

THE MYSTERY OF THE HOLLY TREE.

CHAPTER VI.—(CONTINUED.)

"I thought the same, and went away. When the Squire came home, his first idea was to ask for Anice. I told him that she was ill, and had gone to her own room. We neither of us suspected anything wrong. Quite early the next morning, Tirza, my maid, came to me, and remarked how strange it was there was no sound from Miss Vane's room. I thought she was still asleep, and saw no cause for fear.

"She was not at the breakfast-table, and my father, whose fondness for her was something wonderful, sent up some little delicacy, which he insisted upon her eating. After a few minutes Tirza came back with the tray, saying she could not make Miss Vane hear. Then I felt frightened, and ran up-stairs. I tried to force open the door, but all in vain; and then I sent for the squire. He came in hot haste, his face white and his hands trembling.

"The door was broken open at last. We found the room empty; there was no trace of Anice's presence. She had not slept there—nothing was out of place. She had taken neither clothes nor jewels with her. Conjecture as we might, there was no answer to our thoughts; there was nothing to be learned or gained from those empty rooms.

"My father almost lost his reason; he was like one distracted. He would not believe that she had run away. Why should she go?—whither should she go? Some accident had happened, he declared. She had gone into the grounds, and had fallen into the lake, or she had been murdered by robbers—anything was preferable to the belief that she had left us.

"It was pitiable to see him, Gladys; he was like one distracted; he called continually to Anice, his dead love, that it was from no lack of care that he had lost her child.

"The whole country was aroused, woods were beaten, ponds and lakes were dragged, rewards offered, but all in vain—we never heard one word of Anice Vane. My father was like a madman.

"I have lost Anice's child," he moaned from morning to night—"I have lost her child!"

"No one could arouse him, no one could comfort him; he never seemed to sleep, to eat, to rest; only one thing moved him and drove him almost mad with indignation—the idea that she might have eloped. He would not suffer it, he would not allow it. There were not wanting malicious people who said it was strange Miss Vane should disappear on the same day that Sir Guy and Arthur went away, but it was dangerous to hint at such a thing before the squire. His anger knew no bounds.

"Do they forget," he would cry, "that Anice was but a fair young child, innocent as an angel, untrained in guile and deceit, incapable of leaving her home and me? Do they know that they are speaking of two English gentlemen who would disdain to rob me of my child as they would to pick my pocket?"

"In due time letters came from Guy and Arthur—Guy's was full of wonderment, Arthur's full of indignation. The squire read them through with quivering lips, and then threw them down with an air of triumph.

"Here is the answer to all calumny," he said; "read these, Philippa. You see Guy and Arthur both offer to do all that they can to help in the search. English gentlemen are not such hypocrites and cheats. I fear Anice is dead."

"Then I tried to comfort him; but it was dreary work, Gladys.

"Months passed, and no tidings came of the lost one. With wonder, with pity and compassion, Guy mentioned her in all his letters; but he, like ourselves, seemed perfectly unable to imagine what had become of her. Arthur never failed to mention her; but it was with indignation against some one or other which I could hardly understand.

"When winter came my father grew worse; all the comfort of our home was destroyed. When the wind blew and the rain beat against the window, my father could not find one moment's rest.

"Where is Anice? Can the rain be falling on her? Oh, Philippa! where is she?"

"In the long, dark winter nights I heard him walking up and down the corridor always calling her name, and crying out that he had lost the child of his dear, dead love.

"Time brought no tidings of her. She seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth. The long months brought no comfort to us; there were times when I feared that my father would lose his reason.

"One day near the end of March the rain had poured down in torrents, a cold north wind had been blowing—all was cold, dark and desolate. My father had been more wretched than usual, and I persuaded him to have a bright fire in the library, and to let me read to him. It was night, then, and quite dark.

"More than once I fancied I heard a sound outside amongst the trees—a rustle as of some one moving. I went to see, but all was dark and still.

"Suddenly, on the silence of the night-air, there rose a long, low, pitiful moan. The squire started from his chair with a cry. I went to the window, and, opening it, stepped out on to the lawn; my father followed me.

