OCHRISTMASES

THE MYSTERY OF THE HAUNTED GARRET.

CHAPTER V .- CONTINUED.

We pass the very spot where I threw myself face downwards on that terrible day A /e months ago, when I had lost all I had in the world. I remember it-I never pass the place without remembering it-but I do not know whether my cousin thinks of it or not as he walks beside me with his head bent and his hands in the pockets of his old shooting-coat. I thought then that there was nothing left for me but to die, but I found that there was work for me to do, and I have done it, and found peace and contentment in the doing of it, if not absolute hap. piness-and, after all, how few are happy in this world! I was not perfectly happy even when I was mistress of Grayacre and my boy alive.

I have the superintendence of the little hospital outside the village, a salary of fifty pounds a year with rations, hard work, but also plenty of strength to accomplish it, and a fair share of the pluck and perseverance without which no scheme of the kind can be carried to a successful issue. The little hospital has already made a name for itself in the county, though Hugh Tressilian hates it; it was only lately that I persuaded him to put his foot for the first time inside the doors.

I had a hard fight with him about giving up Grayacre; if his mother had not fallen ill immediately after our falling out, he would have gone back to Canada in spite of me. But I had told Winder & Curtis everything, made over to him as far as I could, when he utterly refused to take any steps to establish his rights. So things remain to this day, my cousin leaving the entire management of the farm to Michael Foote, making no changes, buying and selling nothing, not being empowered to do either, since he has not administered to the will. It is an unnecessary state of things-I feel it now when I am becoming resigned to my own loss. I am too fond of Grayacre for its own sake not to wish to see it properly managed and of course, as affairs are now, everything is at a stand-still at the farm. Whatever resolution my cousin has come to, he seems determined to abide by it; but I am at least equally obstinate. However he came by it, Grayacre belongs to him. I have no more right to it now than the man in the moon.

Aunt Wills has never left her room since ahe dined with us in the oak parlour on Christmas Day. But it was only in the beginning of March that she became seriously ill and took to her bed. Ever since then she has been so weak and poorly that Hugh could not bring himself to leave her, even if she had not begged and prayed him to remain. But I am sure he will go back to Canada as soon as she is out of danger-at least, I am sure that is his intention. That she will ever be well enough to allow of his leaving her I am beginning to doubt. For the last week we have been sitting up with her day and night, and last night I did not like her symptoms at all. But Hugh will not believe that she is in any danger ; even last night when I called him up to look at her-he generally sits up with her part of the night that Leslie and I may rest a little, or else by the fire in the oak parlour to be ready when we call-he had not observed anything unusual in her voice or look. But | ily watching his cousin. I do not think she will ever be up and about the house again.

cousin Hugh.

if I can I will bring him back with me."

I think it would be just as well. even get a little sleep.

It is a vain hope; something or other, her beautiful spoilt existence. some dim presentiment of coming evil perhaps, will not allow me to close my eyes. | play the hostess here, in the house where At seven I am up and about my duties in had held the reins of government since I the wards-before eleven the hardest part | was a child of ten years, and used to drop of the day's duties are over, and I am anx. the keys among the hay, or into the river, iously looking out for my cousin Hugh.

intent way, very much as he used to watch from him than for all the other's attentions. me at Grayacre; but neither a momentary paleness when he meets her nor an occasion. says, standing before me in her softly-clingal look at her across a crowd proves that a ing black silk with its shimmering embroidman is in love with a woman, whatever ro- ery, her round pink cheeks, her golden

mantic people say. He is certain to come-I know him well enough to be sure of that. I am standing and heavy for want of sleep. It is really in the window when he comes up the road on Meerschaum; I am at the door before he has flung himself out of the saddle.

"She is going on very well."

"I am so glad! Did you find Doctor Murray at home? I suppose you did at that hour in the morning?"

"Doctor Murray never came home at all. But I sent for Nesbitt as soon as I got back to Grayacre"-he never calls it "home"-"and he came over at ten."

"Nesbitt?" I repeat, my countenance falling. "Was it only Nesbitt?"

"Murray won't be home till to morrow. Perpetua's." has no dangerous symptoms."

she is lost." "There seems to be no danger of that." " How is Leslie !"

"Oh, Leslie is very well !" the first part of the night.'

" Do you sleep at all, Joan ?"

" No-I could not sleep." " And you will get no rest all day ?"

"I shall sleep to-night, or rather to-mormow morning.

"You look like a ghost," he says, sighhalf-past eight ?"

all that way merely to walk back with me !"

"I shall come nevertheless." and blackbirds are singing in the brakes and hedges, and the dusk is falling with the falling of the dew as we set out, my cousin | blue wainscot at the foot of her bed. in his rough homespun clothes, I in the close black bonnet and nun-like cloak which are such an eyesore to him.

