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One of the Garrison;

Or, A Mysterious Affair.

CHAPTER X.—(Cont'd)

"Gabriel says that she has explained to you that the government is waiting to change man after this particular date, on which his fears reach a crisis. He apparently has more reason than usual this year to anticipate that trouble is brewing for this unfortunate family," for I have never known him to take so many elaborate precautions or appear so thoroughly unnerved. Who would ever think, to see his bent form and shaking hands, that he is the same man who used some few short years ago to shoot tigers on foot among the jungles of the Heral, and would laugh at the more timid sportsmen who sought the protection of their elephant's howdah? You know that he has the Victoria Cross, which he won in the streets of Delhi, and yet here he is shivering with terror and starting at every noise, in the most peaceful corner of the world. Oh, the pity of it. West! Remember what I have already told you—that it, the hopelessness of your position, but one which we have every reason to suppose to be most real. It is, however, of such a nature that it can neither be averted nor can it profitably be expressed in words. If all goes well, you will see us at Brankome on the 5th. With our kindest regards to both of you, I am, ever, my dear friends, your attached Mondaunt."

This letter was a great relief to us as letting us know that the brother and sister are under no physical restraint; but our powerlessness and inability even to comprehend what the danger was which threatened those whom we had come to love better than ourselves was little short of maddening. Fifty times a day we asked ourselves and asked each other from what possible quarter this peril was to be expected; but the more we thought of it the more hopeless our solution appeared. In vain we combined our experiences and pieced together every word which had fallen from the lips of an inmate of Cloomber which might be supposed to bear directly or indirectly upon the subject. At last, weary with fruitless speculation, we were fain to try and drive the matter from our thoughts, consoling ourselves with the reflection that in a few more days all restrictions would be removed, and we should be able to learn from our friends' own lips. Those few intervening days, however, would be feared to be dreary long ones. And so they would, had it not been for a new and most unexpected incident, which diverted our minds from our own troubles and gave them something fresh with which to occupy themselves.

CHAPTER XI.

October had broken auspiciously with a bright sun and a cloudless sky. There had in the morning been a slight breeze, and a few little white wreaths of vapor drifted here and there like the scattered feathers of some gigantic bird; but as the day wore on, such wind as there was fell completely away and the air became calm and stagnant. The sun blazed down with a degree of heat which was remarkable so late in the season, and a shimmering haze lay upon the upland moors and concealed the Irish mountains on the other side of the Channel. The sea itself rose and fell in a long, heavy, oily roll, sweeping slowly and unobtrusively, sullenly with a dull, monotonous booming upon the rock-girt shore. To the inexperienced all seemed calm and peaceful, but to those who are accustomed to read nature's warnings there was a dark menace in air and sky and sea.

My sister and I walked out in the afternoon, sauntering slowly along the margin of the great sandy spit which shoots out into the Irish Sea, flanking upon one side the magnificent Bay of Luce, and on the other the more obscure inlet of Kirkmaiden, on the shores of which the Brankome property is situated. It was sultry to go far; so we soon seated ourselves upon one of the sandy hillocks, overgrown with faded grass-tufts, which extended along the coast line, and which from nature's dykes against the encroachment of the ocean. Our rest was soon interrupted by the crunching of heavy boots upon the shingle; and Jamie, the old man-of-war's-man whom I have already had occasion to mention, made his appearance, with the flat circular net upon his back which he used for shrimp catching. He came toward us upon seeing us, and said in his rough, kindly way that he hoped we would not take it amiss if he sent us a dish of shrimps for our tea at Brankome. "I aye make a good catch before a storm," he remarked.

"You think there is going to be a storm, then?" I asked.

"Why, even a marine could see that," he answered, sticking a great wedge of tobacco into his cheek. "The moors over near Cloomber are just white wi' gulls and kittiwakes. What d'ye think they come ashore for except to escape having all the feathers blown out o' them? I mind a day like this when I was wi' Charlie Napier off Cronant. It wellnigh blew us under the guns o' the forts, for all our engines and propellers."