"There, on the grass, lying prostrate, drenched with rain, shivering with cold, lying, as we believed, lay Anice Vane. With a cry such as I never heard before, my father raised her. Gladys, it was the most awful sight that ever met human eyes. The rain had beaten upon her, and she, in coughing, had broken a blood-vessel. The squire raised her in his arms and carried her into the room; he laid her before the fire, and rang for help. I have seen fond mothers with sick children; but I never saw anything like my father's tenderness to her.

"She has come back to me, my Anice—my poor wounded lamb!"

"But Anice was deaf to all his loving words. She was taken to her own room, and laid upon the bed. Doctors and nurses were summoned—everything that was possible to human skill and human service was done for her; but it was in vain. The doctors said she was dying of inflammation of the lungs, brought on by the exposure to

the cold, and from exhaustion, caused by the breaking of a blood-vessel. There was no hope of saving her life—no hope, even, of ever hearing her story. After a few hours we felt sure that she knew us—her eyes lingered on the squire's face so lovingly. He sobbed like a child over her, and she put out her hands to him, and tried to speak, but the weak white lips could utter no words.

"The doctor told us she could not live beyond sunset of the next day.

"She must have suffered tortures of hunger and cold," said one of them, "to bring her to this."

"When the squire heard that, he beat his breast and tore his hair like one beside himself.

"My dead love's child," he moaned—"how shall I answer for her?"

"Anice never recovered sufficiently to tell us her story. On the noon of the day following the squire was kneeling on one side of the bed—I was on the other. The change that had come over that lovely young face was terrible to behold—it was livid, with great drops of perspiration on the brow. It was terrible to hear the labored breath. The squire, my father, completely lost his self-control—he cried like a child.

"My darling, why did you leave us?" he said. To our surprise, she whispered something. Bending down, we caught the words:

"He persuaded me—I loved him so long, he persuaded me."

"The squire's face flushed until every vein in his temples was swollen.

"Who persuaded you?" he asked; but Gladys, the poor child mentioned no name. She tried to turn toward me.

"He pretended to love you, Philippa," she gasped, "but he did not. It was me he loved all the time; he prayed me to go away with him, and I went. We were married—I am quite sure. I remember an early morning and a thick fog, and we stood together to be married, for better, for worse, and I afterward traveled with him."

"The efforts she made to say this much were fearful; now her cheeks grew crimson, and she panted for breath.

"He told me I must not write, or you would know, and fetch me away. I prayed him to let me send one line, and he would not; then four months ago he told me I was not his wife—not really—and I went mad."

"No wonder," moaned the squire—"my poor, betrayed child!"

"I went mad and ran away from him, I do not know where. I have been wandering in some large city, and I have been hungry and cold; and then some one told me I must die, and I longed to come home and die at your feet. I walked through the cold and the rain, and when I reached the house I was afraid. I stood outside your window where the bright firelight shone, and then I fainted."

"My father's tears fell like rain upon her face.

"I was married," she said—"I am so sure of it; but he will come back, and he will want to marry you, Philippa. He loved me best all the time."

"The squire could contain himself no longer.

"Who is it?" he cried. "Tell me who it is!"

"But she did not seem to hear him; she was looking wistfully at me.

"He will want to marry you, Philippa, but he loved me best. You will not let him forget me?"

"Is it that villain, Guy Brooklyn, who has done this?" my father cried.

"Anice heard the name—a crimson flush lit up her face, her eyes opened wide.

"Guy!" she said, and then fell back dead.

"It was Guy 'Brooklyn,' repeated my father; 'and I pray Heaven to punish him as he has injured this poor child. The traitor, the hypocrite—to pretend to love you, and to betray her! He shall answer for it with his life.'

"I went up to him and seized his arm.

"You are utterly wrong, father," I said. "She did not accuse Guy."

"But my father stood erect and proud, holding the dead hand in his.

"I tell you it was Guy; no one else pretended to love you. She uttered his name. He beguiled her away with him, and now he will return and want to marry you for your money; the curse of the living and the dead shall rest upon him, Philippa, if you listen to him. Look at that face and hate him."

"Gladys, I wept and pleaded in vain; my father would not hear me.

