. Her husband lost his self-control—his mind was overbalanced—he became possessed with a desire, which was absolute insanity, to bring her here without a moment's delay. She was put into her coffin far too soon. Why did not I see her when I arrived at Llanmordaff late yesterday evening? God grant she has not died from suffocation. Anyhow, there is no peace for me until I solve this question."

I went softly into the hall and, ringing a bell, summoned Jasper on the scene.

For every reason it was well I should have a witness of my actions, and also someone to render me assistance if necessary. I much wondered, however, if the old man had nerve to witness my performance. Thank God, at least Raymond was sleeping. Suppose, however, that he awakened suddenly, that he came into the hall? I turned my mind resolutely from this contingency. Jasper was standing before me with the scared look still very manifest on his white old face. For some reason I preferred his assistance to that of Berring, the steward.

"Fetch me a screw-driver," I said, when the old man appeared. I spoke as sharply and incisively as I could. "Be quick about it," I continued, "don't make any noise."

Jasper pattered away in some bewilderment. He returned with the necessary instrument in the course of a few minutes.

"Now," I said, "I want you to do something for me."

"Certainly, doctor."

"I want you, whatever happens, to keep your nerve. I am anxious, for reasons which I need not explain to you, to open the coffin."

"Good Lord!" cried the man, falling back.

"Keep quiet," I said, sternly; "you can control yourself if you wish. I intend to open the shell in which Mrs. Raymond has been placed. It so happens that no medical man has seen her since her death. This, in my opinion, ought never to be allowed—there are cases on record where inexperienced people have mistaken a disease called *cataplexy* for actual death. In order to satisfy my own mind, I mean now to look at the body. In case, however—as, alas, is most probable—Mrs. Raymond is really dead, I do not wish your master to know anything of this, either now or at any time in the future. Can I trust you with so grave a secret?"

"You can, doctor, you can."

"Thank you," I answered. "I felt sure that your courage would rise to the occasion. Remember, too, that I am your master's friend as well as his medical adviser."

"Be you Dr. Halifax, sir?"

"Yes."

A look of relief passed over the man's face.

"That's all right, then," he said. "We all know what Mr. Raymond thinks of you, sir. I'll do anything you want me to do, Dr. Halifax, only it isn't necessary for me to see the poor missus too, sir?"

"Certainly not. I wish you to stand by that study door with your hand on the key.

The moment you hear the least movement within, turn the key quietly in the lock. That is all. Whatever happens, under no emergency are you to utter a sound. Now this will be quickly over, and you can turn your back on me if you like."

I swept the many wreaths of white flowers aside, and began to unscrew the shell which contained the body. My great fear that the unfor-

my pocket, and applied them to the nostrils. There was a very faint movement. That was enough.

"Jasper," I said, speaking as steadily as I could, "come here."

The man obeyed, shuddering and faltering.

I went up to him and took his hands. I verily believe that tears were dimming my eyes.

"Thank God," I muttered under my breath. Aloud I said:—

"There has been an awful mistake made—but I am in time to put it right. Now, Jasper, on your self-control at this moment everything depends. Mrs. Raymond is not dead; but we must get her out of her coffin before she comes to consciousness, or the shock may really kill her."

The poor old man turned so white that I thought he would fall. I held the smelling salts to his nose.

"Keep up," I said, "if you love yourmaster. Think

and wonder afterwards as much as you like. Just obey me now. Tell me, is there a bedroom quite ready to receive Mrs. Raymond?"

"Yes, sir; the room that has been newly got ready for my master and his bride. It is all fully prepared, fire burning there, and everything."

"Is it a cheerful room?"

"Beautiful, doctor; furnished new by Liberty."

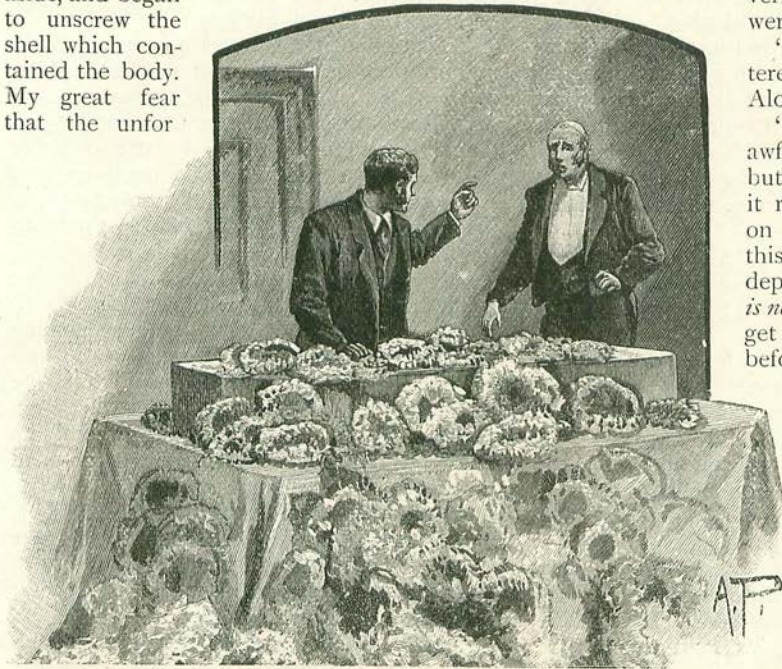
"That's all right. Is there a woman of any kind in this house?"