"Have you ever known a wreck in these parts?" I asked.

"Lord love ye, sir, it's a famous place for wrecks. Why, in that very bay down there two o' King Philip's fleet-rates foundered wi' all hands in the days o' the Spanish war. If that sheet o' water and the Bay o' Luce round the corner could

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tell their aye tale they'd have a gey lot to speak of. When the Judgment Day comes round that water will be just bubbling wi' the number o' folks that will be coming up frae the bottom."

"I trust that there will be no wrecks while we are here," said Esther earnestly.

The old man shook his grizzled head and looked distrustfully at the hazy horizon. "If it blows from the west, he said, "some o' these sailing ships may find it no joke to be caught without sea room in the North Channel. There's that bark out there—I daresay her maister would be glad enough to find himself safe in the Clyde."

"She seems to be absolutely motionless," I remarked, looking at the vessel in question, whose black hull and gleaming sails rose and fell slowly with the throbbing of the giant pulse beneath her. "Perhaps, Jamie, we are wrong, and there will be no storm after all."

The old sailor chuckled to himself with an air of superior knowledge, and shuffled his feet on the deck. "I'll tell you, sister and I walked slowly homeward through the hot and stagnant air. I went up to my father's study to see if the old gentleman had any instructions as to the estate, for he had become engrossed in new work upon the literature, and the practical management of the property had in consequence devolved entirely upon me.

I found him seated at his square library table, which was so heaped with books and papers that nothing of his face was visible from where I sat. A tuft of white hair, "My dear son," he said to me as I entered, "it is a great grief to me that you are not more conversant with Sanscrit. When I was your age I could converse not only in that noble language, but also in the Tamilic, Lohitic, Gange, lic, Jaiic, and Malaic dialects, and all o' fashions from the Turanian branch."

"I regret extremely, sir," I answered, "that I have not inherited your wonderful talents as a polyglot."

"I have set myself a task," he explained, "which if it could only be continued from generation to generation in our own family until it was completed, would make the name of West immortal. This is nothing less than to publish an English translation of the Buddhist Djarmas with a preface giving an idea of the position of Brahminism before the coming of Sakyamuni. With diligence it is possible that I might be able myself to complete part of the preface before I die."

"And pray, sir," I asked, "how long would the whole work be when it was finished?"

"The bridged edition in the Imperial Library of Peking," said my father, rubbing his hands together, "consists of 325 volumes of an average weight of five pounds. Then the preface, which must embrace some account of the Rig-veda, the Sama-veda, the Yagur-veda, and the Atharva-veda, with the Brahmanas, could hardly be completed in less than ten volumes. Now if we apportion one volume to each year there is every prospect of the family coming to an end of its task about the date 2250, the twelfth generation completing the work, while the thirtieth might occupy itself upon the index."

"And how are our descendants to live, sir," I asked with a smile, "during the progress of this great undertaking?"

"That's the worst of you, Jack," my father cried petulantly. "There is nothing practical about you. Instead of confining your attention to the working out of my noble scheme, you begin raising all sorts of absurd objections. It is a mere matter of detail how our descendants live, so long as they stick to the Djarmas. Now I want you to go up to the bothy of Fergus McDonald and see about it. Inasmuch as Willie Cullerton has written to say that his milk-cow is bad. You might look in upon your way and ask after it."

I started off upon my errands, but before doing so I took a look at the barometer upon the wall. The mercury had sunk to the phenomenal point of evening twilight inches. Clearly the old sailor had not been wrong in his interpretation of nature's signs. As I returned over the moors in the evening the wind was blowing in short angry puffs, and the western horizon was heaped with sombre clouds which stretched their long ragged tentacles right up to the zenith. Against their dark background one or two livid sulphur colored blotches showed up malignant and menacing, while the surface of the sea had changed from the appearance of burnished quicksilver to that of ground glass. A low moaning sound rose up from the ocean as if it knew the trouble was in store for it. Far out in the Channel I saw a single panting, eager steam vessel making its way to Belfast Lough, and the large bark which I had observed in the morning still beating about in the offing, endeavoring to pass to the northward. At nine o'clock a sharp breeze was blowing, and ten it had freshened into a gale; and before midnight the most furious storm was raging which I can remember upon the weather beaten coast.