"Nesbitt dined with us," he tells me, as he stops to light his pipe outside the door. "I left Leslie to entertain him while I came

for you " We scarcely speak again till we reach Grayacre -we who used to have so much to say to each other. Sometimes of late Hugh has fallen into sulky fits. I think he is tired of the inactive life he is forced to lead. He may be auxious, too, about La Hougue Bic, left entirely to the care of servants, for the old graudmother died before Leslie came to England. I wonder what would become of Leslie if anything happened to Aunc Wills? She has not a relative in the world that she knows of except aunt Wills and Hugh, and an aunt married to an indigo-planter in Burmah. But I suppose she will marry soon, with her sixty thousand pounds-that is, if she can bring herself to care for any man except her cousin Hugh. As for Hugh, I am beginning to think he dislikes her; but then I may be

mistaken, as Ikave so often been before. We find Leelie in the blue room, pretty little sitting-room, which we always use in summer, with a deep bay-window overlooking the home meadow and the wood. The window is open, and, though there are no candles lighted, there is still sufficient daylight to show us the dainty figure in the low basket-chair, and Doctor Nesbitts' handsome head and shoulders, as he leans at a little distance against the sash.

"You must have owl's eyes," Hugh says crossly, as we come blinking in from the lamp lit hall. "Why don't you have candles? I for one can't see in the dark."

"Don't scold," Leslie laughs. "It is only that the room seems dark to you, coming in from the light. We were quite enjoying the gloaming."

"So it seems." "Has he been as agreeable as this all the

way from St. Perpetua's, Joan?" I shake my head, wondering whether he brought his crossness into the room with him, or whether it is jealousy of Doctor Nesbitt which has put him out of temper. "I waited tea for you. Hugh, will you

ring the bell?"

Susan brings in tea, and lights the candles. Leslie puts me into a comfortable chair, and then pours out tea, assisted by Dr. Nesbitt. Hugh has thrown himself into a corner of the sofa, where he sits sulk-

Leslie looks so pretty in her rich blacksilk gown, with its heavy jet embroiderv Leslie Creed came to her when I left Gray- and ruflles of black lace round the throat acre. Aunt Wills had never made any ef- and half-short sleeves. She wears her fort to keep me. I think she was sorry for | blonde hair cut short and falling in a cloud me and missed me until Leslie came. But of fleecy gold about her forehead, her eyes then she had all she wanted. She loved are of the colour of the gray wood violets Leslie, who never went out of her way to we find among the primroses in spring. please her, a thousand times more than she Her face is charming in colour and outline, had ever loved me, who would have done every movement of her prettily-rounded anything for her for Laurie's sake. I believe | figure worth watching, every modulation of Leslie even cares more for me than she does her clear young voice worth listening to, for Aint Wills. But Leslie werships her they betray so much careful training, so much instinctive coquetry, such a wonder- delight in robing myself in the silks and "I will go on to the doctor's," Hugh says, ful knowledge, how acquired I know not, as we part at the door of my house; "and of the effect they are likely to produce. The French blood in her veins makes a thousand airy graces seem quite natural to He walks on up the road, and I let myself | her which would have been utterly foreign in with my latch-key and steal up the nar- to my nature; and then she is so young, row stairs to my own little room. It is not such a mere child, she may be permitted half pas siv yet; none of the patients are the pretty impertinences which would have stirring, but one of the nurses is moving been not only unbecoming but ill-bred in a about softly in the wards, and the little maid woman of my age. And yet I think some. is lighting the ra-lor fire. I shall have time times Hugh is angry because she is not so to lie down for an hour at all events, and I composed and grave as I am-I, who have am so thoroughly worn out that I hope I may suffered more in six months than Leslie Creed ever suffered in the whole course of

It makes me feel lonely to see a stranger or loss them in tool-house and barn as often Hugh has never betrayed himself by word as not. But I cannot deny that she plays or look, never even alluded to the scene in the mistress very prettily, and I wonder the firwood, from that day to this. He how Hugh can refuse to smile at her when neither avoids me nor seeks me out; some- she carries him his cup of tea. I suppose times I think he changes colour when I he is jealous of Dector Nesbitt's devotion. meet him or address him suddenly, and very and yet he ought to know at least as well often I find him watching me in his grave as I do that Leslie cares more for one look

"You look like a ghost, Joan," Leslie head, her pretty white bare arms, such contrast to my pale tired face and eyes dull too bad to ask you to sit up again to-night. "I should have been more anxious if

had remained at home-I could not have "Well ?" I ack, reading my answer in his slept in any case." "But auntie is so much better-I don

think we need be anxious about her any

" Not if she goes on improving like this for a day or two longer."