"Give him the right given to every accused one," I said. "Let him defend himself."

"I will do so," he replied, calmly. "I never thought, never believed the poor child had eloped. I repudiated with scorn and contempt the idea that my ward, or your lover, had beguiled her from us. There were but two—Guy Brooklyn and Arthur Brandon. By her own confession she accompanied one, and was basely betrayed. I say that, judging from her own words, it was Guy Brooklyn. I will write to both, but should the man that she has accused swear by all that is most sacred, I shall not believe him. She is dead, and the dead keep their own secrets. He will think he is justified in denying it now; he will think his secret may remain hidden, but it shall not."

"All attempts to soothe him were in vain by the side of that unhappy girl. He wrote two letters, one to Guy and one to Arthur. Arthur's reply came first—it was a simple, indignant denial.

"You wish to know the truth," he wrote: "come down to Dover, where I have been living, and make such inquiries as you will. I demand it as a right, and am content to abide by your decision."

"Before Anice was buried, my father went. He told me on his return that he had made the most complete and searching investigation into Arthur Brandon's affairs and mode of life, and was quite convinced of his innocence.

"Anice was buried under the large cypress tree in Aberdare churchyard, and in the afternoon of the day Guy arrived. That was his answer to my father's letter. Oh, Gladys, never while the sweet summer sun shines, and fair flowers bloom, shall I forget that terrible scene. My father would not speak to him in the house—they must

go to Anice's grave; and I, fearful of some great tragedy following them.

"My father's anger was stern and deep; he accused Guy of having lured Anice from her home, and of deceiving her. He said the curse of Heaven would fall on the betrayer of the innocent. He bade him renounce all thoughts of me, for he should never marry me—that we should be parted from that hour. Such terrible words he said to him! Oh, Gladys, can I ever forget them? Then, when the squire had given vent to his furious anger my lover replied. He looked so noble, so true—how could any one doubt him? He raised his right hand to Heaven, and swore he was innocent.

"Do you believe me?" he asked, looking steadily in my father's face.

"I do not," replied the squire. "She accused you. Her last word was your name."

"It cannot be," said my lover, proudly. "I have borne more from you, Squire Carleon, than I would have borne from any other mortal man. I have my faults, like others; but I never yet sullied my lips with a lie; and I repeat to you that I am innocent. Since I first became acquainted with and loved your daughter, I have never even given one thought to any other woman; the whole world is blank and empty to me except where she is. You have most cruelly misjudged me. I am as proud as you, Squire Carleon. Standing here by poor Anice's grave, I repeat that I am as innocent as yourself of all wrong toward her. Will you retract your words?"

"No," replied the squire, "never!"

"My lover's face turned very white.

"We must remain strangers, Squire Carleon," he said, "until you do so." Then he turned to me. "Philippa," he said, "you believe in my innocence. I can see you have faith in me. I shall keep my troth plighted to you until you release me."

"My father drew me angrily away.

"That poor dead girl warned us that you would come back and try to marry Philippa," he said, "but you shall not do so. She has always been a true, obedient, loyal daughter to me, and I forbid her, in your presence, under pain of my curse, ever to marry you."

"I take my dismissal from no lips but hers," he said, proudly. "I bid you farewell, Squire Carleon; the day will come when you will do me justice."

"He turned away, and my father has never seen him since. That is two years ago; and oh, Gladys, how will it end? He is innocent, I am sure; but my father will never believe it. Time will not clear up the mystery of that blighted life and early death. No one may mention Guy's name before the squire, so intense is his hatred and anger; for he believes implicitly that the death of Anice lies at his door. I know he is innocent, but I can never marry him, fearing my father's curse. My father loves Anice's memory dearly. On the day she was buried we collected everything belonging to her, and placed all in the room where she had died; then he kissed the white pillow where her head had lain, and locking the door, threw the key into the depths of the lake. He could not bear to look at her portrait—the innocent, fair young face almost maddened him. One day, while he was from home, I sent it away, and he has never spoken of it."

"It is a strange, sad story," I said, when she had finished.

"They are both so proud," she continued, sadly. "My father is proud in his anger and what he thinks just indignation—my lover is proud in his injured innocence. They will never speak—never meet again; and my heart will be broken between them."