I sat for some time in our small oak-paneled sitting-room, listening to the screeching and howling of the blast and to the rattle of the gravel and pebbles as they pattered against the window. Nature's grim orchestra was playing its world-old piece with a compass which ranged from the deep diapason of the thundering surge to the thin shriek of the scattered shingle and the keen piping of frightened sea birds. Once for an instant I opened the lattice window, but a gust of wind and rain came blustering through, bearing with it a great sheet of sea-weed, which flapped down upon the table. It was all I could do to close it again in the face of the blast. My sister and my father had retired to their rooms, but my thoughts were too active for sleep, and I continued to sit and smoke by the smoldering fire. What was going on in the hall now, I wondered? What did Gabriel think of the storm, and how did it affect the old man who wandered about in the night? Did he welcome these dread forces of nature as being of the same order of things as his own tumultuous thoughts? It was only four days now from the date which I had been assured was to mark a crisis in his fortunes. Would he regard this sudden tempest as being in any way connected with the mysterious fate which threatened him?

Over all these things and many more I pondered as I sat by the glowing embers until they died gradually out, and the chill night air warned me that it was time to retire.

I may have slept a couple of hours when I was awoken by some one tugging furiously at my shoulder. Sitting up in bed, I saw by the dim light that my father was standing half-clad by my bedside, and that it was his grasp which I felt on my nightshirt.

"Get up, Jack, get up!" he was crying excitedly. "There's a great ship ashore in the bay, and the poor folk will all be drowned. Come down, my boy, and see we what we can do. The old man seemed to be nearly beside himself with excitement and impatience.

I sprang from my bed, and was huddling on a few clothes, when a dull booming sound made itself heard above the howling of the wind and the thunder of the breakers.

"There it is again!" cried my father. "It is their signal gun, poor creatures! Jamie and the fishermen are below. Put your oilskin coat on and the Glengarry hat. Come, come, every second may mean a human life!" We hurried down to accompany by a dozen or so of the inhabitants of Brankome.

The gale had increased rather than moderated, and the wind screamed all round us with an infernal clamor. So great was its force that we had to put our shoulders against it, and bore our way through it, while the sea and the gray, fogged up against our faces. There was just light enough to make out the scudding clouds and the white gleam of the breakers, but beyond that all was absolute darkness. We stood ankle deep in the shingle and seaweed, shading our eyes with our hands and peering out into the murky vacancy against our faces. I listened that I could hear human voices loud in entreaty and terror, but amid the wild turmoil of nature it was difficult to distinguish one sound from another. Suddenly, however, a light glimmered in the heart of the tempest, and next instant the beach was circled with a light as bright as day, brilliantly illuminated by the wild glare of a signal light.

She lay on her beam ends right in the centre of the terrible Hansel reef, hurled over to such an angle that I could see all the planking of her deck. I recognized that once she had been the same red-headed bark which I had observed in the Channel in the morning, and the Union Jack which was nailed upside down to the jagged stump of her mizzen proclaimed her nationality. Every spar and rope and writhing piece of cordage showed up hard under the lurid light, which glittered and flickered from the highest portion of the fore-castle. Beyond the doomed ship out of the great darkness came the long rolling lines of black waves, never ending, never tiring, with a petulant tuft of foam here and there upon their crests. Even as it reached the road a glare of unnatural light appeared to gather strength and volume and to hurry on more impetuously until with a roar and a jarring crash it sprang upon its victim. Clinging to the weather shrouds we could distinctly see ten or a dozen frightened seamen, who when the light revealed their faces turned as white as paper toward us and waved their hands imploringly. The poor wretches had evidently taken fresh hope from our presence, though it was clear that their own boats had either been washed away or so damaged as to render them useless.