" Doctor Nesbitt says she has turned the corner. We'll have her up and about in no time. Are you going up stairs? We'll, I'll look in when I'm going to bed. And I'll relieve you at four o'clock, and then you must have a good sleep before you go back to St.

But I believe Nesbitt quite understands the I take my place in the sick-room, making case. He says we are not to force her to my arrangements for the night so quietly take more nourishment than she feels inclin- that aunt Wills never wakes out of her doze ed for-her pulse is quite strong and she to inquire who is in charge. She lies in the same way, half asleep, half, I think, in "I wish Doctor Murray would come a kind of stupor, for the greater part of the back ! If they let her strength run down, | night-I am not sure that she recognizes me when I rouse her to give the necessary nourishment and medicine. At two o'clock Hugh comes in, and wants me to rest on the sofa; but I do not feel sleepy. He re-" I shall be over at nine, tell her, to take | mains sitting with me at the fire, not talking much, but leaning his elbow on the arm

of the chair farthest from me and watching me gravely with the old intent look in his Hugh has changed greatly during the last few weeks, I think. He never goes about now in the old careless happy way which had made his presence such a boon to us at Grayacre in the beginning of the year.

At four o'clock I go to call Leslie. It is broad daylight; the early morning sunshine streams into the pretty eld-fashioned room when I open the shutters, falling full on the child's white forehead and long eyelashes. I cannot help thinking how tair ing. "Well, I will come over for you at | she looks in her white nest, with one hand under her dimpled cheek and all her bright "But it is quite light till nine o'clock, hair spread out on the pillow. It seems a Hugh. It is great nonsense your coming pity to wake her, her sleep is so sweet and so profound, and I could not sleep even if she took my place with Aunt Wills. So I Which he does, just as the old church leave her to her dreams a little lorger, clock strikes the nalt-hour. The thrushes smiling to see how she has hung Hugh's photograph where she can see it last thing at night and the first in the morning, on the

> I have just finished my solitary tea. My little maid has cleared away the tea-things and gone out to spend an hour with her mother, who lives in the village. I am sitting in a little low basket-chair in the window, resting myself and thinking, my hands clasped idly in the lap of my white apron. Up-stairs in the women's ward I can hear the nurse moving about; but most of the children are asleep, and the house is very quiet. The long evening is before me, to do with as I like, for I do not sit up with aunt Wills to-night. I can read, or sew, or write and think, as I am doing now.

"A life of independence is a fine thing; but it is very lonely." It must have been a woman who wrote the pathetic words. I bread as a man might earn it, with hard LOAN AND SAVINGS COMPANY am independent-I am able to earn my I OAN honest work. But I feel lonely to-night. Other women are in their fathers' or their husband' houses, surrounded by sisters or children, dependent perhaps, but hedged round and encompassed by all the sweet ties and companionships of home. I am alone, and likely to be alone for the remainder of my life, unless -- But, as once before, " unless.

My book lies on the table at my elbow, but I do not care to read. I feel sad, and the good turn aunt Wills's illness has taken. | pected. Expenses reduces to minimum. Hugh rode over to tell me of it in the afternoon, and I can picture how he and Leslie are rejoicing over her; he had seemed in such good spirits, talking to me from his horse's back as I stood in the garden-he was riding one of the young horses, and could not tie him, like Meerschaum, to the

" I suppose he will be off to Canada now," I said to myself as I watched him ride away up the sunny, dusty road. But I know his gladness is for his mother's sake—Hugh was always strongly attached to his mother. and I ought to be glad too. I am glad. If I envy Leslie Creed, it is not with any bitter envy-it is only that I wonder why I was destined to live and die alone. I suppose it was not my fate to be the centre of any sweet home-circle; and, after all, I have my sick folk to attend to, and their love and gratitude to keep my heart warm. And the world was made for the young. Some words I read in the book on the table come back to me like a refrain. "A woman may be an angel, but she can never be a girl again ;" and, though it is surely best to be an angel, the thought fills me with a half pathetic pain. Will the angel be as glad as the girl has been sorry? Will the angel's bliss make up for the pain of the mortal? Will it even remember its identity with the poor passionate body which, much as it may have erred and suffered, is all that we know of ourselves? Never a girl again! Never a girl like Leslie, with her bright head and her sweet eyes and her fresh glad voice! Never a girl for whom lovers will pine-never a girl to take satins and jewels which suit so well the smooth peach-like skin, the glad eyes, the dimpled shoulders! I am not so very old -only four-and-twenty. But I have never felt young since Laurie died. And I have always had so much responsibility. I think

it is that which makes me feel so old. The summer gloaming falls softly while I sit here, thinking, in my serge gown and linen collar and trim white cap and apron. They hate the nurse's dress at Grayacre, but I think it is becoming to me, and I am picturing the happy party in my aunt's room-Leslie in some pretty aress or other, sitting on the foot of the bei probably, chattering in her sweet girlish voice, Hugh in the great old chair beside her, grave and glad, aunt Wills propped up on her pillows looking at her "children" with loving, languid eyes-when Hugh himself pushes open the little gate and comes walking up the garden between the low box border and

the sweetbriar hedge. The instant I see him I feel a misgiving; but them I reassure myself with the thought that if there were any danger he would never have come away.