"But, Philippa, if you are sure of his innocence, you are at liberty to marry him."

"No," she replied, "not against my father's will. I would not, and I dare not. I hold obedience to one's parent as a great and sacred duty. I did one thing that I thought my unbroken troth plighted to Guy excused—I wrote to him assuring him of my unchanged, devoted love, telling him of my entire faith in his innocence; and I told him that once a year—on Christmas eve—he might write to me, and once a year—on my birthday—I would see him for a few minutes."

"Is that the secret of the holly-tree?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "We dare not send letters by the post, and I would not bribe servants. We had often left little notes for each other in the clefts of that old holly-tree—we used to call it our post-office."

"Was it in going to meet him that you dropped your bracelet, Philippa?" I asked again.

"Yes; I could not remain with him more than ten minutes. He looked so ill, so altered, my heart ached for him. Oh, Gladys, how will it end?"

"If you do not marry, you will lose your fortune, Miss Carleon."

"Yes; but I care little for that. What could money do for me when fate deprives me of my love?"

"Suppose that, at any time, anything should happen that would tend to prove Sir Guy's innocence—what then?"

"Then all would be well; but I have prayed for it so long, and it has not happened yet. I am growing old in my youth, patient instead of hopeful, resigned instead of happy. There is the bell—we must go now."

CHAPTER VII.

It was such a sad story! Now I understood the trouble that seemed to underlie every moment of the squire's life; now I saw why lovers might come and lovers might go, but the smiles of Philippa Carleon were for none of them.

I loved her dearly, but I was powerless to help her; her youth and her beauty would wane, and day by day her unhappiness would increase. What could I do for her? I would fain have seen her happy, but the sacrifice of my life could not have helped her.

Who could help her? Nothing but proof of the innocence of Sir Guy. Was he innocent? Yes; though appearances were against him, I could not think him guilty. The man whom Philippa Carleon loved could not be anything but just, pure, and upright. Who, then, was guilty? I could not tell—not Sir Guy, not Arthur Brandon, if the word of either of us was to be believed; yet surely some one must have lured the poor girl away—some one, too, who pretended to love Philippa. It was an enigma I could not solve; my whole thoughts became engrossed in the one idea—how could I help her?

Christmas was coming round again, and

she would be twenty-four in January. Only one year more, and this magnificent fortune would be swept away from her. It was not only the loss I deplored; but it was pitiable to think of her youth and her beauty—her wasted life, her unhappy love. I could not endure to think that the remainder of her life must pass in this fashion—she is so beautiful, so gifted.

But what could I do to help her? If I could but find out the secret of Anice Vane's flight! Was it likely that I could discover a secret that had baffled the most clever men? If love could work wonders, then I could do much, but at the best, it would be groping in the dark.

I went one day to the lumber-room, and turned her portrait to the light. I looked at the blue eyes, with their shadow of sadness—at the sweet red lips and the golden hair.

"If you could but speak and tell me with whom you left King's Norton," I said; "if you could but clear the dark shadow from Philippa's life!"

That same day the squire seemed much excited by the arrival of the post-bag.

"Philippa," he cried, "here is a letter from Arthur. He is coming home—six months' leave of absence. See that his rooms are prepared."

The squire seemed pleased; even Philippa liked the prospect of a visitor.

"Philippa," I said to her that evening, "are you pleased that your cousin is coming?"

"I do not know," she replied; "I am not quite sure."

"Do you—pray pardon the question—do you think he was the one who wronged Anice Vane?"

"I do not know, Gladys—Heaven only knows. Some one was guilty. It was not my lover; the squire says it was not my cousin Arthur—I dare not decide."

"But what do you think about him?" I persisted.

"Candidly, I do not see how he could have been guilty; but it was not Guy. I say no more."

Nor would she. Thinking over all that had been told me, I could not form any opinion. I left my decision until he came. He arrived one bright July evening, and I was prepossessed in his favor. He was tall, with military erectness of figure, an easy carriage, and a very handsome face. If there was any fault in his appearance, it was that he was "too brown." His eyes and hair were brown, the mustache that shaded his lips was brown. He had a careless laugh, and talked in the highest spirits. He was very cordial and kind to me.