The sailors who were on the rigging were not, however, the only unfortunate aboard. On the breaking poop there stood three men who appeared to be both of a different race and nature from the cowering wretches who implored our assistance. Leaning upon the shattered taffrail they seemed to be conversing as though they were unconconscious of the deadly peril which surrounded them. As the signal light flickered over them we could see from the shore that these immutable strangers wore red faces, and that their faces were all of the same large features type, which proclaimed an Eastern origin. There was little time, however, for us to take note of such details. The ship was breaking rapidly, and some effort must be made to save the poor doleful group of humanity who implored our assistance. The nearest lifeboat was in the Bay of Luce, ten miles away, but here was our own broad, roomy craft upon the shingle, and plenty of brave fisher lads to form a crew. Six of us sprang to the oars, the others pushed us off, and we fought our way through the swirling, raging waters, staggering and heaving before the wind and sweeping billows, but still steadily decreasing the distance between the bark and ourselves.

It seemed, however, that our efforts were fated to be in vain. As we mounted upon a surge I saw a giant wave, topping all the others and coming after them like a driver following a flock sweep down upon the vessel, curling her great green arch over the breaking deck. With a rending, riving sound the ship split in two where the terrible serrated back of the Hansel reef was sawing into her keel. The after-part with the broken mizzen and the three Orientals sank backward into deep water and vanished, while the forehalf oscillated helplessly about, retaining its precious balance upon the rocks. A wall of fear went up from the wreck and was echoed from the beach, but by the blessing of Providence she kept afloat until we made our way under her bowsprit and rescued every man of the crew. We had not got half way upon our return, however, when another great wave swept the shattered fore-castle off the reef, and extinguishing the signal light, hid the wild denouement from our view.

Our friends upon the shore were loud in congratulation and praise, nor were they backward in welcoming and comforting the castaways. They were thirteen in all, as cold and cowed a set of mortals as ever slipped through death's fingers, save indeed their captain, who was a hardy, robust man, who made light of the affair. Some were taken off to this cottage and some to that, but the greater part came back to Brankome with us, where we gave them such dry clothes as we could lay our hands on, and served them with beef and beer by the kitchen fire. The captain, whose name was Meadows, compressed his bulky form into a suit of my own, and came down to the parlor, where he mixed himself some grog and gave my father and myself an account of the disaster.

"If it hadn't been for you, sir, and your brave fellows," he said, smiling across at me, "we should be ten fathom deep by this time. As to the 'Belinda,' she was a leaky old tub and well insured, so neither the owners nor I are likely to break our hearts over her."

"I am afraid," said my father sadly, "that we shall never see your three passengers again. I have left men upon the beach in case they should be washed up, but I fear it is hopeless. I saw them go down when the vessel split, and no man could have lived for a moment among that terrible surge."

(To be continued.)

A Difference of Opinion.

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Tommy's Misfortune.

The teacher in looking round the room saw a new face. It pertained to a little boy. She called him to her desk.

"What is your name, dear?" she asked.

"Tommy Hunter, ma'am," he answered.

"How old are you?"

"Six, going on for seven."

"You don't look more than five," she said, after a careful scrutiny. "I shall have to ask you to bring me a certificate of your age. When you go home at noon ask your mother to write me a note telling me when and where you were born."

After lunch, when the children had reassembled in the schoolroom, Tommy presented himself at her desk, flushed with triumph. The glow soon faded from his face, however, as he felt in his pockets one after another and failed to find the note his mother had written. He began to cry.

"What is the matter?" asked the teacher.

"I—I've lost my excuse for being born," sobbed Tommy.

All men are born equal, but a mother believes that her first baby is more than equal.

Hunger Strike in 1857.

As long ago as the reign of Edward III. the hunger strike was known in England. Cecilia, wife of John de Ryegway, was in 1357 confined in Nottingham Jail on a charge of murdering her husband, and there, according to the old records, she abstained from meat and drink for forty days. Which, being reported to the King, he "was moved with piety, and for the glory of God and the Blessed Virgin, to grant the woman a pardon." The records say nothing of her guilt or innocence, nor do they throw any light on fourteenth century ideas of forcible feeding.

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