"Of course, Dr. Halifax."

"A woman with a head on her shoulders, I mean—someone who can act promptly and show self-control?"

"There's Mrs. Adams, the housekeeper. Shall I fetch her?"

"If you think she won't scream. If you think she will behave just as admirably as you are doing at the present moment, she can go into the bedroom and get it ready. Go to her as quickly as you can, Jasper, and bring me down a hot blanket. Now, be quick. We have not an instant to lose."



"I SWEEPED THE MANY WREATHS OF WHITE FLOWERS ASIDE."

tunate girl might have been suffocated in her coffin was immediately relieved by the fact that the badly and hastily made shell was anything but air-proof—the lid did not fit—and although the white velvet covering gave the coffin a fairly respectable appearance, it was evidently the work of an unaccustomed hand. I quickly unscrewed it, and, lifting the lid, looked down at the fair face of the dead. Mrs. Raymond looked beautiful in her last sleep. Her hands were folded in conventional fashion on her breast—her head drooped slightly to one side, her lips were parted, and there was a faint, a very faint, tinge of colour on her cheeks. I eagerly seized one of the hands, and felt for the pulse in the wrist. After a long time I fancied that I distinguished a throb. The hands were limp. There was no rigidity apparent anywhere.

"Merciful heavens!" I exclaimed, under my breath. "How could any but a madman have thought this sleeping girl dead?"

I took some strong smelling salts out of

My nerve inspired the old man. He rushed away eagerly, and I hovered in a fever of impatience between the study door and the open coffin. All would be lost, indeed, if Raymond awoke now. He did not stir, however, and I owned to myself that my fears made me unduly anxious.

After a time, which seemed an eternity, Jasper returned with the blanket.

I wrapped it tenderly round the sleeping girl's slender form, lifted her in my arms, and carried her upstairs. She was placed in a warm bed, restoratives of different kinds were immediately applied, and in about a quarter of an hour she opened her eyes and smiled at me.

She recognised me immediately, and asked where she was.

"In bed," I said. "You are going to have this cup of beef-tea, and then you are to have another sleep. You have been ill, but are much better."

"I don't remember anything," she said, in a drowsy tone; "but I want Will. Where is he?"

"He shall come to you very soon; now go to sleep."

I sat by her until she fell into a gentle, natural slumber, then, motioning Mrs. Adams to take my place by her side, I went downstairs.

Jasper and Berring, whom he had summoned, were both standing by the open coffin. Both men looked dazed, as well they might. Jasper rubbed his hand several times across his eyes.

"Now, look here," I said to them both. "You are immediately to get rid of all that. Every trace of it must be taken away, flowers and all, and the hall restored to its normal condition. Do you hear me? This *must* be done before Mr. Raymond awakes, and what is more, as you value your master's life and reason, you two men are never to mention the subject of this night to him, or to anyone else in the place. I myself will see Mr. Herbert, the clergyman, in the morning, and you, Berring, can go round and stop all funeral proceedings immediately."

The men promised to do everything that I wished, and I spent the rest of the night between the two rooms where the husband and wife each slept unconscious of the other.

The grey dawn was breaking when Will opened his eyes. He stretched himself at first, looked round him drowsily, and stared at me in some astonishment.

"Why, Halifax, old man," he began.

Then memory returned to him. The poor fellow turned ghastly pale, and put his hand to his brow.

"I forgot for a moment," he began.

"What did you forget?" I answered, cheerfully. "Come up to your wife. She is rather tired after her journey, but is awake now, and has been asking for you incessantly for over an hour."

"But, Halifax, you forget—you must have taken leave of your senses—Maggie is dead—this is the day of her funeral."

"That is not the case," I answered, speaking on purpose in as matter-of-fact a tone as possible. "The state of things is this: Mrs. Raymond's death was assumed far too quickly. You behaved in a very extraordinary way when you allowed no doctor to see her. As matters turned out, she was only having a long sleep. I opened her coffin last night—for goodness' sake, keep quiet, man—don't excite yourself—it is all right—I opened her coffin, and found that she was beginning to awake. She is now in bed, doing well, taking nourishment, and asking for you."

Poor Raymond's face was a picture—he staggered for a moment, clutching my shoulder with a grip of iron, but presently he recovered himself. The news was too good not to restore his mental equilibrium.

"Now, look here," I said, "you are all right, and joy need never kill anyone; but remember that your wife knows nothing of this, and if you wish her to keep her reason, *she must never know*. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, yes, of course I do. But I am stunned. I can't take the thing in. Has my wife really got her reason back?"

"Perfectly."

"Then she doesn't dislike me now?"

"Good heavens, no—she's longing for you to go to her."

"My God, how can I thank Thee?" said poor Raymond. "Halifax, old man, let me pass."

"You are not to go to your wife in that state. Have a bath and a shave, change your things—go quietly into the room, sit by her side and talk commonplaces. There is not the least hurry. She is very calm at the present moment, and you must on no account excite her."

"I'll do anything in the world you tell me, Halifax—*how can I thank you?*"

"By doing what I say."

These things happened two years ago. Raymond and his wife are the happiest people of my acquaintance. Neither of them have shown a trace of insanity from that day to this, and Mrs. Raymond never knows, nor will, I think, anyone ever tell her, how she came home as a bride to Raymond Towers.