"I feel like a schoolboy coming home, uncle," he said. "What a happy, beautiful home it is!"

"There has been a deep shadow on it, Arthur—one that has darkened it forever for me."

The young man's face grew very grave, his voice took quite another tone.

"Poor Anice!" he said; "how dreadful it was! I suppose that you have no clew, uncle?"

"I know who did it!" cried the squire, sudden passion flaming in his face—"I know! Never mention the subject to me again, Arthur—I am not a patient man, and I cannot bear it."

I thought Mr. Brandon seemed very much inclined to obey. The evening was spent more happily than any I remembered of late, but next morning, while the young soldier sat watching Philippa at her drawing he said, suddenly:

"Philippa, if you have no objection, I should like to see poor Anice Vane's grave. Will you and Miss Ayerton accompany me?"

"Yes," she replied, gravely; "I am quite willing."

We went; it was a pleasant walk through the summer woods. The sun was shining, a thousand birds made music in the spreading trees, the wild-flowers were all in the fairest bloom. Arthur Brandon and Philippa talked all the way of Anice. Once he stopped under a large tree.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Battle of the Insects.

A student of natural history gives a most interesting account of a battle witnessed by him between two colonies of black ants, one of which occupied the space between the ceiling and roof of a little shed near his house, and the other a sheltered place some hundreds of feet away. The nest in the roof was the one attacked, and a broad, wooden step beneath it was the scene of the conflict. On the morning of the battle, the large, soldier ants of the colony in the shed were out on the wall and floor in great numbers, a strong force holding every approach to the step, while smaller bodies were formed in regular lines on the top of it. Pretty soon there appeared, streaming along the fence from the distant nest, a horde of warriors, numbering many thousands, which presently descended to the ground, and threw forward an attacking column. The skirmish that ensued was exceedingly brisk, the antagonists rushing upon each other, and, with their strong jaws, cutting off here a leg and there an antenna, until the floor was strewn with dead and dying. Meantime, the main body of the enemy was moving deliberately onward in close array, not less than 15,000 strong. When this phalanx reached the step, regiment after regiment of the defenders poured down upon it, and the carnage became terrific. Slowly, but surely, the superior numbers of the invaders compelled the brave garrison to retreat, until the step had been gained. Then a number of guards, who had not previously been engaged in the fight, ran quickly up to the nest, from which, a moment later, a fresh army rushed, and, descending the wall, fell upon the foe. The latter, their shattered ranks unable to withstand the fury of the charge, wavered and fell back. The battle lasted altogether about five hours, and ended in the total rout of the attacking party. When the fighting was over, the workers came down from the nest and carried away their own dead, but the corpses of their enemies they left to rot upon the field.

Tramp—Can't you spare a little Christmas present for an old soldier who lost his leg in the Charge at Cold Harbour, Virginia? Citizen—But look here, man, last month you told me you lost that leg in the battle of Corinth, Mississippi. Tramp—So I did, so I did; but the Century for this month says the battle of Corinth was fought at Cold Harbour, and I ain't the man to go back on the history of my country.

How the Eskimo Travel.