"Hugh," I exclaim, as he walks into the room, sitting still from very eagerness, " how is aunt Wills ?" "She is gone !" he answers hoarsely, and,

throwing himself upon the floor beside me, buries his face in my lap and bursts into a passion of choking sobs.

It is terrible to see a strong man cry. My own heart is wrung, but I am so sorry for him that I can shed no tears for myself. I can only hope that the very violence of his grief will wear it out, for, if not, it will kill him; it seems to me as if the agony is as much greater than any agony a weaker person could endure as his strength is greater than theirs. But he conquers it at last.

"Hugh," I say tenderly touching the crisp close locks which cover but do not hide the shapely outline of the prone dark head, "dear Hugh, try to remember that all her suffering is over-that nothing that could be her, caring for her, to the last."

He raises his head, and even in the dim twilight I can see how is face is discorted; the few burning [tears a man sheds have FARMERS] seared his cheeks.

"She was all I had in the world." "You were a good son, Hugh."

"I! I was a selfish brute—I thought of nothing but my own troubles !" "You have no need to reproach yourself.

You were the joy of her life." (TO BE CONTINUED).

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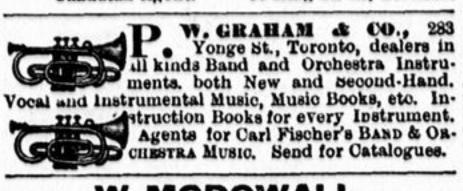
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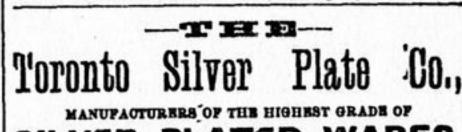
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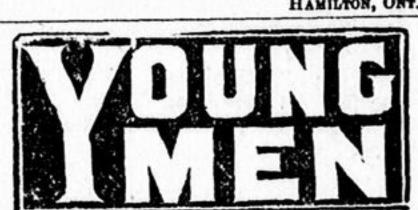




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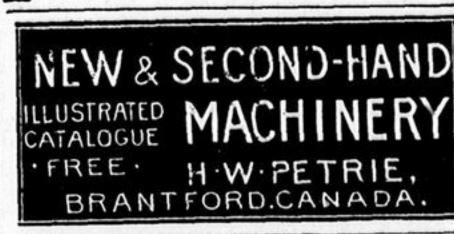


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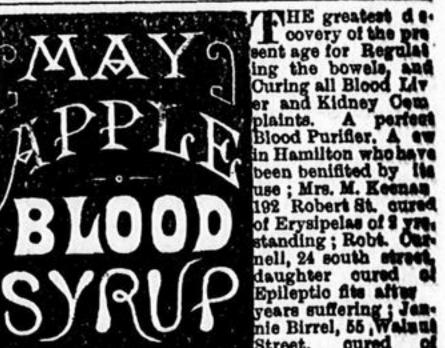
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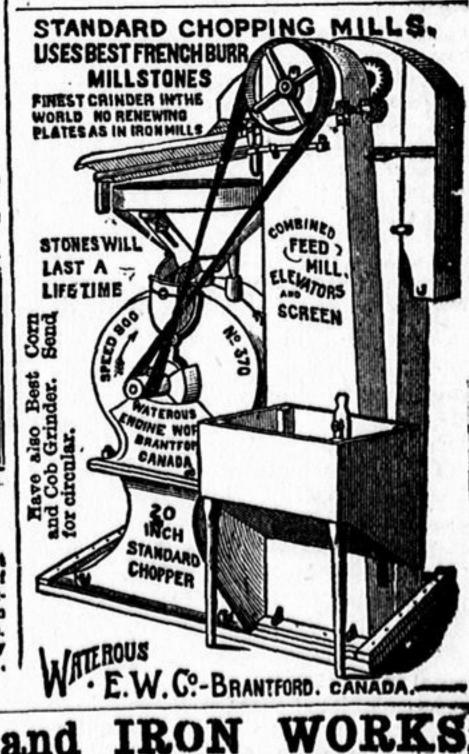
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