Travel on the shores of Hudson's Bay in mid-winter cannot be called pleasant, although the Eskimo, and occasionally the Company's officers, indulge in it. There is not a tree or shrub to break the force of the gale as it comes howling down from the Arctic circle with a temperature of perhaps 30° below zero. Horses and cattle are unknown on these inhospitable shores, the dog supplying their place as a beast of burden. The sled used by the Eskimo is known as a komatik. It is of peculiar construction. Its ordinary length is about twelve feet and its width about two and a half. The floor is made of slats placed about three inches apart; and these are laced securely with seal things to the runners, which are shod with bone taken from the walrus. Ivory is also used in some cases. In order to make the komatik run more easily the bone shoring is covered by a thin coating of ice; this latter is continually wearing off, but may be renewed very easily. In order to do so the komatik is overturned (whether loaded or not, for if loaded everything is securely lashed on), on or by some lake or other source of water. Although the ice may at any time be six or seven feet thick, a native with a seal spear will very soon cut a hole through it, and having done so will first of all let the dogs drink. Then filling his own spacious mouth he will go to the komatik and, having scraped the old broken ice shodding off, deposit the water along the runner in a fine stream and with as much precision as if it were pressed through a straw. The temperature, being probably down to 30° the water of course freezes very rapidly and in a few seconds forms a smooth hard surface. The number of dogs in a team varies from four to twenty, and depends upon the condition of the animals, the snow, the load to be drawn, etc. Each dog is attached to the komatik by a single line, the length of which varies directly as the merits of its owner. Thus the best dog in the pack is chosen as the leader, and has a line of 20 or 25 feet in length. In order to have control of the team it is necessary to have a whip of rather extraordinary dimensions. This instrument of torture has only a short wooden handle of length about 18 inches, but what it lacks in stock is made up in lash, for this latter, made of the hide of the square flipper seal, is about 30 feet long. An Eskimo can, of course, handle his whip with great dexterity, being not only able to strike any particular dog in the pack, but any part of its body, and with as much force as the case may require.

Laughing to the Death.

Zeuxis was one of the most celebrated of painters. His last great work was the picture of an old woman. The face of the antiquated dame displayed all of the deformities and defects which make age deplorable. The form was lean and shrivelled. The eyes were bleared and the cheeks hung ghostly on the cheek bones. The gums displayed were toothless. The mouth was sunken and the chin was far protruding. These great deformities were presented in a style of such ludicrous combination that when Zeuxis, as is usual with artists who have completed a great work, drew back to contemplate the offspring of his fancy, he was excited to such an immoderate fit of laughter that his joy was turned to pain and he died on the spot.

When the famous comic poet Philemon reached a very advanced age he happened one day to see an ass eat up some figs which a boy had left upon the ground. The boy returned and stood wondering what had become of the figs.

"The ass has eaten them," said the aged wit; "go now and fetch it some water to drink."

The old man was so tickled with the fancy of his own jest, that if we may place any reliance on history, he also died of laughing. The cream of this jest consisted of its being his own.

The Size of the Spider's Thread.

I have often compared the size of the thread spun by a full-grown spider, with a hair of my beard. For this purpose, I placed the thickest part of the hair before the microscope, and from the most accurate judgment I could form, more than a hundred of such threads placed side by side could not equal the diameter of one such hair. If, then, we suppose such a hair to be of round form, it follows that ten thousand of the threads spun by a full-grown spider, when taken together, will not be equal to the size of a single hair. To this, if we add that four hundred young spiders, at the time they begin to spin their webs, are not larger than a full-grown one, and that each of the minute spiders possesses the same organs as the larger ones, it follows that the exceedingly small threads spun by these little creatures must be still four hundred times slenderer, and consequently that four minute spider threads cannot equal in substance the size of a single hair. And if we further consider of how many filaments or parts each of these threads consist, to compose the size we have been computing, we are compelled to cry out, "Oh, what incredible minuteness is here, and how little do we know of the work of nature!"

A Phantom Fleet.

One superstition which is firmly believed along the coast of the Maritime Provinces is that of the phantom fleet of St. Mary's Bay, a wild and rockbound inlet on the coast of Newfoundland. In August, 1862, a terrible storm swept over the Newfoundland coast and the homewardbound fishing fleet, 100 vessels in all, put into St. Mary's Bay for shelter. There every one of them went down and now when the fog is thick and the storms are high over St. Mary's Bay the fishermen believe that a ghostly fleet sails there—the phantoms of the lost vessel. I have seen fishermen ready to swear that when seeking shelter in the bay they have seen through the fog and storm that unearthly fleet sweep by and have heard the shouts of men whose bones for years have been the sport of the icy waves that break on that stormbound coast.

She—I don't see why women shouldn't make as good swimmers as men. He—Yes—but you see a swimmer has to keep his mouth shut.

Anastasia (about to be married)—"Ned, see if this reads all right for the invitations: 'Your presence is requested—'" Devoted brother—"Stop there, sis! It isn't grammatical. You mean: 'Your presents are requested.'"